PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 200

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIFTH SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FORTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1991-92

COMPRISING PERIOD
2 December—13 December 1991

HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

(FORMED BY THE RT. HON. JOHN MAJOR, MP, NOVEMBER 1990)

PRIME MINISTER, FIRST LORD OF THE TREASURY AND MINISTER FOR THE CIVIL SERVICE—The Rt. Hon. John Major, MP
LORD CHANCELLOR—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Mackay of Clashfern
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS—The Rt. Hon. Douglas Hurd, CBE, MP
LORD PRIVY SEAL AND LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Waddington, QC.
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE HOME DEPARTMENT—The Rt. Hon. Kenneth Baker, MP
CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER—The Rt. Hon. Norman Lamont, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT—The Rt. Hon. Michael Heseltine, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE—The Rt. Hon. Tom King, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EDUCATION AND SCIENCE—The Rt. Hon. Kenneth Clarke, QC, MP
LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL AND LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS—The Rt. Hon. John MacGregor, OBE, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT—The Rt. Hon. Malcolm Rifkind, QC, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENERGY—The Rt. Hon. John Wakeham, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SOCIAL SECURITY—The Rt. Hon. Tony Newton, OBE, MP
CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER—The Rt. Hon. Chris Patten, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND—The Rt. Hon. Peter Brooke, MP
MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD—The Rt. Hon. John Gummer, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EMPLOYMENT—The Rt. Hon. Michael Howard, QC, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WALES—The Rt. Hon. David Hunt, MBE, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRADE AND INDUSTRY AND PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE—The Rt. Hon. Peter Lilley, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH—The Rt. Hon. William Waldegrave, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND—The Rt. Hon. Ian Lang, MP
CHIEF SECRETARY TO THE TREASURY—The Rt. Hon. David Mellor, QC, MP

LAW OFFICERS

ATTORNEY-GENERAL—The Rt. Hon. Sir Patrick Mayhew, QC, MP
LORD ADVOCATE—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Fraser of Carmyllie, QC
SOLICITOR-GENERAL—The Rt. Hon. Sir Nicholas Lyell, QC, MP
SOLICITOR-GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND—Alan Rodger, Esq, QC

MINISTERS NOT IN THE CABINET

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY TO THE TREASURY—The Rt. Hon. Richard Ryder, OBE, MP
MINISTER OF STATE, PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE, (MINISTER FOR THE ARTS)—The Rt. Hon. Tim Renton, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE, FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE—
Minister for Overseas Development—The Rt. Hon. Lynda Chalker, MP
The Rt. Hon. The Earl of Caithness
The Hon. Douglas Hogg, QC, MP
Tristan Garel-Jones, Esq, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE, HOME OFFICE—
The Rt. Hon. The Earl Ferrers
The Rt. Hon. John Patten, Esq, MP
The Rt. Hon. Mrs. Angela Rumbold, CBE, MP
FINANCIAL SECRETARY TO THE TREASURY—The Hon. Francis Maude, MP
MINISTER OF STATE, TREASURY—Mrs. Gillian Shephard, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE, DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT—
Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities—Michael Portillo, Esq, MP
Minister for the Environment and Countryside—David Trippier, Esq, RD, MP
Minister for Housing and Planning—Sir George Young, MP
The Baroness Blatch, CBE
MINISTERS OF STATE, MINISTRY OF DEFENCE—
Minister of State for the Armed Forces—The Rt. Hon. Archibald Hamilton, MP
Minister of State for Defence Procurement—The Rt. Hon. Alan Clark, MP
MINISTER OF STATE, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE—Tim Eggar, Esq, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE, DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT—
Minister for Aviation and Shipping—The Lord Brabazon of Tara
Minister for Public Transport—Roger Freeman, Esq, MP
MINISTER OF STATE, DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SECURITY—
Minister for Social Security and Disabled People—The Rt. Hon. Nicholas Scott, MBE, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE, NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE—
Paymaster General—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Belstead
Minister of State—Dr. Brian Mawhinney, MP
MINISTER OF STATE, MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD—The Baroness Trumpington
MINISTER OF STATE, WELSH OFFICE—The Rt. Hon. Sir Wyn Roberts, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE, DEPARTMENT OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY—
Minister for Trade—The Hon. Tim Sainsbury, MP
Minister for Corporate Affairs—John Redwood, Esq, MP
MINISTER OF STATE, DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH—
Minister for Health—Mrs. Virginia Bottomley, MP
MINISTER OF STATE, SCOTTISH OFFICE—Michael Forsyth, Esq, MP

DEPARTMENTS OF STATE AND MINISTERS

Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—
MINISTER—The Rt. Hon. John Gummer, MP
MINISTER OF STATE—The Baroness Trumpington
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES—
David Maclean, Esq, MP
David Curry, Esq, MP

Arts and Libraries, Office of—
MINISTER FOR THE ARTS—The Rt. Hon. Tim Renton, MP

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster—
The Rt. Hon. Chris Patten, MP

Civil Service, Office of the Minister for the—
PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER FOR THE CIVIL SERVICE—The Rt. Hon. John Major, MP
MINISTER OF STATE, PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE (MINISTER FOR THE ARTS)—The Rt. Hon. Tim Renton, MP

Defence—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Tom King, MP
MINISTER OF STATE FOR THE ARMED FORCES—The Rt. Hon. Archibald Hamilton, MP
MINISTER OF STATE FOR DEFENCE PROCUREMENT—The Rt. Hon. Alan Clark, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE PROCUREMENT—Kenneth Carlisle, Esq, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE ARMED FORCES—The Earl of Arran

Education and Science—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Kenneth Clarke, QC, MP
MINISTER OF STATE—Tim Eggar, Esq, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
Alan Howarth, Esq, CBE, MP
Michael Fallon, Esq, MP
Robert Atkins, Esq, MP (Minister for Sport)

Employment—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Michael Howard, QC, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
Robert Jackson, Esq, MP
Eric Forth, Esq, MP
The Viscount Ullswater

Energy—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. John Wakeham, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
David Heathcoat-Amory, Esq, MP
The Hon. Colin Moynihan, MP

Environment—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Michael Heseltine, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities—Michael Portillo, Esq, MP
Minister for the Environment and Countryside—David Trippier, Esq, RD, MP
Minister for Housing and Planning—Sir George Young, MP
The Baroness Blatch, CBE
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
Tony Baldry, Esq, MP
Robert Key, Esq, MP
Tim Yeo, Esq, MP

Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Douglas Hurd, CBE, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Minister for Overseas Development—The Rt. Hon. Lynda Chalker, MP
The Rt. Hon. The Earl of Caithness
The Hon. Douglas Hogg, QC, MP
Tristan Garel-Jones, Esq, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—The Hon. Mark Lennox-Boyd, MP

Health—
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH—The Rt. Hon. William Waldegrave, MP
MINISTER OF STATE—
Minister for Health—Mrs. Virginia Bottomley, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
The Baroness Hooper
Stephen Dorrell, Esq, MP

Home Office—
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE HOME DEPARTMENT—The Rt. Hon. Kenneth Baker, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
The Rt. Hon. The Earl Ferrers
The Rt. Hon. John Patten, Esq, MP
The Rt. Hon. Mrs. Angela Rumbold, CBE, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—Peter Lloyd, Esq, MP

Law Officers' Department—
ATTORNEY-GENERAL—The Rt. Hon. Sir Patrick Mayhew, QC, MP
SOLICITOR-GENERAL—The Rt. Hon. Sir Nicholas Lyell, QC, MP

Lord Advocate's Department—
LORD-ADVOCATE—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Fraser of Carmyllie, QC
SOLICITOR-GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND—Alan Rodger, Esq, QC

Lord Chancellor—
The Rt. Hon. The Lord Mackay of Clashfern

Northern Ireland Office—
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND—The Rt. Hon. Peter Brooke, MP
PAYMASTER GENERAL—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Belstead
MINISTER OF STATE—Dr. Brian Mawhinney, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
Richard Needham, Esq, MP
Jeremy Hanley, Esq, MP

Paymaster General's Office—
PAYMASTER GENERAL—The Right Hon. The Lord Belstead

Privy Council Office—
LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL AND LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS—The Rt. Hon. John MacGregor, OBE, MP
LORD PRIVY SEAL AND LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Waddington, QC.
MINISTER OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Tim Renton, MP

Scottish Office—
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND—The Rt. Hon. Ian Lang, MP
MINISTER OF STATE—Michael Forsyth, Esq, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, MP
The Lord Strathclyde
Allan Stewart, Esq, MP

Social Security—
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SOCIAL SECURITY—The Rt. Hon. Tony Newton, OBE, MP
MINISTER OF STATE—
Minister for Social Security and Disabled People—The Rt. Hon. Nicholas Scott, MBE, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
The Lord Henley
Michael Jack, Esq, MP
Miss Ann Widdecombe, MP

Trade and Industry—
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRADE AND INDUSTRY AND PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF TRADE—
The Rt. Hon. Peter Lilley, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Minister for Trade—The Hon. Tim Sainsbury, MP
Minister for Corporate Affairs—John Redwood, Esq, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INDUSTRY AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS—Edward Leigh, Esq, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INDUSTRY AND TECHNOLOGY—The Lord Reay

Transport—
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT—The Rt. Hon. Malcolm Rifkind, QC, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Minister for Aviation—The Lord Brabazon of Tara
Minister for Public Transport—Roger Freeman, Esq, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
Christopher Chope, Esq, OBE, MP, (Minister for Roads and Traffic)
Patrick McLoughlin, Esq, MP, (Minister for Shipping)

Treasury—
PRIME MINISTER, FIRST LORD OF THE TREASURY AND MINISTER FOR THE CIVIL SERVICE—The Rt. Hon. John Major, MP
CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER—The Rt. Hon. Norman Lamont, MP
CHIEF SECRETARY—The Rt. Hon. David Mellor, QC, MP
FINANCIAL SECRETARY TO THE TREASURY—The Hon. Francis Maude, MP
MINISTER OF STATE—Mrs. Gillian Shephard, MP
ECONOMIC SECRETARY—John Maples, Esq, MP
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY TO THE TREASURY—The Rt. Hon. Richard Ryder, OBE, MP
LORDS COMMISSIONERS—
The Hon. Tom Sackville, MP
Sydney Chapman, Esq, MP
Greg Knight, Esq, MP
Irvine Patnick, Esq, OBE, MP
Nicholas Baker, Esq, MP
ASSISTANT WHIPS—
Timothy Wood, Esq, MP
Timothy Boswell, Esq, MP
Neil Hamilton, Esq, MP
Timothy Kirkhope, Esq, MP
David Davis, Esq, MP

Welsh Office—
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WALES—The Rt. Hon. David Hunt, MBE, MP
MINISTER OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Sir Wyn Roberts, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—Nicholas Bennett, Esq, MP

Her Majesty's Household—
LORD CHAMBERLAIN—The Rt. Hon. The Earl of Airlie, KT, GCVO
LORD STEWARD—The Viscount Ridley, TD
MASTER OF THE HORSE—The Lord Somerleyton
TREASURER—Alastair Goodlad, Esq, MP
COMPTROLLER—David Lightbown, Esq, MP
VICE-CHAMBERLAIN—John Taylor, Esq, MP
CAPTAIN OF THE HONOURABLE CORPS OF GENTLEMEN-AT-ARMS—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Hesketh
CAPTAIN OF THE QUEEN'S BODYGUARD OF THE YEOMEN OF THE GUARD—The Viscount Davidson
LORDS IN WAITING—The Viscount Long, The Earl of Strathmore and Kinghorne, The Lord Cavendish of Furness, The Viscount Astor, The Earl Howe

---

SECOND CHURCH ESTATES COMMISSIONER, REPRESENTING CHURCH COMMISSIONERS—The Rt. Hon. Michael Alison, MP

HOUSE OF COMMONS

PRINCIPAL OFFICERS AND OFFICIALS

THE SPEAKER—The Rt. Hon. Bernard Weatherill, MP

CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—The Rt. Hon. Harold Walker, MP

FIRST DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—The Rt. Hon. Sir Paul Dean, MP

SECOND DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—Miss Betty Boothroyd, MP

CHAIRMEN'S PANEL—

Patrick Cormack, Esq, MP. Stan Crowther, Esq, MP. Dame Janet Fookes, MP. James Hill, Esq, MP. Norman Hogg, Esq, MP. Geraint Howells, Esq, MP. Roy Hughes, Esq, MP. Sir John Hunt, MP. David Knox, Esq, MP. James Lamond, Esq. MP. Michael Latham, Esq, MP. Ted Leadbitter, Esq, MP. Geoffrey Lofthouse, Esq, MP. John McWilliam, Esq, MP. Michael J. Martin, Esq, MP. Sir Anthony Meyer, MP. Michael Morris, Esq, MP. Robert Rhodes James Esq, MP. Sir Giles Shaw, MP. Sir Michael Shaw, MP. Michael Shersby, Esq, MP. Nicholas Winterton, Esq, MP.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION—

The Rt. Hon. The Speaker (Chairman), Alan Beith, Esq, MP, Dr. John Cunningham, MP, The Rt. Hon. Sir Barney Hayhoe, MP, The Rt. Hon. John MacGregor, OBE, MP, The Rt. Hon. Peter Shore, MP

SECRETARY OF THE COMMISSION—W. A. Proctor

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT—

Sir Clifford Boulton, KCB (Chairman), Sir Alan Urwick, KCVO, CMG, D. J. T. Englefield, J. Rodda, FCA, I. D. Church, W. J. J. Smillie, FHCIMA, FCFA, ACF

SECRETARY OF THE BOARD OF MANAGEMENT—B. A. Wilson

OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

SPEAKER'S SECRETARY—P. J. Kitcatt, CB

ASSISTANT SECRETARY TO THE SPEAKER—Mrs. M. E. Thomson

TRAINBEARER—D. J. Lord

DEPUTY TRAINBEARER—P. L. Warwick

DIARY SECRETARY—Mrs. S. Norvell

SPEAKER'S CHAPLAIN—Rev. Canon D. C. Gray, TD, PhD

SPEAKER'S COUNSEL—H. Knorpel, CB, QC, G. E. Gammie, CB, QC

ASSISTANT TO SPEAKER'S COUNSEL—P. Harvey, CB

OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS

SECRETARY TO THE CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—Ms. P. A. Helme

DEPARTMENT OF THE CLERK OF THE HOUSE

CLERK OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS—Sir Clifford Boulton, KCB

CLERK ASSISTANT—D. W. Limon

CLERK OF COMMITTEES—J. F. Sweetman, CB, TD

PRINCIPAL CLERKS—
W. R. McKay (Public Bills)
C. B. Winnifrith (Table Office)
R. B. Sands (Select Committees)
G. Cubie (Overseas Office)
A. J. Hastings (Journal Office)
R. J. Willoughby (Private Bills)
D. G. Millar (Select Committees)
M. R. Jack, PhD (Standing Committees)
R. W. G. Wilson (Financial Committees)
W. A. Proctor (Domestic Committees)

DEPUTY PRINCIPAL CLERKS—S. A. L. Panton, Mrs. J. Sharpe, Ms. A. Milner-Barry, F. A. Cranmer, R. J. Rogers, C. R. M. Ward, PhD, Ms. H. E. Irwin, D. W. N. Doig, A. Sandall, MLitt, D. L. Natzler, E. P. Silk, A. R. Kennon, D. W. Robson, L. C. Laurence Smyth, S. J. Patrick, D. F. Harrison, S. J. Priestley, A. H. Doherty, P. A. Evans, R. I. S. Phillips

SENIOR CLERKS—D. J. Gerhold, C. J. Poyser, R. G. James, Ms. P. A. Helme, D. R. Lloyd, R. A. Lambert, B. M. Hutton, J. S. Benger, DPhil, Miss E. C. Samson, N. P. Walker, M. D. Hamlyn, J. M. Hope (acting), H. R. Neilson (acting), M. J. Reeves (acting), D. Steel (acting)

CLERKS OF DOMESTIC COMMITTEES—K. J. Brown, S. D. Barrett

ASSISTANT CLERKS—P. C. Seaward, DPhil, C. G. Lee, C. D. Stanton, A. Y. A. Azad, C. A. Shaw, P. M. Hensher, Ms. L. M. Gardner, F. J. Reid

SENIOR EXECUTIVE OFFICERS—G. E. Clayton, Miss R. J. Challis, P. G. Moon

HIGHER EXECUTIVE OFFICERS—L. L. Kaye, A. P. Hubner, Miss S. J. Fox, Mrs. P. Fisher, F. McShane, J. D. Whatley, M. Clark, Miss A. M. Loader, Miss F. L. Allingham, Mrs. L. M. Nugent, J. A. L. Dresner, M. P. Oxborough, N. P. Wright, Ms. C. M. Genis

SPECIALIST ASSISTANTS—M. J. Cremin, E. Thompson, J. K. Wheatley, Miss S. Phipps, PhD, S. Smith

EDITORIAL SUPERVISOR OF THE VOTE—B. Tidball, DEPUTY—Miss L. Lewis, ASSISTANTS—Miss B. Balcomb, J. Puricelli, K. B. Wood, P. D. Howlett, Mrs. L. R. Shade, P. A. Jack

EXAMINERS OF PETITIONS FOR PRIVATE BILLS—R. J. Willoughby, B. P. Keith

REGISTRAR OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS—R. B. Sands

TAXING OFFICER—R. J. Willoughby

SUPERVISOR OF BROADCASTING—J. F. Grist (temporary)

TECHNICAL CO-ORDINATOR (BROADCASTING)—R. Longman, OBE (temporary)

SUPERINTENDING CLERK—R. A. Broomfield

CHIEF OFFICE CLERKS—Miss D. E. Symes, J. Hole, Miss E. Segal, R. W. A. Barrand (temporary)

DEPARTMENT OF THE SERJEANT AT ARMS

SERJEANT AT ARMS—Sir Alan Urwick, KCVO, CMG

DEPUTY SERJEANT AT ARMS—P. N. W. Jennings

ASSISTANT SERJEANT AT ARMS—M. J. A. Cummins

DEPUTY ASSISTANT SERJEANTS AT ARMS—P. A. J. Wright, J. F. Collins

CLERK IN CHARGE—Miss S. J. Scott Thomson

ADMISSION ORDER OFFICE—A. Chipperfield, BEM, Mrs. S. J. Warren, A. J. Spencer

PRINCIPAL DOORKEEPER—F. T. Warboys

SECOND PRINCIPAL DOORKEEPER—R. H. Usher

SENIOR DOORKEEPERS—R. A. F. Chapman, J. D. Garnett, C. E. Gray, J. C. W. Cooper, D. L. Hurley, D. Shiels

HEAD OFFICE KEEPER—M. Bryant

SENIOR OFFICE KEEPERS—V. M. Roccia, K. R. Kemp, BEM, K. R. Dickason

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH MANAGER—Miss M. Mainland

DEPARTMENT OF THE LIBRARY

LIBRARIAN—D. J. T. Englefield
DEPUTY LIBRARIAN—Miss J. B. Tanfield
LIBRARY AND RESEARCH—
ASSISTANT LIBRARIANS (Heads of Division)—S. Z. Young, Miss P. J. Baines, B.Litt
DEPUTY ASSISTANT LIBRARIANS (Heads of Section)—K. G. Cuninghame, Mrs. J. M. Wainwright, FIInfSc, C. C. Pond, PhD, Mrs. C. B. Andrews, R. C. Clements, Mrs. J. M. Lourie, R. J. Ware, DPhil, C. R. Barclay, Mrs. J. M. Fiddick (acting)
LIBRARY CLERKS, SENIOR—Mrs. H. R. Coates, Ms. F. Poole, Mrs. C. M. Gillie, Ms. C. E. Nield, R. J. Twigger, T. N. Edmonds, R. J. Cracknell, FSS, Miss O. M. Gay, Miss B. McInnes, Miss M. Baber, Ms. A. Muir, Mrs. H. V. Holden ALA, Mrs. G. L. Allen, Mrs. P. Carling, Miss J. Seaton, FLA
ASSISTANT—A. J. L. Crompton, Mrs. K. Greener, Miss P. Strickland, Miss V. A. Miller, Ms. N. R. Donlon, Ms. H. M. Jeffs, J. R. Lunn, PhD, R. S. Dewdney, Ms. L. E. Sloman, DPhil, Ms. W. T. Wilson, Miss N. J. Chedgey, P. Bowers, PhD, M. P. Hillyard, Dr. A. Davies (period), E. Wood (temporary), M. Nawaz (temporary), T. Dodd (temporary)
SENIOR EXECUTIVE OFFICERS—S. A. Wise, Ms. P. A. Bozdan
SENIOR LIBRARY EXECUTIVES—K. N. H. Parry, ALA, Miss C. E. Fretten, ALA, Mrs. P. V. Wilks, Miss I. O. White, ALA
EDUCATION OFFICER—Mrs. C. Weeds; ASSISTANT—Mrs. C. C. O'Connor
PROJECT MANAGER, NEW BUILDING—Miss N. Harland (acting)
HIGHER EXECUTIVE OFFICERS—E. L. V. MacGregor, J. R. Hutson, Ms. B. A. Rowlands, ALA
HIGHER LIBRARY EXECUTIVES—J. A. Prince, MLS, Mrs. D. W. Clark, Miss M. H. Fletcher, Mrs. P. E. Cook, ALA, Ms. H. Armstrong, Miss E. J. Jones, ALA, G. Haig, Miss G. L. Cooper, Mrs. E. H. Riley, ALA, Mrs. F. M. Ward, Mrs. M. A. Azim, ALA, Ms. F. Whittle, T. C. Holmes, C. M. Sear, Ms. J. B. Hall, ALA, R. Freebury, ALA, A. D. Parker, ALA
EDITOR, WEEKLY BULLETIN—D. B. Inns
LIBRARY EXECUTIVES—P. E. M. Ward, Mrs. J. M. Smith, ALA, Miss J. Lyall, Ms. Z. A. Smallwood, Miss C. Owens Miss C. M. Blair, ALA, S. A. H. Jones, Miss D. J. Gillings, Miss L. K. Fleming, Mrs. J. Priestley, Miss C. Chambers, Miss P. Rix, Ms. A. Crook, Miss S. Pepin, ALA, P. C. Tomes, R. O. Steeden, G. G. Newell, (acting)
EXECUTIVE OFFICERS—Mrs. A. J. H. Mara, D. A. Brown, J. P. Brevitt, M. Greenhill (Head Library Attendant), B. Smith, Miss A. J. Hatton, Ms. J. Fessey, A. J. Fuller, Miss J. M. Perkes, Mrs. H. Onyskiw, A. Clark, Miss A. Gual, Mrs. S. P. Sinclair, Mrs. P. M. Burnett (acting), Miss K. E. Susilovic (acting)

VOTE OFFICE—
DELIVERER OF THE VOTE—G. R. Russell
DEPUTY DELIVERER OF THE VOTE—H. C. Foster
ASSISTANT DELIVERER OF THE VOTE—O. B. T. Sweeney
HIGHER EXECUTIVE OFFICER—C. D. Lister
SUPERINTENDING CLERKS—Mrs. S. Fuzio, B. G. Underwood, A. J. Ashton (Sales Office)
VOTE OFFICE ASSISTANTS—T. S. Wilson, G. E. Howard, C. P. Williams, P. Hannett, J. Harrington

DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

DIRECTOR—J. Rodda, FCA
FEES OFFICE—
ACCOUNTANT—A. J. Lewis
DEPUTY ACCOUNTANT—A. R. Marskell
ASSISTANT ACCOUNTANTS—M. Fletcher, R. H. A. Russell
SENIOR EXECUTIVE OFFICERS—Mrs. D. C. Hill, N. P. Crawley
HIGHER EXECUTIVE OFFICERS—R. Gunn, Mrs. G. M. Baker, Miss R. Harrison, Ms. M. R. Morris, G. L. Turner
EXECUTIVE OFFICERS—D. M. Allen, D. J. D. Woods, G. L. Turner, Miss P. R. Mills, Miss S. V. A. Weaver, P. H. Olden, A. D. Rowlands, P. J. S. French, Miss T. D. Ruewell, C. J. Bumstead, Miss M. Oliver, Miss D. M. McGuire, Mrs. S. M. Chalmers, Miss D. O. McElderry, Mrs. C. J. Stockton (temporary), Miss L. C. Rostron (temporary), Miss B. Parekh (temporary)
FINANCE OFFICE—
SENIOR ASSISTANT ACCOUNTANT—M. J. Barram, IPFA, MBCS,
ASSISTANT ACCOUNTANTS—Miss. M. M. McColl, Mrs. G. Crowther
SENIOR EXECUTIVE OFFICER—Mrs. N. Norman
HIGHER EXECUTIVE OFFICERS—M. J. H. Caswell, Mrs. J. S. Peach, Mrs. J. D. Mead
EXECUTIVE OFFICERS—Miss D. E. Johnson, P. F. Dawson, Miss V. E. Wilson, R. A. P. Edwards (temporary)
ESTABLISHMENTS OFFICE—
HEAD OF OFFICE—B. A. Wilson
DEPUTY HEAD OF OFFICE—J. A. Robb
SENIOR EXECUTIVE OFFICERS—V. H. Stocker, Miss P. J. Hurford
HIGHER EXECUTIVE OFFICER—M. Page
PERSONNEL OFFICE MANAGER—Miss J. Bremner (temporary)
PERSONNEL OFFICERS—C. L. Watson, Miss C. E. Jackson, Miss Y. C. S. Bland (temporary), Mrs. R. A. Baker (temporary)
COMPUTER OFFICE—
COMPUTER OFFICER—R. S. Morgan, FBCS, FIInfSc
ASSISTANT COMPUTER OFFICERS—S. J. Lewis, J. Fishenden
SUPPORT MANAGER—Mrs. J. M. Cleveland
INTERNAL AUDITOR—A. A. Cameron
STAFF INSPECTOR—R. C. Collins
WELFARE OFFICER—Mrs. A. Mossop

DEPARTMENT OF THE OFFICIAL REPORT

EDITOR—I. D. Church

DEPUTY EDITOR—P. Walker

PRINCIPAL ASSISTANT EDITORS—R. V. Hadlow, J. Gourley, J. Withers, W. G. Garland

ASSISTANT EDITORS—Ms. C. V. Grainger, Miss V. A. A. Clarke, Miss H. A. Hales, Miss L. Sutherland, S. M. Hutchinson

COMMITTEE SUB-EDITORS—D. Crosswell, Mrs. A. Roberts, Miss V. A. Widgery, C. Fogarty, Mrs. H. J. G. Natzler, Miss M. Babington, Mrs. A. Street, L. Gilmore, Ms. G. Hardgrave, P. Oglethorpe, P. Hadlow, Miss C. Hanly, M. Watson, Ms. K. Stewart, J. Ransley

REPORTERS—Mrs. E. J. Gregory, Miss J. A. Bradshaw, Miss E. Morris, Ms. J. Dall, Mrs. P. Pickford, Miss K. Myers, Ms. J. Warrington, J. Robinson, Ms. D. Jones, Mrs. J. Symons

PRINCIPAL TRANSCRIBER—D. N. Harrington, MBE

DEPUTY PRINCIPAL TRANSCRIBERS—Mrs. M. J. Harding, Mrs. C. C. Grice (acting)

IT PROJECT MANAGER—Miss J. L. Brown (temporary)

PRINCIPAL HANSARD ASSISTANT—Miss R. Washington

SENIOR HANSARD ASSISTANT—J. Brake

ANNUNCIATOR SUPERINTENDENT—G. Carpenter

REFRESHMENT DEPARTMENT

GENERAL MANAGER—W. J. J. Smillie, FHCIMA, FCFA, ACF

DEPUTY GENERAL MANAGER—E. J. Nash, MCFA

ASSISTANT MANAGER—P. Gale, MHCIMA

PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATOR—Mrs. S. M. Nicholls, FHCIMA, MIPM

PERSONAL ASSISTANT TO GENERAL MANAGER—Mrs. A. G. Lunn

BANQUETING MANAGER—C. J. Griffiths

CATERING ACCOUNTANT—D. R. W. Wood, FCA

ASSISTANT CATERING ACCOUNTANT—Mrs. B. A. Langley

EXECUTIVE CHEF—I. Gabay, MBE

HEAD CELLARMAN—D. Balcombe

HEAD STOREMAN—A. E. Edmond

CATERING MANAGER, 1 PARLIAMENT STREET—Ms. S. Hovells, LCHIMA

SHORTHAND WRITER TO THE HOUSE—Mrs. E. M. C. Holland

DIRECTOR OF WORKS—H. Webber

PARLIAMENTARY WORKS OFFICER—B. C. Sewell

PARLIAMENTARY WORKS SECRETARY—A. Makepeace

HEAD OF SECURITY—Chief Superintendent G. K. Dark

COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER—A. Blake

POSTMASTER—J. Arnold

TRANSPORT MANAGER—J. W. Jones

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIFTH SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 25 JUNE 1987]

FORTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 200**

THIRD VOLUME OF SESSION 1991-92

House of Commons

Monday 2 December 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WALES

Training and Enterprise Councils

1. **Mr. Ray Powell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the total funding for each individual TEC in Wales for 1990-91; and what is the total individual funding for 1991-92.

The Minister of State, Welsh Office (Sir Wyn Roberts): As the answer contains a lot of figures, I will, with permission Mr. Speaker, arrange for them to be printed in the *Official Report*. However, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that there was a substantial increase in funding for each training and enterprise council this year on the year before.

Mr. Powell: We usually get the figures in the replies to questions. It is difficult to question the Minister when we have not been given the figures. Most people in Wales are sick and tired of the glossy brochures that confuse the issue of training in Wales and TECs. Is the Minister aware that since CATO closed in my constituency, 230 training places remain to be filled and 35 trainers have yet to find jobs? That is the position with TECs in Mid Glamorgan. The whole of the Principality——

Mr. Speaker: Order. One question please.

Mr. Powell: I shall be brief, Mr. Speaker, but this question covers a wide subject.

In March, an inquiry was called for into the case of manager Dereck Jones, who took away property belonging to Llynfi workshop. I demand a reply from the Minister about my request for an inquiry into the financial ramifications for Mid Glamorgan TECs.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I told the hon. Gentleman that each TEC had received an increase in funding. Mid Glamorgan received an increase from £14·9 million in 1990-91 to £21·1 million in 1991-92. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for drawing attention to the strategy document and for giving it publicity in the Chamber. That document is important, as every hon. Member concerned with training in Wales is fully aware. I am sorry that CATO, of which the hon. Gentleman was chairman, failed to achieve approved training organisation status, but he must not keep on digging and hitting at the Mid Glamorgan TECs on that account. That is small-minded of him.

Mr. Grist: Is my right hon. Friend aware that I welcome the transfer next April to his Department of the responsibility for training and TECs, and I hope that that will mean a better-focused and relevant service for his and my constituents.

Sir Wyn Roberts: I am absolutely certain that that is what it will mean. The transfer of responsibility for training to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, initiated by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, makes a great deal of sense. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will combine that responsibility with responsibility for education in schools and, we hope, in due course for further and higher education. He has set up a special unit to deal with the transfer.

Mr. Barry Jones: Has not the right hon. Gentleman cut funding for training and cut training places for unemployed and young people? Has not he in effect created a hostile climate for companies such as Hoover and British Aerospace, which have had to slash their

apprenticeships? A modern, productive and competitive economy for Wales would be unattainable under the right hon. Gentleman's policies.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The hon. Gentleman cannot possibly have listened to the reply that I gave to his hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell). The amount available to all the TECs in Wales increased from £49·1 million to £117·1 million this year. I dare say that there will be an increase next year. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that an extra £11 million has been devoted to employment training this year. We are taking all possible steps to ensure that we have a well-trained and well-educated work force for the future.

The total funding for each TEC in Wales is shown in the following table:

TEC	*Operational Start Dates*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*
		£ million	*£ million*
Mid Glamorgan	23 July 1990	14·9	21·1
West Wales	23 July 1990	20·4	31·5
North East Wales	17 September 1990	6·2	13·6
North West Wales	4 February 1991	1·8	13·6
South Glamorgan	4 February 1991	3·4	14·1
Gwent	4 February 1991	2·4	18·4
Powys	2 April 1991	Nil	4·8

Note: It should be borne in mind that the 1990-91 budgets are for the period of TEC operation only and vary in the periods they cover because TECs became operational at differing times.

Ambulance Service

2. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to change the organisation of the ambulance service in Wales; and whether he will make it his policy that the service should continue to be organised on a county or health authority basis.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Nicholas Bennett): We are considering whether reform of the ambulance and patient transport services in Wales may lead to a more cost-effective service, greater efficiency and, therefore, better patient care.

Mr. Michael: Will the Minister end the secrecy surrounding that consideration and tell us his view of the Powys, Gwent and South Glamorgan combination, which is like a giant, inverted reverse question mark around the deprived county of Mid Glamorgan? Is he aware that the only reason for their proposals that has been given by the managers of those three ambulance services is that that combination would protect their market share? Will the Minister give up the nonsense about a market in care and a market in accidents? Does he accept that people in every part of Wales want an efficient local service and want to be treated as patients, not as pieces of a market share?

Mr. Bennett: We have not yet received the application to which the hon. Gentleman refers. If it is received, we shall give it careful consideration and there will, of course, be wide public consultation on it. We shall not approve any applications for changes in the ambulance and patient transport services that are not in the best interests of patients throughout Wales.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: Does my hon. Friend agree that rather than taking a dogmatic approach, and in the interests of improving the service, it would be better to wait to see what proposals are produced by the professionals—those who run and really know about the ambulance service?

Mr. Bennett: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that it is important that we wait to see the contents of any application and plan. I can assure the House that we shall not allow any application to go forward for consideration if it does not provide for real improvements in the way in which patients are treated in the ambulance and patient transport services. Any application that is allowed to go forward for public consideration will be subject to full consultation.

Mr. Livsey: Does the Minister agree that, as presently constituted, Powys ambulance service gives a superb service in a very rural area? Is he aware that Powys health authority is opposed to the amalgamation of the Powys ambulance service with those of South Glamorgan and Gwent? Does he agree that that would be an unacceptable combination?

Mr. Bennett: The hon. Gentleman will not expect me to comment on that—[HON. MEMBERS: "We do."]—because, as I have said, we must wait for the application to come forward.—*[Interruption.]* The problem with the Opposition is that they do not want proper consultation and consideration.

Mr. Michael: The Minister is running away from the issue.

Mr. Bennett: The application has not yet come forward —*[Interruption.]* I cannot be running away from something that has not yet happened. As I have said, the application has not yet come forward, but when it does, it will be carefully considered and if it seems to have—*[Interruption.]* I cannot have an opinion on something that I have not yet seen. The Opposition do not want to wait for careful, mature consideration. We shall await the proposals and, when they come forward, we shall consider whether they are in a form that enables them to be put forward for public consultation. Obviously, we shall carefully weigh the views of Powys health authority in any consideration.

Women Patients

3. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the cost to the national health service in Wales of treating women suffering from strokes, osteoporosis and senility; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The treatments to which my hon. Friend refers are specialist treatments and information on them is not kept at Welsh Office level.

Mrs. Gorman: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Would he like me to give him the bad news first, which is that more women in Wales are killed or severely disabled by those complaints than by all other medical complaints put together? However, the good news is that those complaints are preventable by the use of hormone replacement therapy. That medical treatment is available in two hospitals in Wales, but they operate on only two days a week. Does my hon. Friend agree that the half a million or more women in Wales should be able to receive specialist menopause care in more hospitals? May I look

forward to my hon. Friend's Department investigating this matter with a view to improving the level of those facilities?

Mr. Bennett: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. Hormone replacement therapy is available on prescription on the clinical judgment of the general practitioner or consultant concerned. It must be for the patient and her GP or consultant to look at the advantages and disadvantages of HRT. It is not a matter on which Ministers should proclaim a view one way or the other. Nevertheless, HRT is available on prescription to women who require it.

Mr. Denzil Davies: Is the Minister aware that two of the illnesses that are mentioned in the main question, strokes and senility, are part of the aging processes? However good the acute services and whatever the life expectancy, will not there always be a need for hospitals to deal with such illnesses among the chronically sick elderly? In those circumstances, will the hon. Gentleman reconsider East Dyfed health authority's proposals to close the Mynyddmawr hospital in my constituency, which provides proper care for women and men who suffer from such illnesses?

Mr. Bennett: The right hon. Gentleman would not expect me to comment on a matter that is the subject of consultation—*[Interruption.]* I do not comment on matters that are out for public consultation because at the end of the day I shall have to take a decision, and there is no point in doing so before the public have been consulted. I am sorry that some Labour Members do not appreciate that. Under the community care arrangements that come into effect on 1 April 1993, we want more people to be treated in their own homes. We want to avoid, as far as possible, institutionalising people by sending them into hospital. We want them to be treated in a caring environment in their own home. However, there will always remain a need for hospitals and it is for the health authorities in each district to make sure that such accommodation is available.

Housing

4. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give figures of housing starts in Clwyd and Wales by *(a)* councils, *(b)* housing associations and *(c)* private developers for 1978 and for 1990.

The Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Daavid Hunt): In 1978 total housing starts in Wales amounted to 12,351. In 1990 there were 10,183. In Clwyd in 1978, total housing starts were 1,626. That figure rose to 2,078 in 1990. I shall arrange for the other figures to be printed in the *Official Report*.

Mr. Jones: I thank the Secretary of State for those figures. Is he aware that there will be only 48 housing associations starts this year in the whole of Glyndwr, which, as he knows, is a rural area? Does he agree that that is a disgrace, bearing in mind that I and, I am sure, my hon. Friends receive regular visits from people who are desperate for housing in those areas?

Mr. Hunt: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman framed his supplementary before he heard the figures that I gave, but they showed that total housing starts in Clwyd rose between 1978 and 1990. The basic housing programme in 1979-80 amounted to some £30 million for housing association activity, whereas this year's programme is likely to be worth about £150 million. That is an enormous increase.

Mr. Alan Williams: Will the hon. Secretary of State bear it in mind that for the homeless it is rented accommodation that counts? Homelessness had risen by 4,500 before a further 2,000 repossessions took place, yet at the same time there has been a decline of 2,300 in the number of houses being built for rent. Does not the Secretary of State realise that much of the problem and the desperation of the homeless in Wales is the direct result of the policies that he is pursuing?

Mr. Hunt: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware of the extremely good document "Housing in Wales: An Agenda for Action", for which my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State was responsible. On the hon. Gentleman's particular point, he should have a word with his hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones), whom I met only this morning with a delegation from north Wales. I pointed out, for example, that the flats above shops initiative has been extremely successful. There are many other initiatives.

Mr. Simon Coombs: Does my right hon. Friend agree that alongside new housing, it is important to conserve the existing private sector housing stock? In that context, will he say something about the level of renovation grant currently available in Wales?

Mr. Hunt: That is a particular success story. Total expenditure since 1979 on house renovation in Wales is about £2,000 million. Some 215,000 grants have been made for private sector renovation since 1979. That speaks for itself.

Mr. Barry Jones: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that in the first six months of this year alone, 1,923 repossession orders were made for homes in Wales? That was an increase of more than 70 per cent. on last year. What advice does the right hon. Gentleman give to the hundreds of families who have had their homes repossessed because of his economic policies? Does not he realise that his glossy brochures do not help to mend the marriages under stress or put right the budgets under stress? Is not it the case that the right hon. Gentleman has no strategy and no policy, but only complacency on housing?

Mr. Hunt: It is always a matter of great sadness when anyone's home is repossessed, but the hon. Gentleman is trying to draw a veil over what happened in the 1970s, when there were considerable repossessions and when interest rates, if he recalls, reached a much higher level than they are at present. If the hon. Gentleman considers the number of housing starts instead of artificially creating anger, he will realise that the Opposition's record was not very good. Under the last Labour Government there were a number of cuts, so I hope that the hon. Gentleman will begin to recognise the progress that has been made under this Government.

Following is the information:

Housing starts—Wales

	Total Wales	*Private*	*Housing associations*	*Local authorities*
1978	12,351	7,165	1,184	4,002
1990	10,183	7,632	2,213	338

Housing starts—Clwyd

	Total Clwyd	*Private*	*Housing associations*	*Local authorities*
1978	1,626	1,371	41	214
1990	2,0[illegible]	1,597	375	106

In each case housing association starts have increased and housing associations should be congratulated on their achievements.

Common Agricultural Policy

5. **Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met leaders of the farmers' unions in Wales to discuss reform of the common agricultural policy.

Mr. David Hunt: I last met leaders of the Farmers Union of Wales and the National Farmers Union on 22 October.

Mr. Jones: I congratulate the Secretary of State for taking our advice, and that of the farming unions in Wales, to go to Brussels to fight for the interests of Welsh farmers. During his talks with Commissioner Ray MacSharry, did he urge him to raise the limits on which sheep support is payable from 750 in the less-favoured areas and 350 elsewhere to 1,000 and 500 respectively? If he did, what was the Commissioner's reply?

Mr. Hunt: I certainly made the point that those headage limits were unacceptable and virtually singled out Wales as a target for discrimination. I pointed out that the headage limits affect 15 per cent. of the flock in Wales, whereas they affect only 3 per cent. of the flock throughout the European Community. That sort of discrimination is unacceptable. I am afraid that we shall have to wait for the Commissioner's response, but I made him aware of the strong feelings that exist throughout Wales on that issue. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has taken the opportunity to air that important subject.

Mr. Ron Davies: Did the Secretary of State discuss the possibility that something close to Commissioner MacSharry's original proposals are likely to be accepted in the near future by the Council of Ministers? Does he agree that if that is the case, there will be a real drop in the level of income received by Welsh farmers? While I welcome the announcement a couple of weeks ago about two new environmentally sensitive areas, is not it now the case that the only way to protect farm incomes in Wales is to adopt an environmental protection scheme covering the whole of Wales and to pay farmers to look after the countryside?

Mr. Hunt: I believe that I speak for every hon. Member when I say that we want a reform of the common agricultural policy. However, that must be done in a way that is fair to farmers throughout the Community and does not single out farmers such as those in Wales for discrimination. I welcome the hon. Gentleman's comments about the recent announcement that we made. I am sure that some measures that will link the tremendous work that farmers are doing to conserve the countryside with reward will come in the reform of the CAP. We must ensure that we reward farmers not only for efficiency, but for what they do in the countryside.

Unemployment

6. **Mr. Gwilym Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are the latest totals of actual unemployment in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Unemployment has dropped by more than 1,800 and is down to just over 117,000, if we take the unadjusted figures.

Mr. Jones: Provided that we can convince them that we are not bent on the same course, are not there excellent prospects for persuading Scottish insurance companies to set up in Wales? Because of their real concerns about the consequences of a Scottish Assembly, they are being forced to consider establishing new bases south of the border. Perhaps he should suggest to the Welsh Development Agency that it sends a mission to Edinburgh.

Mr. Hunt: I am a little loath to go down the same route with the same conclusion, but my hon. Friend has made an important point which has to be taken into account by all those who plead and argue that we should move towards setting up a Welsh Assembly, overturning the four to one majority against in the last referendum on the issue.

Mr. Roy Hughes: Does the Secretary of State appreciate that all the economic forecasts point to an increase in unemployment in the period ahead? Has the Welsh Office made any assessment of what that will mean in terms of repossessions of homes, domestic discord, divorce and so on? Does he think that that should be given more serious consideration than the Welsh Office appears to be giving it?

Mr. Hunt: I am pleased to see the hon. Gentleman in his place. He appears to have made a swift recovery from his operation and we are delighted to see him here.

The distress that the hon. Gentleman described is distress to everybody. However, Wales has a higher level of owner-occupation—about 72 per cent.—than elsewhere in the United Kingdom. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will pay tribute to the significant level of inward investment and new job announcements that have occurred in Wales in the recent past.

Mr. Raffan: What plans is the Welsh Office making in conjunction with the Welsh Development Agency and

British Coal Enterprise, to minimise the impact on Delyn of the 200 redundancies at Point of Ayr scheduled for the end of 1993?

Mr. Hunt: I have been concerned about that announcement, and I want further announcements to be made about new projects in and around the area. I have been underground at the Point of Ayr colliery, as my hon. Friend is aware. I believe it to be a remarkably good colliery, and I opened the coal liquefaction plant alongside it. I am pleased to say today that a range of projects has been announced. They are new industrial projects involving investment of more than £25 million, creating more than 500 new jobs and safeguarding about 300 others. Some of those projects are in north Wales, but I agree with my hon. Friend that we need to hear more such announcements.

Local Government Finance

7. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next intends to meet Welsh local government leaders to discuss local government finance.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend will meet the Welsh Consultative Council on Local Government Finance after he has received the submissions and consultations on the settlement proposals for 1992-93, which are due in by 24 December.

Mr. Murphy: Does the Minister agree that the council tax, which he is pushing through the House now, will be seen as just as unfair and unrelated to the ability of people to pay as the poll tax? Does he accept that it is so unfair that with all the discounts and bandings, the Government will have to squander another £100 million in precisely the way that they had to squander money to dump the poll tax?

Mr. Bennett: The last thing that the people of Wales want is to return to the discredited and out-dated rating system, which the hon. Gentleman said some years ago was not supported. Labour now wishes to go back to it. The council tax proposals are eminently fair. There is a special banding for Wales, with special reductions. More than 90 per cent. of all local government expenditure in Wales is provided by central Government or business finance, not by the chargepayer. The Labour party's proposals would mean 14 bands, but we were not told the ratios between the different bands. In other words, Labour Members did not have the guts to tell the people of Wales just what their proposals were.

Mr. Wigley: Does the Minister accept that local authorities in Wales will need much more capital finance if they are to make inroads into the massive housing shortage for people on the waiting lists in Wales? Is he aware of the representations from a number of Welsh local authorities about the need for a review of housing and planning legislation to make sure that the housing problem is cracked? Will the Government call a conference in Wales to consider those serious issues?

Mr. Bennett: I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the importance of dealing with housing in Wales. My right hon. Friend will shortly be making a statement about capital allocations for local authorities. It must be remembered that the role of local authorities has changed from their being the providers to being the enablers. We have put considerable sums of money into Housing for Wales. This year, a record 3,500 properties are under construction. I take seriously and personally the need to tackle the housing problem in Wales, which is why we recently issued "Housing in Wales: An Agenda for Action", the first-ever agenda on housing issued by a Government Department.

Mr. Edwards: The Minister states that Tai Cymru is building 3,500 homes in Wales next year. However, there are 3,500 people on the waiting list in my constituency alone. Is he aware that those people will never be able to buy, that they cannot afford to rent, and that for them very little is being developed in the council housing sector—indeed, nothing at all—which means that they have little chance of getting into a property developed by Tai Cymru? Does he appreciate that there is a massive housing crisis in Wales, and especially in my constituency?

Mr. Bennett: No, I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's premise that not enough is being done. We are working hard on the housing problems of Wales. Housing waiting lists are not a good indication of need because they have not been validated. When local authorities have examined their waiting lists, they have found that a large number of people on them have moved or no longer need to be rehoused. That is why housing lists are not an especially good indicator. We are increasing the number of properties available for rent through the housing associations, but we must also consider the total number of properties being built in Wales. Private builders are doing a good job in building new properties for sale and that creates a knock-on effect on rented accommodation.

Through our policies, for instance those on rented accommodation, we now provide a special allocation for the flats above shops initiative. If the hon. Gentleman takes a walk down any high street he will see how that policy is working through into the provision of new housing.

Inward Investment

8. **Mr. Morgan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent discussions he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency concerning his inward investment mission to Japan, Australia and the United States of America.

Sir Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend has frequent meetings with the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency to discuss a range of matters, including inward investment.

Mr. Morgan: I thank the Minister of State for his somewhat opaque reply. Will he be a little more precise? Has he discussed the value for money which the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency thinks he got out of the £28,000 worth of taxpayers' money that was spent on the recent mission, which finished on 17 November? That mission involved two executives of the agency travelling around the world, including the chairman, and Mr. Shimon Cohen from Lowe Bell—the most expensive bag carrier in history, whose participation in the trip cost £7,500 and who has no specialised knowledge of industrial development. What proposals does the Minister have to

obtain greater value for money from such round-the-world missions, particularly as the second half of this one was cancelled?

Sir Wyn Roberts: I am surprised to hear such talk from an Opposition Front-Bench spokesman. He should realise that one cannot judge the value of an inward investment mission immediately afterwards. It often takes years before the results can be fully quantified. I have listened to the hon. Gentleman speak on this subject and he has made many mistakes in his statements and allegations of impropriety. He gives me the impression of being like Dennis the Menace's dog, Gnasher, who goes for anyone's ankles. My more refined hon. Friends may wish to compare him with Bildad the Shuhite, who was one of Job's most cruel comforters.

Mr. Win Griffiths: The purpose of the mission's visit abroad was obviously to obtain more jobs in Wales. Does the Minister realise that, although my constituency is one of the wealthier Welsh constituencies, 17 people are looking for jobs for each vacancy listed in unemployment centres there? Does the Minister expect that in the next six months there will be fewer or even more people looking for jobs?

Sir Wyn Roberts: The hon. Gentleman represents Bridgend which, with Sony, has one of the most attractive inward investments in Wales. He will know that we have had a record number of inward investment projects. There were 142 last year and 165 up to October this year. There were 69 overseas projects in 1990-91 and this year there have already been 59. Those 69 overseas projects were secured with the promise of 8,500 jobs and the 59 projects promised 9,000 jobs. As the hon. Gentleman heard from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, unemployment fell last month, so on unemployment, we look forward optimistically to the future.

Rail-Bus Services

9. **Sir Anthony Meyer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will discuss with the chairman of British Rail the improvement of co-ordination with bus services in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: I understand that British Rail is discussing with county councils better ways of co-ordinating bus services.

Sir Anthony Meyer: Is my right hon. Friend aware that because of a dispute between British Rail and the Crosville bus company, for months there has been no shelter from the weather for bus passengers waiting at Rhyl station? Does he agree that this long-running and silly dispute reflects extremely badly on the Crosville bus company, which seems to think that it has no responsibility whatever for the well-being of its passengers, but, above all, reflects badly on Sir Bob Reid, who, as chairman of a great nationalised corporation, seems quite content to sit back, let matters take their course and let passengers go to hell?

Mr. Hunt: Thanks to my hon. Friend, I am aware of the position at Rhyl and am very concerned about it. I shall certainly bring what he has said directly to the attention of Sir Robert Reid.

Mr. Anderson: Is the Secretary of State worried about the number of mergers and amalgamations affecting bus services in Wales and about the reduction in service in the evenings and on Sundays? Now that we have had sufficient experience of the workings of deregulation, is not it time for the Government to have an inquiry into how some claims are not being met?

Mr. Hunt: The statistics show that the whole privatisation move has been a remarkable success. Between 1985-86 and 1990-91, local bus mileage rose by 29 per cent. in Wales, compared with the Great Britain average increase of 18 per cent. We have done remarkably well.

Employment, Cardiganshire

11. **Mr. Geraint Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to visit Aberporth, Cardiganshire during the next few months to discuss employment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend currently has no plans to do so.

Mr. Howells: The Minister will be well aware that west Wales will have an unemployment black spot in the next four to five years due to the possible closure of Brawdy in his constituency and Trecwn in mine and the problems facing Aberporth. Does he have a glimmer of hope for people who are worried about their jobs?

Mr. Bennett: The hon. Gentleman is right. As a Minister and as a Member of Parliament for west Wales, I am concerned about the future of defence-related industries. I can give the hon. Gentleman a glimmer of hope about the defence research agency at Aberporth. I understand from the Ministry of Defence that there is no intention to close it and my right hon. Friend and I shall continue to make every representation that we can to enourage others to move into west Wales and create more opportunities for employment.

Welsh Language

12. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made with regard to responding to the Welsh Language Board's proposal for a new Welsh Language Act; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Consultations are continuing within Government on the Welsh Language Board's proposals. The proposals are wide ranging and have implications for all branches of the public sector in Wales. My right hon. Friend is anxious that these consultations should be completed as soon as possible so that he can announce a decision. Whatever is decided in relation to legislation will not lessen the need to pursue a wide range of policies in support of the language. I am happy to announce that direct grant support for the language next year will be £7·6 million, a 12 per cent. increase on provision in the current year.

Mr. Wigley: Does not the Minister realise that consultation on a new Welsh Language Act started five years ago last month and that for over five years we have been waiting for some sign of life from the Welsh Office? Is that an indication of the speed at which the Welsh Office usually moves? Is that the dynamic David and the

wonderful Wyn making progress on an issue, or is it another example of the Government's dithering on an important issue for Wales?

Sir Wyn Roberts: The hon. Gentleman is misleading himself as well as the House and the country. We have had these proposals in our hands only from the beginning of this year. The Welsh Language Board took a considerable time to work out its proposals and gave them to us at the beginning of the year. Consultations are continuing in government and within the past fortnight there has been an important meeting involving a member of the board, Mr. Winston Roddick, and representatives of the Lord Chancellor's Department.

"This Common Inheritance"

13. **Dr. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been achieved in implementing the White Paper on environmental policy "This Common Inheritance"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The Government reported on the progress of their environment initiative on 25 September with the publication of "This Common Inheritance: the First Year Report", Cm. 1655. In addition, my right hon. Friend published on that day a report, "The Environment in Wales", on progress in the Principality.

Dr. Thomas: Does the Minister believe that progress on environmental policy has been made when his Department and the Department of Energy decide to give the go-ahead to an incinerator project which will produce low-level radioactive waste, adding to the already radioactive environment of Trawsfynnydd, without ensuring adequate environmental assessment of that project? The inspector appointed by the Minister's Department to make a recommendation on the project decided that he could not do so because not enough information was available to him.

Mr. Bennett: All nuclear installations are inspected regularly by the nuclear installations inspectorate and other responsible agencies and our emergency plans are kept under continual review to ensure that they are responsive to changing circumstances. Before the power station can reopen, Nuclear Electric will have to satisfy the safety requirements. That should be a reassurance to the hon. Gentleman and his constituents.

Mortgage Repossessions

14. **Mr. Rowlands:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next hopes to meet representatives of building societies and banks on the level of mortgage repossessions in Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney, Mid Glamorgan and Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I met the building societies liaison committee for Wales recently. We maintain regular contact with mortgage lenders in Wales about repossessions and other matters of common interest.

Mr. Rowlands: Does the Minister realise that in the first nine months of this year, there was an increase of 25 per cent. in repossession orders in Merthyr and Rhymney? Many of the householders affected are not in receipt of income support or any other benefit. Did the Minister put to the building societies any Government proposals to safeguard those communities, householders and homes? After all, his policy is partly responsible for the repossession orders.

Mr. Bennett: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said earlier, any repossession is a matter of great tragedy to the family and to society. We can offer those people the hope that, with the reductions in interest rates and in the rate of inflation and with the welcome reduction in unemployment in Wales last month, the economic situation is improving. The way forward is for everybody to work together, including the mortgage lenders and the rest of the people involved in housing in Wales, including Housing for Wales, on finding ways to help people who have lost their homes.

THE ARTS

Arts Council

30. **Mr. Burt:** To ask the Minister for the Arts what increases in funding he proposes for the Arts Council in the current financial year.

The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Tim Renton): As I announced on 7 November, the Arts Council's grant in aid for 1992-93 will rise by 13·9 per cent. to £221·2 million. This is a marvellous settlement, the third record increase in a row. Once again, the Government have demonstrated their firm commitment to the arts.

Mr. Burt: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the widespread welcome in the north-west for the substantial increase that he has achieved and in particular the increase for the Hallé orchestra, Britain's premier regional orchestra? Can he confirm that that increase in funding to the north-west in general further establishes the reputation of the north-west as the leading centre for arts under this Government?

Mr. Renton: I thank my hon. Friend for his warm support for the settlement and I am delighted to confirm what he said. I have managed to visit the new North West Arts board already and I realise how committed it is to development of the arts in the north-west. I am particularly pleased to learn that the Hallé orchestra will receive an 18 per cent. increase in funding next year. With the appointment to that orchestra of Kent Nagano, one of the most exciting new conductors, it has a great future.

Mr. Robert Sheldon: I congratulate the Minister on providing a substantial increase in funding for the arts. However, will he get the Arts Council to explain more clearly the somewhat arbitrary decisions that it makes? For example, the Royal Philharmonic orchestra has been told that it will not get as much money as it needs because it is not adventurous enough. Could not it get the money first and then, if it was not adventurous enough, the Arts Council could postpone any subsequent increase? It needs to explain its policies rather more clearly to some of us who take these matters seriously.

Mr. Renton: I am interested in what the right hon. Gentleman says and I am sure that he takes these matters seriously. So do I and so does the Arts Council. He will appreciate that I do not interfere in individual decisions about the levels of funding to arts organisations, but I understand that the RPO has written to the Arts Council

about the level of its 1992-93 grant. The Arts Council will respond to all the points that have been made as quickly as it can and will take into account the concern that the right hon. Gentleman has expressed.

Sir Richard Luce: May I congratulate my right hon. Friend most warmly on the substantial extra resources that he has raised for the arts which will provide a foundation for expansion for the arts in the years ahead? Does he agree, however, that if we look ahead we see several arts requirements in areas in which it is not possible to derive all funding from the taxpayer—for example, the fabric of theatres? Does he agree that the best answer to the problem is to introduce a national lottery?

Mr. Renton: I am particularly grateful to my right hon. Friend for his support because it was he, during his long and noteworthy tenure as Minister for the Arts, who introduced two years ago the first of the three major increases—that of 11 per cent. It set us on course for the substantial increase in funding for the Arts Council that we now see. I was delighted to read, in the *Financial Times* on Saturday, Anthony Thorncroft talking about levels of grant to arts organisations that go well beyond the munificence of the days of Jennie Lee and Lord Goodman. After allowing for inflation, grants are now nearly three times the level of Jennie Lee's. I fully understand my right hon. Friend's enthusiasm for a lottery and have some of the same enthusiasm myself. I understand that it is possible that we shall see a private Member's Bill on the subject.

Mr. Fisher: I welcome the Arts Council settlement and congratulate the Minister. Does he recognise that while he and the Treasury are helping the Arts Council and regional arts boards to give increased grants to arts bodies, the Secretary of State for the Environment has set poll tax levels that will force local authorities to cut their grants to many of precisely the same arts bodies? Does he understand that the Government are giving with one hand and taking away with the other? Does he support the Secretary of State for the Environment in the policies that will force cuts to be made in local authority grants to arts companies throughout the country?

Mr. Renton: The shadow Minister for the Arts really should stop using Cassandra as his role model. Cassandra's gloomy prophecies came true while, thankfully, the hon. Gentleman's do not. Local authorities throughout the country—the hon. Gentleman and I have both visited many of them—are determined to continue their arts spending. It is not a large part of their budgets and they realise how successful it is, especially in the context of plural funding. Many other sources help the funding. If local authorities removed their support, the other sources might disappear. I do not believe that many local authorities will follow that course.

Welsh Arts Council

31. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Minister for the Arts how many meetings he has had during the past 12 months with local government representatives from Wales regarding the activities of the Welsh Arts Council.

Mr. Renton: I visited Wales in May and again in October, when I met a great many people from the arts, including representatives of Welsh local authorities. I was warmly welcomed and found the visits stimulating and informative.

Mr. Wigley: I hope that the visit was productive as well. What progress has been made, in association with local authorities and the Welsh Arts Council, on the provision of the multi-purpose concert hall and opera house in Llandudno, to enable the Welsh National Opera to give performances in that town as it used to do? There are signs that things are moving in the right direction. Will the right hon. Gentleman give an undertaking that this valuable project is going ahead and that there is a date by which it will be open?

Mr. Renton: I thank the hon. Gentleman for what I think was his support. I was delighted that on 16 November the *Western Mail* quoted Tom Owen, the director of the Welsh Arts Council, as follows:

"The Welsh arts world is in its best conditions for years."

I know that north Wales lacks a theatre large enough to stage full-scale opera. Work on proposals for a new building involving both public and private sectors is well advanced and I understand that a firm decision is likely to be taken by the end of the month. I very much hope that there will be a successful outcome.

Sir Anthony Meyer: Is my right hon. Friend aware that there is a splendid new theatre in Rhyl, in which the Hallé orchestra gave an outstanding performance last week? Is he aware also that that is the result of sensible co-operation between the local authority, the Welsh Office, the Welsh Arts Council and the European reconstruction and development fund?

Mr. Renton: I support what my hon. Friend has just said. Successful arts funding—this is where the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher) was so wrong—depends now on many different sources of funding. That is being shown in the instance to which my hon. Friend referred and it is being demonstrated in many other parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the inconsistency between the increased funding of visual arts in Wales and elsewhere which he has achieved and the deliberate reduction by the Department of Education and Science and the Welsh Office of places in higher education for the study of fine art? Will the right hon. Gentleman encourage his colleagues in those two Departments to ensure that fine art places are not cut further?

Mr. Renton: My right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Welsh Office—who is sitting beside me—is dedicated to, and very knowledgeable about, the arts and I am sure that he listened to the hon. and learned Gentleman's comments with great care.

Scottish Arts Council

32. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Minister for the Arts when he last met the chairman of the Scottish Arts Council to discuss the provision of financial assistance to theatres and art galleries in the 1990s; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: I met the chairman of the Scottish Arts Council on Thursday last week. We discussed a range of

issues and he told me how pleased he was about the allocation of £22·1 million in total for the council next year. That is an increase of 13·8 per cent. on last year.

Dr. Godman: May I, too, express my pleasure at that increase? However, can the Minister explain the contradiction between his introduction to a manual on percentage schemes for the arts published by the Scottish Arts Council last Friday, in which he encouraged public agency support for the arts, and his Department's decision to cancel such a percentage scheme for the new British Library? Will the Minister look again at that decision, because it could have important and disturbing implications for crafts in Scotland? I urge the right hon. Gentleman to change that decision.

Mr. Renton: I have seen, for example, public art on display in Dundee and I share the hon. Gentleman's view of how important it is in the regeneration of some parts of inner cities. As to the hon. Gentleman's point about the British Library, I said that, at this stage in the library's long building programme, I was unable to commit part of the funds that are available to it for the purchase of new works of art. However, I have encouraged the library to go out and seek, for example, sponsorship for new works of art. Alternatively, it will be able to use and to display many of the splendid items in its own collection. When the building programme is further advanced, perhaps we will be able to look again at that question.

London Arts

33. **Mr. Robert G. Hughes:** To ask the Minister for the Arts when he next plans to meet the chairman of the London Arts Board to discuss funding for the arts in London.

Mr. Renton: I met the chairman and chief executive of the new London Arts Board on 18 November to hear about the excellent progress made in setting up the new board and its plans for the immediate future. Since then, the Arts Council has announced at 13·9 per cent. increase in its grant to the London Arts Board for 1992-93.

Mr. Hughes: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on that answer. When he next meets the chairman of the London Arts Board, will he discuss with him the suggestion made by some others that regional arts boards might be abolished? Will my right hon. Friend tell the chairman that the Government support regional arts boards and that he will do everything to fight their abolition? Will my right hon. Friend condemn those who are trying to abolish regional arts boards?

Mr. Renton: Yes, I will certainly do that. The boards have got off to a very successful start. They have strong chairmen and chairwomen and are now nearly complete. I believe that they will be very successful in using the average 17 per cent. increase that they have been given by the Arts Council. I was most surprised when Labour's shadow spokesman for the arts said during a radio interview, which I shared with him, that under Labour's policy, regional arts boards would disappear. I believe that there was some confusion on the hon. Gentleman's part, but obviously the suggestion has caused great concern among the boards.

CIVIL SERVICE

Equal Opportunities

40. **Mr. Burt:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what is being done to further equal opportunities training in the civil service.

The Minister of State, Privy Council Office (Mr. Tim Renton): We take the subject of equal opportunities training very seriously. With that in mind, my Department recently published two equal opportunities training packages and a video. Those will be used by Departments and agencies in a wide range of training programmes.

Mr. Burt: I am grateful for that answer. Is my right hon. Friend satisfied with recent progress in the civil service in giving effect to such measures? Does he agree that those of us who want better representation of all minorities in the civil service believe that that can best be achieved through co-ordination with the education service? Is not it important that people come through naturally and that no special favours are seen to be given, because otherwise those places would be devalued?

Mr. Renton: To take my hon. Friend's second point first, it is very important that it should be made clear in schools, universities and polytechnics that the civil service and the public sector generally provide a good career for women as well as for men and also for ethnic minorities. It is a career which, with help, they can follow throughout their lives.

As for my hon. Friend's first point, over the past four years the proportion of women in the top civil service grades has nearly doubled, from 4 per cent. in 1987 to 7·3 per cent. now. That is unsatisfactory; there is a long way to go. However, the civil service is trying very hard to implement equal opportunities.

Dr. Marek: Is it true that only three of the 53 newly appointed chief executives of executive agencies are women? If it is true, are not the Minister's sentiments and what he says about trying to achieve equality of opportunity for women within the civil service just platitudinous rubbish?

Mr. Renton: That sounded awfully tough, but the answer is that 41 of the 63 civilian chief executives will be appointed by open competition. One third of all chief executives are from outside the civil service and 11 per cent. are women. Of those 11 per cent., one, the chief executive of the Civil Service college, reports directly to me. When considering those for which I have direct responsibility, that represents one out of three, so in that area at least we are doing extremely well.

Recruitment

41. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will make a statement on the recruitment procedures for the civil service as operated at universities and polytechnics.

Mr. Renton: We believe strongly in the policy of selection on merit on the basis of fair and open competition. It applies to all applicants, including those from universities and polytechnics.

Mr. Viggers: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it was a bright idea of the head of the civil service to encourage each of his grandees, the permanent secretaries in the different Departments, to establish a link with a separate university? Does my right hon. Friend also agree that that underlines the fact that the civil service offers a fine career to all, regardless of their educational background, since selection and promotion are purely on merit?

Mr. Renton: Yes, I very much agree with my hon. Friend. In recent years the aim has been to spread entry into the civil service. During the past three years the proportion of Oxbridge candidates has dropped from 70 per cent. between 1982 and 1984 to 50 per cent. now. I hope that that trend will continue. As for the heads of the various Departments "adopting a poly", as it came to be called in the newspapers, that is a very imaginative idea, the purpose of which is to make the prospect of a civil service career much more widely known.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Since we are told that a fast stream has been created to enable more graduates to enter the Brussels organisations, why is not it possible for the Minister to create a fast stream and to increase pay rates so as to encourage more women graduates to go into higher-paid civil service jobs?

Mr. Renton: I am pleased to tell the hon. Lady that women are particularly successful in the fast stream competition. That is one area where their prominence is——

Mrs. Dunwoody: Why not for the home civil service?

Mr. Renton: Not just for the European fast stream, but for the domestic fast stream. It is there most particularly that women are getting a high percentage of the jobs and it is they who will be in grade 1 and 2 in future years. That is where women are showing that they can come first past the post.

Arts Organisations (Secondment)

42. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service how many civil servants have been seconded to arts organisations.

Mr. Renton: The Government are very ready to consider seconding civil servants to other areas where their experience can be of use. Details are not collected centrally, but I can tell my hon. Friend that I know of six such cases where civil servants have moved to arts organisations.

Mr. Bowis: Is my right hon. Friend aware that one of the jewels in our cultural crown, based in Battersea, is the Royal Academy of Dancing? It sets the standards and the syllabus for dance and ballet tuition throughout the world and in particular throughout the European Community. The Governments of France, Italy and Greece are financing bids by their own organisations to rival the academy. Will my right hon. Friend ascertain whether his Department can support the Royal Academy of Dancing in such a way as to ensure that British dance tuition standards remain at the top of the ladder in the European Community?

Mr. Renton: I congratulate my hon. Friend. He is a good friend of all the arts organisations in his constituency. I know of his interest in the Battersea arts centre and I am interested to hear what he said about the RAD.

On my hon. Friend's point about qualifications, that matter may fall under the provisions of the treaty of Rome on the free movement of persons and recognition of qualifications. If my hon. Friend cares to write to me about the matter, I shall gladly look into it in detail.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Can the Minister give the House any information about the number of Scottish civil servants who have been seconded to the Scottish Arts Council and, indeed, to the Scottish Film Council, given what we are hearing about the much-awaited renaissance of the Scottish as well as the British film industry?

Mr. Renton: If the hon. Gentleman had asked me about secondments to industry and commerce in Wales, I could have answered him because that is the subject of the next question. I am afraid that I cannot answer off the cuff his question about secondments in Scotland, but if he cares to write to me in detail, I shall be pleased to find out the answer for him.

Industry (Secondment)

43. **Mr. Murphy:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service how many secondments to industry from the civil service have taken place in Wales.

Mr. Renton: There have been 15 secondments from civil service departments to industry and commerce in Wales since the beginning of 1990.

Mr. Murphy: I am grateful to the Minister for both answers, but I suggest that the number of secondments is not sufficient. There should have been more secondments from the civil service to industry in Wales to improve the quality of advice from the Welsh Office. Will the right hon. Gentleman give us an assurance that the figure will be improved in the months ahead?

Mr. Renton: I cannot agree with the hon. Gentleman that the quality of advice from the Welsh Office could be improved. Having just listened to the end of Welsh questions, I am very much aware of the deep knowledge of and expertise in all Welsh matters of my colleagues on the Government Front Bench. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am glad that my comment received rapturous applause from both sides of the House.

On the hon. Gentleman's particular point, it is not for us to direct secondments from the civil service to industry and commerce. People have to find partnerships in which they are willing to engage. I am sure that the Welsh Office will take the hon. Gentleman's point on board and I hope that the number of secondments will increase.

Equal Opportunities

44. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what progress has been made in achieving equal opportunities for women in the civil service.

Mr. Renton: Much has been achieved since 1984, when the Government launched a programme of action on equal opportunities for women in the civil service. A report on

progress was published on 28 October and copies have been placed in the Library. To keep up the momentum, a new programme for action will be launched in the spring.

Mr. Hague: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the progress that has been made so far. What improvements have been achieved in the proportion of women recruits entering fast stream competition? How many Departments have joined Opportunity 2000 and what is my right hon. Friend doing to encourage the rest to do so?

Mr. Renton: I thank my hon. Friend for his support. In 1984, 28 per cent. of those entering administrative fast stream competition were women and the proportion is now just over 40 per cent. That figure emphasises the position of women in the future because they are the people from whom the future top people will be chosen.

Four Departments have already signed up, but many more are considering doing so. I have no doubt that in a few weeks' time the number will increase.

Child Abuse (Leicestershire)

3.33 pm

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will make a statement on the abuse of children in children's homes in Leicestershire.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. William Waldegrave): As the House will be aware, on 29 November, three child care officers formerly employed by Leicestershire county council were convicted on extremely serious charges of sexual assault and other acts of violence which occurred in three Leicestershire children's homes between 1973 and 1986. These were particularly despicable crimes. They went on over a long period and affected many children who had been entrusted to the defendants for care and help. I do not believe that it is necessary for me to put into words the outrage of the House—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—and of the country at the things which we heard during that trial.

The first concern of hon. Members, particularly those representing Leicestershire constituencies, will be to know whether children in Leicestershire children's homes are now properly protected against abuse. As soon as the charges came to light earlier this year, the Department's social services inspectorate carried out an inspection to assess the present quality of child protection in the county's children's homes. The report showed that there had been many changes and improvements since 1986, but that some deficiencies remain. The inspectorate's recommendations are now being vigorously addressed under the leadership of the present director of social services, Mr. Brian Waller.

Through the Children Act 1989 and its associated regulations and guidance, the Government have ensured that a much more effective framework for controlling children's homes is now in position. It includes proper complaints and rigorous inspection procedures. This new framework is both endorsed and supplemented by the Utting report of last August.

As I announced at the end of the trial, I am immediately doing two things. First, I am directing Leicestershire county council to establish a statutory and legally chaired inquiry whose terms of reference will be to inquire into management responses to complaints or other prima facie evidence of abuse, malpractice or other related matters in Leicestershire children's homes between 1973 and 1986; and any other relevant management and personnel management matters during that period or subsequently.

No amount of legislation can in itself guarantee that there will be no more child abuse in our children's homes. This trial shows yet again the danger that work with vulnerable children, particularly in residential homes, may attract the very people who should be kept at the greatest possible distance from it. This means doing more than checking qualifications and setting up systems, although these things should be done. It means that there must be constant vigilance by the authorities; it means that there must be methods of responding swiftly to alarm bells that may be rung either by staff or by children and that there must be alarm bells that can, in real life, be rung.

But the trial shows the need to look with the utmost care at staff selection procedures. I am therefore also establishing a national inquiry whose chairman will be Mr. Norman Warner, former director of Kent social services. The inquiry's terms of reference will be

"to examine selection and appointment methods and criteria for staff working in children's homes and to recommend improvements; and to make such further examination as the committee may consider justified of management or other issues relevant to the protection of children and young people and to the support and guidance of staff in such homes."

I will wish to see the report and its recommendations by 1 July 1992.

I have no doubt that the majority of staff working in this difficult field do their job with compassion and professionalism, but this trial has shown that we can afford to take nothing for granted.

Mr. Ashby: I think that the whole House will welcome that statement and the fact that two inquiries will be set up. This is yet another major scandal involving the social services department of a council, and the country is rather tired of such scandals. I hope that the second inquiry, of which Mr. Norman Warner will be the chairman, will look closely at the role, quality, education and training of social workers as well as the way in which they are selected.

In respect of the inquiry into Leicestershire county council, in general there appears to have been a major cover-up by those responsible for the care and welfare of these children. I am sure that my right hon. Friend will wish the inquiry to investigate how numerous complaints came to be disregarded, how Mr. Frank Beck was able to simply resign, why the police were never informed of the complaints so that they could be fully investigated at the time, why Mr. Frank Beck, having resigned voluntarily after numerous complaints, was given a reference, why there was not even a report into the then Department of Health and Social Security, and why the inquiries by Brent therefore proved negative.

My right hon. Friend will agree that those questions must be answered and that we have to get to the very heart of the scandal to ensure that it should not happen again, not only in Leicestershire but elsewhere, and those responsible for the cover-up are made to realise what they have done and the subsequent effect it has had on numerous children.

Mr. Waldegrave: I agree with the second part of my hon. Friend's question. He raises a range of issues into which the statutory inquiry must look.

On the first part, I could quote to the House increased statistics for money spent on training, but I do not wish to mislead the House into thinking that there is any qualification that can guarantee against the abuse that we have seen. Mr. Beck was a formidably powerful personality and doubtless would have passed any examination set for him in his profession—indeed, he did so. Examinations do not preclude against evil. What matters is that the authorities exercise their responsibility for checking and double checking what happens on the ground.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West) *rose*——

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Janner: Is the Minister aware that everyone in Leicestershire will welcome the setting up of the inquiry into the regime of Frank Beck? There was, of course, not a shred of truth in any of the allegations of criminal conduct made against me during the trial by Beck and by

his accomplice, Winston. I hope to raise many important aspects of the matter in the House tomorrow evening, if I am fortunate to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker.

As my wife, my family and I have had a taste of the suffering that Beck can impose on innocent people, will the Minister join me in sending to the real sufferers, the individuals who endured Beck's homes and whose lives have been wrecked at his hands, the profound sympathy of us all?

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Waldegrave: I am sure that the House has demonstrated its feelings on the matter in relation to the hon. and learned Gentleman by the reception that he has just received. I am sure that the House wished to join him in sending its sympathy to the many victims, some of whom may have suffered irreparable damage. We hope that that is not true in too many cases.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): I thank my right hon. Friend for what he has just said about the vile allegations and lies against my hon. and learned Friend—I use both words advisedly—the Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner).

I thank my right hon. Friend especially for the inquiry into Leicestershire. This terrible matter has brought shame on Leicestershire, and we expect to get to the heart of how it could have gone on for so long, while apparently nobody did anything about it.

Mr. Waldegrave: That is exactly what the local statutory inquiry must get to the bottom of. I am sure that it will wish to consider a wide range of evidence, including the Newell report producted by the county, which I am sure contains matters germane to the inquiry. We must get to the bottom of the matter. I repeat that there is no system that can automatically preclude evil people getting into positions of power over vulnerable people. That is why we must have complaints procedures that can be worked and really do work, why authorities must use their powers in the proper way and why we must have constant vigilance.

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): I thank the Secretary of State for acting so expeditously in establishing the two public inquiries. I also take the opportunity to inform him and the House that the people of Leicestershire have been shattered and appalled by the relevations of abuse in our children's homes. Does the Secretary of State agree that it is vital that the public inquiry in Leicestershire establishes the circumstances that permitted the regime of terror to go on for so long and that permitted complaints made by the children to be ignored for long? Only if that background is established can we be assured that abuse will not take place in future either in Leicestershire or in other counties.

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman puts his finger exactly on some of the issues that must be addressed most seriously. The citizens of Leicestershire need not feel shame. There is no reason why such evil cannot happen anywhere, and it is their ill luck that many of their children have suffered from it.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): My right hon. Friend will recall that I asked on 18 July for an inquiry, and my constituents will welcome what my right hon. Friend has said today. Is the discredited regression therapy still taught and used in any homes and, if so, will he make it illegal? What plans are there to tighten up the foster service vetting which, in this case, allowed a known homosexual to adopt a child? Will my right hon. Friend consider extending the inquiry of Leicestershire social services department to investigate departments throughout the country?

Mr. Waldegrave: On the latter point, the statutory inquiry must consider this case. Lessons may well be learned from it, but the statutory inquiry has the terms of reference that we have directed the county to adopt, with, I must say, the full support of the county and its present director of social services who, I am reliably informed, has a very high reputation in the service. On the other matters, we should await the report's conclusions. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick), I have personal views about some of those matters, but we should await the report, when we will have a little more to go on about the circumstances and how this could have happened. There are discredited and out-of-date theories around, and I have asked officials in my Department to report to me on those matters. However, we will need a little more evidence before we reach conclusions on some of these things.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): May I join the hon. member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham) in condemning the cowardly attacks made on the character of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner). I am sure that we all want to pass on our good wishes to his wife and family after their terrible ordeal over the past few months.

On 18 May 1989, in Standing Committee B, I moved an amendment to the Children Bill, supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Monklands, West (Mr. Clarke), which would have required all local authorities to appoint a children's rights officer. Bearing in mind the fact that the first complaint in this case was made on the advice of the Leicestershire children's rights officer, will the Secretary of State reconsider the Government's view about the appointment of those officers? Will he, as a matter of urgency, issue a directive or circular to all local authorities requiring them to appoint an officer as a matter of urgency and not simply to wait until the end of the inquiry before making such an appointment?

Mr. Waldegrave: I think that the important thing is the provision in the Children Act 1989 to have a named person to whom children in such homes can complain. It is no earthly use appointing a particular officer if the childen do not know how to complain to him or her and cannot do so. That is the vital and most important thing that has been done. I warn hon. Members not to think that there is an easy institutional panacea for any of those matters. All the authorities must work properly and openly if we are to avoid such abuse in future.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): Will my right hon. Friend consider the chasm that seems to exist between local authority children's homes, where 85 per cent. of the staff are unqualified, and private sector residential homes, which are run as businesses and which charge local authorities as much as £1,000 a week and the directors of which draw as much as £750,000 per annum?

Mr. Waldegrave: I would warn the House, and repeat my earlier point, that Mr. Beck had qualifications. There is no particular reason to think that people who are

[Mr. Waldegrave]

determined to get their hands on vulnerable children will be so stupid that they cannot pass examinations. The issue is a little more complex than that.

Mr. David Bellotti (Eastbourne): I congratulate the Government on appointing Mr. Norman Warner to conduct the national inquiry. His views and leadership will be well respected by hon. Members on both sides of the House. In that inquiry, do the Government intend to consider two very important aspects, the first of which is funding? The Secretary of State will be aware that the social services departments of many local authorities are struggling to meet their financial commitments in implementation of the Children Act 1989. Many local authorities are millions of pounds short of the necessary resources. For example, Hampshire is £2 million or £3 million short, and East Sussex is £2 million short for next year. I hope that the inquiry will consider all those aspects, because the things that we all desire come at a price.

Secondly, is not now the time for the Government seriously to consider an independent inspection service for complaints because in many cases—pindown was one, Leicestershire is another and I understand that there may be further examples at Wrexham and Bangor—the local authorities are not the best bodies to investigate the complaints? Will the terms of reference of the Warner inquiry include those two important aspects?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's support for Mr. Norman Warner, whose appointment will be widely welcomed by those who know him as an independent-minded and good man. However, I warn people against lumping together pindown and what has been happening in Leicestershire. Pindown was a serious professional failure, but was a hundred miles removed from the level of criminal activity of which we heard in the recent trial. Although the House was right to be concerned about pindown, we are talking about something of a different order of magnitude in this case.

The Warner report will not become involved in the issue of independent inspections. However, we have now insisted that there should be arm's-length inspectorates. Our own central social services inspectorate will be not only carrying out its own inspections, but also checking on the quality and systems of the arm's-length inspectorates that have been set up by the local authorities. It must be for the local authorities, which have the statutory responsibilities, to take those responsibilities extremely seriously and I would not want to divorce them from the primary responsibility for undertaking those tasks.

More money could, of course, be spent, but if we think that this is simply a matter of money——

Mr. Bellotti *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Waldegrave: Indeed, I am sure that the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) did not mean to say that. There are things on which we should be spending money, which is why we have increased the standard spending assessments in recent years, but in this case——

Mr. Bellotti *indicated assent.*

Mr. Waldegrave: I know that the hon. Gentleman agrees with me, because I can see him assenting. This is not necessarily a matter of money. Evil men can be fully qualified and have resources at their command, so we may still find that we have evil to contend with.

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): I am sure that my right hon. Friend will agree that we should be grateful to the vast majority of staff who work in children's homes and who deal daily with children who, almost by definition, are difficult and disturbed. Although I accept that people can be both highly qualified and evil, does my right hon. Friend agree that it is important to have adequate numbers of properly trained staff in such homes? Is he satisfied that the establishment of the homes is sufficient and that a sufficiently high proportion of the staff are properly trained? Does he further agree that there might be a case for extending the training of social workers, especially in this area?

Mr. Waldegrave: I am sure that there is common ground with my hon. Friend, because I accept that we need steadily to improve training—indeed, we have been putting more money into that. Although the Utting report, which was published in the summer, made it clear that training was not the central issue in such cases, I am not arguing that professionalism is not important. As I was saying earlier, paper qualifications cannot guarantee to exclude the kind of evil that we have been reading about in the past few weeks.

Miss Joan Lestor (Eccles): I welcome both the inquiries that the right hon. Gentleman has so speedily set up, but may I advise him that, if we do not get it right this time, we shall be at the Dispatch Box again to consider still more cases? Unfortunately, there has recently been a terrible saga of children who have been abused. The crux of the matter today is that those children were not listened to or believed when they complained to the very people in whose care we had put them for protection. Although we must get it right, we will not necessarily be able to prevent such cases from happening again, because human beings are full of frailties. Nevertheless, this case could have been avoided. In connection particularly with the second inquiry, will the right hon. Gentleman bear in mind the fact that we have children in private as well as in local authority homes, all of which need to be looked into quickly?

How is it possible not only that children are not listened to when they complain, but that the man against whom they are complaining can leave one employment for another and be given a reference by the very people who have already received complaints about him? That seems unbelievable.

I hope that the Secretary of State, who I know is as appalled as all of us about the matter, will pay special attention to how that could possibly happen. I hope that the inquiry will underline the fact that, by and large, children do not lie about such matters and that the people who have now come forward as adults have probably been permanently damaged because no one would pay any attention to what they said.

It is important that we examine the Children Act 1989 to make sure that we have got the complaints procedure right. There must be an independent person to whom children can complain. The children's charities are backing our policy of a children's rights commissioner to whom children can go, wherever they are, and be listened to. That is important.

I accept the Secretary of State's point that all the training in the world will not deter an evil man like Beck. The main inquiry will examine the vetting of people who work with children. Will the Secretary of State bear in mind the fact that the police tell me that there is a backlog of six to 10 weeks for vetting certain people, especially teachers? To avoid other children being subjected to abuse during the inquiry, it is important that the backlog is dealt with as a matter of the gravest urgency. These are our most vulnerable children, and they deserve our best support and protection.

Mr. Waldegrave: I welcome the hon. Lady's comments. I will take up the latter point both in my Department and with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. That is probably an issue that we should examine.

I strongly support the thrust of what the hon. Lady said. Children must be heard, and must feel confident that they have an independent person to whom they can complain. We have taken steps to draw to the attention of all children who go into a home the fact that there is a telephone number, a contact point and a named officer separate from the home to whom they can complain if they feel the need. That is a vital step.

The inspection under the Children Act 1989 is now extended to private homes. That is a welcome step. The reference issue, which my hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) also mentioned, is one of the matters to which the statutory inquiry must direct its attention. I shall not make any further comment about it today, but it must be one of several essential issues which the inquiry will have on the table.

Home Secretary (Appeal Court Judgment)

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the Home Secretary, I should say that I understand that a notice of appeal has now been lodged but that I propose to exercise my discretion in respect of the sub judice rule to allow questions covering the Home Secretary's statement.

3.57 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Kenneth Baker) *rose——*

Hon. Members: Resign.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Baker: The House will know that, on Friday, my action in the case of the deportation of a Zairean national was subject to a judgment by the Court of Appeal. I have now had the opportunity to study that judgment and I have taken further legal advice. The court gave me leave to appeal. I have decided that an appeal to the House of Lords should be lodged, and this has been done.

I have placed a copy of the judgment, together with the earlier judgment of Mr. Justice Simon Brown, in the Library of the House of Commons. The issue centres upon the response to an order made by Mr. Justice Garland in the early hours of 2 May and the consideration that I gave to that order at a meeting at 4 pm on the same day. I was, of course, advised throughout not only by Home Office lawyers but also by Treasury Counsel.

As this matter will be central to the proceedings in the House of Lords, the House will recognise that I can say no more about it.

As the Master of the Rolls has acknowledged, this case raises issues of constitutional importance, issues which go far beyond the facts of the case which gives rise to them. The question posed by the judgment of the majority of the Court of Appeal is whether Ministers of the Crown and civil Servants, acting in the course of their duties, can be separated from the Crown itself.

I should like to make it clear to the House that I accept full responsibility for the actions taken in this case by officials of the Home Office and by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, who dealt with it. I was involved in the case at a late stage, and that is the subject of the court's findings.

On any view that may be taken, this case breaks new ground of great constitutional importance. Every Minister acts, and must act, under the rule of law. The only comment I wish to make at this stage is that the court recognised that I had no intention to act in defiance of an order of the court or to hold myself above the law.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook) *rose——*

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Where is the honour?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) to sit down.

Mr. Hattersley: Is the Home Secretary aware that, by purporting to describe his motives in persisting with the deportation order despite the instructions of the court, he is contributing to a debate which he described as sub judice? Will he understand that had he wished, as his

[Mr. Hattersley]

statement claimed, to remain within the law, his proper course would have been to accept the court's ruling and then appeal, not to flout the court's judgment? He claims that he had no intention of acting in defiance of the court order. That is exactly what he did. He also broke an undertaking which had been given to the court in his name.

Will the Home Secretary confirm that, aside from the point of law to which he draws our attention and which will soon become sub judice, the judgment described Home Office procedures as reflecting no credit on the Home Secretary, and called the treatment of that asylum seeker a disgrace. Does he understand that, while he may postpone or prevent debate on such matters in the House, outside he will be called upon to justify his incompetence?

Finally, the Home Secretary will recall that, at the time of the Brixton escape fiasco, he claimed that no blame attached to him because he had not been consulted. In the case of the wrongful deportation of any asylum seeker, he admitted that he was consulted, but he hides behind the excuse that he did no more than accept civil servants' advice. Are there any circumstances in which the Home Secretary would feel it right to take the honourable course and resign from the office which he discharges so inadequately?

Mr. Baker: Once again, the right hon. Gentleman mistakes the constitutional wood for the political trees. He has sought to make a political attack on me, and I shall reply in the same way because the right hon. Gentleman has been highly selective in his summary of the case.

I remind him that the applicant arrived in the United Kingdom on 23 September 1990 on a flight from Lagos, Nigeria, using a false passport, and claimed that he would be persecuted in Zaire—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Home Secretary should bear in mind the fact that this case is sub judice.

Mr. Baker: Could I say that the actual issues that go to the House of Lords do not relate to the earlier events to which the right hon. Gentleman has referred.

I wish to come to the point that the right hon. Gentleman raised specifically about my role in this matter. I remind him that the applicant was interviewed three times, on 24 September, 2 December and 17 December, and was given every opportunity to present his case. The case for asylum was turned down, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, and there were three applications for leave to move for judicial review. Three hearings took place, two of them on the afternoon of 1 May.

Could I now come to the events of which the right hon. Gentleman accused me—namely, my involvement on 2 May? In the various judgments that have been made in the High Court by Mr. Justice Brown, no contempt was found against officials or my hon. Friend for what is called phase 1 and phase 2. I was involved because an order had been made in the early hours of 2 May. I was advised by my legal advisers in the Department, and subsequently by first Treasury counsel, that that order was beyond the power of the court, and I was given leave to apply for it to be varied or discharged. I asked for that to be done at the earliest opportunity, the following morning at 9 o'clock. When the court met, that order was withdrawn.

That is the issue that will go to the House of Lords. As I said, it is an important issue, because it involves a decision which I took. I do not shirk any responsibility in this matter, nor do I shirk any responsibility for the actions taken by my officials or for the way in which the Parliamentary Under-Secretary handled the case.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Will my right hon. Friend accept that no hon. Member on this side of the House and, if they can leave aside party politicking for a moment, no hon. Member on the Opposition Benches, would believe that my right hon. Friend was capable of flouting the law —*[Interruption.]*—as has been suggested, either in his personal capacity, or, still less, as a holder of one of the great offices of State?

Is it not a fact that this is now an area of very important constitutional dispute, that my right hon. Friend accepted the advice of senior Treasury counsel, that two judges have spoken in his favour and two against, and that the House of Lords may find that he was right and they were wrong? Is it not also a fact that in this case it is clear that, if the Court of Appeal believes that he had no intention of flouting a court order and of putting himself above the law, that should be good enough for the rest of us?

Mr. Baker: I thank my hon. and learned Friend for those comments, and I quote from the judgment of the Court of Appeal—*[Interruption.]* I could read the whole of it if I am asked to do so. On the question of the rule of law and observance of the rule of law—this is a very important matter; Ministers are subject to the laws of the land and to enforcing the rule of law—the Master of the Rolls said:

"He"—

that is, the Home Secretary—

"has disavowed any intention to act in defiance of an order of the court or to hold himself above the law."

That is a disavowal which I fully accept.

Mr. Robert Maclennan Caithness and Sutherland): Does the Home Secretary accept that, in his high office, he is the prime protector of the liberties of the subject and upholder of the rule of law, and that his position has been fatally compromised by his unwillingness to carry out the order of the court and to ask questions about it subsequently? Is he aware that, by persisting in the claim that he was not bound by the order of the court, he is compounding his offence?

Mr. Baker: I wish that the hon. Gentleman had made himself familiar with the two judgments in the case—those of Mr. Justice Simon Brown and of the Master of the Rolls. If he had, he would know that what he has said is not right.

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): My right hon. Friend rightly accepts responsibility for what happens in the Home Office. Is it not a fact that everyone in the Home Office associated with this case has been properly advised by qualified lawyers, that the facts that my right hon. Friend had produced to the House today are not in dispute and that the issue is one of constitutional importance only?

Mr. Baker: As I said, I think that this issue is of very considerable constitutional importance, because the effect of the judgment is to separate the activities of a Minister acting under his own name from those carried out while acting as a Minister of the Crown. That has considerable implications for the conduct of affairs. It is certainly at variance with the constitutional practice——

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Oh?

Mr. Baker: The hon. and learned Gentleman has his own view, but I think that, as a lawyer, he will agree that it is at variance with the constitutional practice that has operated hitherto. It certainly cannot be limited just to matters of contempt but must relate to the other coercive jurisdictions of the court. This is a matter of major constitutional importance which will have to be looked at by the House of Lords and no doubt considered by this place in due course.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Is the Home Secretary aware that his decision of 2 May put that Zairean teacher in an extremely dangerous and vulnerable position, and that it is not the first time that his Department has deported people in the face of a court decision that they should remain in this country? Does he agree that it is now essential that he withdraw the Asylum Bill now under consideration and instead institute a proper system of legal appeal that gives automatic rights of appeal to political asylum seekers and does not leave them at the mercy of his erroneous decisions?

Mr. Baker: In the consideration given to that case, the most scrupulous care was taken of the safety of the Zairean. Right at the last minute, before the final Court of Appeal hearing on 1 May, evidence alleging torture was adduced. It was looked at by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State and was available to the Court of Appeal when the appeal was turned down. As for the safety of the Zairean, I was glad to see that, in his judgment, Mr. Justice Brown said:

"However, it is at least now clear that no irreversible damage has resulted from his removal on 1st/2nd May"—

as he has been in touch with his solicitors both from Zaire and Nigeria since then.

I certainly will not withdraw the Asylum Bill. Indeed, such legislation would have helped in a case like that, because the asylum seeker concerned sought asylum at the port of entry. The Bill gives asylum seekers in that position the right—it did not exist when the case was before the court—to appeal to an independent adjudicator.

Sir George Gardiner (Reigate): Does my right hon. Friend accept that he has considerable sympathy on this side of the House and in the country, especially as there is now some doubt about whether the judge had the power to make the order that he made?

Mr. Baker: I would be treading a little widely in the direction of sub judice if I were to answer that, because any decision is for the jurisdiction of the court. All that I can say is that the judges who have considered the matter so far are divided.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Although I accept that the Home Secretary will not resign at this stage, does he accept that, when that case is combined with prisoner escapes and Sunday trading, his credentials as a law and order Minister begin to look a little threadbare?

Mr. Baker: That raises very different questions. The Attorney-General and the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold), made statements on Sunday trading, whereas I have made a statement on the interpretation of last Friday's judgment.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): Is not the hypocrisy and confusion in the Opposition ranks shown by the fact that, when that judgment was announced, the legal affairs spokesman for the Opposition was immediately in the media demanding my right hon. Friend's resignation, while the shadow Home Secretary was demanding that he remain. After a weekend's contemplation, the shadow Home Secretary now says that my right hon. Friend should resign. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the case breaks new ground, that he acted at all times on legal advice and that wise counsel should permit the case to go before the House of Lords rather than rush to judgment now?

Mr. Baker: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) is entitled to change his view, as he does from time to time. The view that he changes is not usually very considered and, from his short statement, he has clearly not studied in depth either of the judgments that we are discussing today. I hope that he now applies himself to them, because he has not applied himself to the rest of his portfolio.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East): Is not the right hon. Gentleman's attitude to this judgment typical of the decline in standards of political integrity over the 11 years of the regime of the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher)? Is not it particularly typical of the tacky conduct of the Home Secretary in every office that he has held?

Mr. Baker: I had not appreciated the fact that my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley had been involved in the matter; as far as I know, she has not. I know perfectly well what responsibilities I have for the Home Office and for the actions of Home Office officials and the Minister who handled the case, and I know my own responsibility in this matter. If the hon. Gentleman would do me the service of going to the Library and reading the judgments, he would find that in the earlier proceedings, neither the Home Office nor my hon. Friend were held in contempt for the actions that were taken on 1 and 2 May.

Mr. Patrick Ground (Feltham and Heston): Is it correct that the majority decision of the Court of Appeal said that the present order was irregular and should not have been made, and accepted that my right hon. Friend acted on legal advice to that effect? In such circumstances, is it not absurd for Opposition Members to talk about resignation?

Mr. Baker: I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend, because that is exactly what the judgment says. I must in no way criticise the judgment or make any comment upon it, because this is material to the House of Lords. I note what my hon. and learned Friend has said on the basis that the order was irregular. None the less, a constitutional issue was raised on separating the function of the Minister acting personally from the Minister acting as a Minister of the Crown. That has considerable constitutional implications.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): Of course the Home Secretary has criticised the judgment of the Court of Appeal, and I deplore the attempts to rubbish the decision taken by three senior judges. As Home Secretary, the right hon. Gentleman has awesome power in immigration cases.

[Mr. Keith Vaz]

As resignation is an issue, if he is not prepared to resign at this stage, will he resign if the House of Lords dismisses his appeal?

Mr. Baker: One should see what the House of Lords makes of this case. It will be an important matter. I know perfectly well my responsibilities for the Home Office and for the decisions that have been taken on my behalf. [HON. MEMBERS: "Blaming others."] I am not blaming anybody. The decision taken on 2 May was mine, and I make it absolutely clear that I will answer for that decision. It was taken with the fullest advice from Home Office lawyers and from first Treasury counsel, which is exactly how Ministers operate on these occasions.

Mr. John Watts (Slough): Has my right hon. Friend had the opportunity to reflect upon the bogus indignation of Opposition Front Bench Members in respect of the allegation that he failed to observe an irregular order of the court, and to contrast it with the deafening silence from that same Front Bench in the face of an assertion by an Opposition Member that, if he had information about the identity of the murderer of a police officer, he would withhold it from the police?

Mr. Baker: I will say only that I thought that that was a disgraceful statement by an hon. Member. I hope that the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook will dissociate himself from that statement and condemn the Member who made it.

Mr. Skinner *rose*——

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. On this matter, I call Mr. Hattersley.

Mr. Skinner: Have you had your eyes tested recently?

Hon. Members: Order!

Mr. Speaker: Fortunately, I do not hear everything. The two hon. Members, who just rose, have made so many comments, not necessarily sedentary comments, that I do not intend to call them

Mr. Hattersley: The Home Secretary will recall that, in answer to my original question, before you, Mr. Speaker, reminded him of the sub judice rule, he began to explain his opinion that M, the man at the centre of this case, was not a genuine asylum seeker. Will the Home Secretary confirm that, on page 16 of the judgment, the Master of the Rolls says:

"Whether M was a genuine asylum seeker is irrelevant"?

The serious error of judgment made by the Home Secretary concerns his dealings with the court, not the evidence that he claimed to put before the House.

Mr. Baker: I do not disguise from the right hon. Gentleman or the House the fact that the matter on which I was found to be in contempt was the decision taken on 2 May. The position that I put to the House and the right hon. Gentleman, that the decision about whether this Zairean national was an asylum seeker was heard twice before a court of law and by the Court of Appeal, which was presided over by Lord Justice Donaldson on the very afternoon on which the decision was taken.

Points of Order

4.18 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Has the Home Secretary given notice of an intention to make a statement about the ruling of Mr. Justice Poppleweil this morning in a case that is germane to the matter under discussion on which he just made a statement? In the High Court, Mr. Justice Popplewell has asked the Home Secretary to reconsider his decision to deport to India a leading Sikh independence campaigner, Mr. Karamjit Singh Chahal. If there has been no such request from the Home Secretary, the right hon. Gentleman is present and may feel it appropriate to make a statement on whether he intends to observe the advice of Mr. Justice Popplewell.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Kenneth Baker): It might assist the hon. Gentleman if I say something on that case. The decision to deport Mr. Chahal for national security reasons and other reasons of a political nature, including the international fight against terrorism, was taken by my predecessor—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Baker: If the House will be patient, it will hear the facts.

Since then, an application for asylum was refused by me. This was challenged by judicial review and the judgment given in the High Court today. The judge asked me to reconsider Mr. Chahal's status as a refugee, and I shall most certainly do so. I give the House an undertaking that if, after consideration, I come to the conclusion that Mr. Chahal should be deported, that will not occur until he has had an opportunity to go back to the courts again.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This is on a different matter. I know that you do not get the opportunity to study the weekend papers in Scotland, but perhaps you will take my word for it that they have been full of reports that Government sources have said that there will be a statement tomorrow on hospital opt-outs, which will approve the opt-out of hospitals in Ayr and Aberdeen.

Have you had notification, Mr. Speaker, of a request to make such a statement, and if so, have you been told what the contents of it will be? Is this not just another example of parliamentary accountability being reduced to the same farce that we have seen in the Government's crooked consultation exercises on this issue and in the whole untenable position of the Government north of the border?

Mr. Speaker: Since my recent happy visit to Dundee, I do see the Scottish newspapers, but I have not had any notification of such a statement.

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Am I right in saying that you are allowing further questions to the Home Secretary on his second statement?

Mr. Speaker: As the Home Secretary made that comment, I will allow questions to be put to him on it.

Mr. Gale: I am most grateful, Mr. Speaker. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that, both in the previous case

and in the case of Mr. Chahal, all the correct legal processes have been, and will be, followed? In the light of the comments made earlier, can my right hon. Friend tell the House of the growth in the numbers of people seeking asylum in the past four years? Is not that growth a sign that the system is being abused, and if so, is it not to the detriment of genuine asylum seekers, and is that not what the Asylum Bill will redress?

Mr. Baker: My hon. Friend goes rather wide, but as the House knows, there has been a substantial increase in the number of asylum seekers. My Department has before it 6,000 applications from Zaireans, all of which have to be processed and looked at individually. I agree that the Asylum Bill is necessary so as to distinguish between the genuine and the bogus asylum seeker. I hope that it will find its way on to the statute book as soon as possible.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I will call one more hon. Member. Will the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) please sit down while I say this? I shall call him, but it does not help the Chair if comments of the kind that I have heard this afternoon from him are made from a sedentary position.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, but it may be that the sound system is not as accurate as it should be.

Does not the Home Secretary's assurance on the second case—that the person will not lose his court rights—arise directly out of his contempt in the first case, which has demonstrated that he has ignored his responsibility to the court and——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is not about the first case.

Mr. Cryer: Yes, it is. I am linking the two and saying that the Secretary of State has given the House a welcome assurance, but that is surely an attempt to retrieve his position in the first case, which is digraceful.

Mr. Baker: I advise the hon. Gentleman to look at the two judgments. He will find that the Zairean applied for judicial review on three occasions, and had three hearings, two on the last day. In the case of Mr. Chahal, this is the first of his judicial review cases, and I have given the House a clear undertaking.

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will be aware that, in the early hours of last Friday morning, Sergeant Alan King of the Metropolitan police, who was based at Chingford police station, was callously and brutally murdered in the execution of his duties——

Mr. Speaker: Order. This comes directly within the sub judice rule. I cannot allow the hon. Member to make comments about the case.

Mr. Summerson: I do not wish to make a comment about the case, Mr. Speaker. My purpose in raising a point of order is to ask whether you have received a request from the Government to allow them to make a statement about the control of knives, which appear to be used more and more for violent purposes.

Mr. Speaker: I have not received a request for a statement to be made on that matter.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It has nothing to do with the previous point of order. It is another matter.

Mr. Speaker: Maybe, but sit down please. Mr. Hughes.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I seek your guidance. I have proof, which was sent to me anonymously, that the Islington, North Labour party black section Christmas fund-raising social is being advertised by using House of Commons internal envelopes. Is this a matter that I should raise with you, Mr. Speaker, or with the House authorities? It is a disgrace that taxpayers' money is being used for that sort of organisation.

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman will bring the envelope to my office, I shall have the matter looked into.

Mr. Corbyn: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I call the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner).

Mr. Skinner: In view of the fact that you, Mr. Speaker, have been checking the records lately about what is unparliamentary or otherwise, I ask you to check the word "crap". It has been drawn to my attention that the Tory party has recently received £25,000 from Gerald Ratner. We do not want £25,000-worth of crap being dished out in here, do we? Or is it that Gerald Ratner will be put in charge of propaganda for the Tory party?

Mr. Corbyn: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No. Let me deal with one point of order at a time and think about this one.

I rule that that is definitely an unparliamentary word in this Chamber.

Mr. Corbyn: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you had any intimation from the Home Secretary whether he plans to make a statement about the planned visit tomorrow to this country of the fascist leader from France, Jean-Marie Le Pen? Will he make a statement to the effect that Le Pen is not welcome here and that his nazi connections are found to be odious by everybody in this country who believes in racial harmony and justice rather than a perpetuation of racist ideas?

Mr. Speaker: I have had no notice of that, but the matter was certainly raised during business questions last Thursday.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

EDUCATION SUPPORT GRANTS

That the Education Support Grants (Amendment) regulations 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. John D. Taylor.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Transport and Works Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

4.27 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Patrick McLoughlin): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This is one of those rare Bills which will change radically the business that Parliament transacts. It is being presented in response to the work of the Joint Select Committee on Private Bill Procedure, which is chaired so ably by my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest (Sir P. McNair-Wilson). I pay tribute to him for the way in which he conducted the Committee and to its report and findings.

There has been a remarkable increase in weighty private legislation authorising public transport schemes and works at ports. This reflects the profound changes in those industries. It has become clear that Parliament is not prepared, as it once was, to see numerous Bills brought before it to authorise such schemes and works. For example, in 1838, Parliament was able to deal with the 62 Bills deposited in that Session with relative ease. Today, Parliament has great difficulty in handling less than half that number of new Bills each Session. A number of causes célèbres have emphasised that.

The Bill will give effect in the most part to the proposals published in "Private Bills and New Procedures", the consultation document published by the Government in June 1990. It proposed that a system of ministerial orders should be created to cover the works most frequently authorised by private Bill—railway and tramway works —and that the Harbours Act 1964 should be amended to encompass a greater range of measures than it does at present. The consultation documents was widely welcomed in the House and elsewhere. Those who currently promote Bills had reservations about the time that would be taken under the new procedures to authorise projects and I shall deal with these issues as I describe the Bill. First, I shall make some general comments.

Mr. Jerry Wiggin (Weston-super-Mare): My hon. Friend the Minister mentioned the wide acceptance that the consultation procedure produced. He may be aware also that the Select Committee which dealt with the matter earlier—which he rightly complimented—did not mention canals or inland waterways. There was no consultation with the inland waterway authorities. If my hon. Friend intends to press ahead with that part of the Bill, will he either immediately consult those bodies or, better still, build into the Bill a consultation procedure before the orders, which could be very damaging to small organisations, are made law?

Mr. McLoughlin: I will cover some of my hon. Friend's points later, but I assure him that we want to hear from all relevant bodies. We are still open to consultation on specific points about which individuals or organisations feel aggrieved.

We tried to achieve a fair balance between the interests of promoters and those who are affected by their proposals —the objectors. A system for authorising projects should not be used as a means of holding up development that is generally desirable. At the same time, promoters should be sensitive to the needs of those on whose lives their proposals will impinge.

The well-established local inquiry system, which has been with us for more than 40 years, enables the promoters' proposals and the views of objectors to be examined thoroughly. It will be one of the available means for deciding new orders. The Government's concern is to provide a framework in which decisions can be made as quickly as possible, while affording those with an interest a proper opportunity to make their views known. That is what part I of the Bill does.

Part II contains safety measures for railways and other forms of guided transport. Some are necessary because the principal legislation is so out of date that private Bills have been used to give the railway inspectorate the powers it needs to supervise railway and tramway works. The most important changes are made by chapter I of part II, which provides a modern code on drink and drugs abuse.

This is a technical Bill and therefore I shall not describe every clause in detail, but I will pick out the main features. The first four clauses describe the kind of works that will be subject to the new system. They empower the Secretary of State to make orders authorising railway, tramway, trolley bus and inland waterway schemes. They refer to guided transport systems that are to be further described in regulations.

Right hon. and hon. Members who are familiar with those matters will know that there are already several novel systems of that type in the country and more are planned. We want to avoid the need for private Bills for those systems, so we drafted a comprehensive definition in an attempt to provide for all foreseeable modes. However, it seems wise to provide for specific regulations to be made later, when it has been possible more closely to assess their principal features.

There is also a power to prescribe types of work that would interfere with rights of navigation. Those, too can be varied. At present, such works mostly require a private Bill.

It would be convenient to mention time scales at this point. We are not introducing this legislation primarily to speed up the process of approving works, but it is important to ensure that we do not slow them down. We looked at the recent history of the progress of private Bills —not just the notorious ones, but all the others. There can be no doubt that they are taking longer to enact.

Private Bills used commonly to be passed in a single Session. The average time for Bills that have now passed was 19 months. At the beginning of this Session, no fewer than 23 transport or other works Bills were still before the House from previous Sessions, including one that started in 1988. I understand that some 23 new Bills were deposited last Wednesday, 16 of which would involve works. That means that the average time taken is bound to increase.

The time taken by local inquiries and by the inspector to write his report has been criticised in the past. In recent years, the Department of the Environment has done a great deal to sharpen up inquiry procedures, with some success. We therefore hold to the view, advanced in the consultation document, that projects which are progressed by order will, on the whole, take no longer than private Bills and that the smaller ones will progress much more quickly.

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson (New Forest): I am grateful for my hon. Friend's earlier remarks, but to make sure that we avoid incorporating delay in the new procedures, will there be no holding out on a decision whether or not to grant an order? Is my hon. Friend prepared to stipulate a timetable in the Bill, so that the Secretary of State could not unreasonably delay his determination on whether an order should be granted? Also, will my hon. Friend make it clear that if inquiries are necessary in certain areas because there are objections, enough inspectors will be available to conduct those inquiries? If not, a large number of public inquiries could be in the pipeline—and in the case of railway works in particular, that could slow down the development of the system.

Mr. McLoughlin: The suggestion that the Secretary of State should have to adhere to a timetable is an interesting one that does not appear on the face of the Bill.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): It jolly well should.

Mr. McLoughlin: I shall look closely at my hon. Friend's suggestion. The Department of Transport does not wish to hold up schemes after an inquiry has been held. Important works are often necessary. My hon. Friend also asked whether sufficient inspectors are available. We shall keep that matter under constant review. If problems arise, we shall have to address them. I can be no more specific than that.

Orders may be applied for at any time, whereas at some moment private Bills can be deposited only once a year. In some respects, that would help the flow. It would do away with the great dash to deposit Bills by a certain date in November. The very fact that there would be no specific date by which orders had to be deposited and that they could start their natural progression at any time of the year would go some way towards relieving the existing bottleneck.

The Joint Committee also identified limitations in the Harbours Act which meant that, even though harbour works could be authorised by order, the private Bill route would still be available. There were some purposes for which orders were not available—for example, the setting up and construction of purely recreational harbours. These matters are dealt with in clause 57 and schedule 3. I should mention here that we have not provided for the complete closure of a harbour by means of a harbour order. Dismantling the regulatory, navigational and conservancy functions of a harbour authority might raise wider issues which we thought should still come before Parliament on the rare occasions when the closure of a harbour is envisaged.

Those clauses cover a good 95 per cent. of all the works Bills that come to Parliament. What remains are those works which are normally authorised by procedures outside Parliament, but, because of the need to amend private enactments, some aspect of the scheme must come here. It would have stretched unduly the scope of the Bill to deal with those circumstances and a general provision would have been indefensibly vague. The Joint Committee recommended that the private Bill system should be so policed that only the powers required to be sought in Parliament should be the subject of a Bill and that, if its primary purpose could be achieved elsewhere, it should be.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): The Minister has outlined the order-making procedure and compared it with the private Bill procedure. The abolition of the private Bill procedure would have certain advantages, but does not the Minister think that the orders which are to take the place of the private Bill procedure should be subject to the affirmative procedure? The scrutiny of negative procedure instruments in this place is appalling. There is no guarantee that time will be made available to debate a prayer. The Bill therefore provides Ministers with a great deal of power that will be subject to no scrutiny. It is going from one extreme to the other.

Mr. McLoughlin: I understand the hon. Gentleman's criticisms, but I hope to be able to answer some of them later. If he is here when I do so, he will hear me explain why we feel that the affirmative procedure is not the best course to adopt in some cases.

It is, of course, for the House authorities to act on these matters and to decide when a private Bill should come before the House. I understand that the Chairman of Ways and Means is content that they have adequate powers to do so.

Clause 5 deals with what may go in the orders described in clause 1 to 4. Our examination of the purposes for which private legislation has been sought has led us to seek this power; schedule 1 lists some of the objects for which orders may be made. The powers in subsection (3) are apparently wide, but can be exercised only in relation to the objects for which an order could be made. They will be used to apply existing legislation—on compensation, for example —to apply or disapply the old Railways Clauses Acts and to modify legislation so that its purpose is retained but it is tailored more closely to the requirements of the relevant order. Paragraph 51 of the Joint Committee report foresaw that a provision of this sort would be necessary.

The procedure for making orders is dealt with in clauses 6 to 14. It follows the normal pattern which we have come to expect where orders are made by Ministers following a public inquiry. Clause 6 enables the Secretary of State to make rules about applications for orders. The rules will require that an environmental statement should be submitted with most applications for orders. We may have a system like the one that applies to private Bills now, where the applicant might seek a dispensation from the Secretary of State that an environmental statement need not be submitted because the works proposed in question order were clearly not likely to have significant environmental effects.

Mr. Ronnie Fearn (Southport): The hon. Gentleman mentioned public inquiries. Does the procedure mean that Ministers can state how long a public inquiry should last —one week, two weeks and so on?

Mr. McLoughlin: The Bill does not provide that power. It would be wrong if it did. A public inquiry may want to look into matters that it initially felt were not relevant. There would therefore be no time limit.

The exact text of the rules will be informed by the discussions that are now going on with the Commission. We shall abide by the directive on environmental impact assessment, as we always have. That European directive is, I fear, vaguely drafted. The orders will in due course be based on model clauses, which can be prescribed in clause 8. Clause 7 allows the Secretary of State to propose orders for defence purposes or where works have been abandoned and are a danger to the public.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Is the Minister happy that the promoters will have to provide environmental statements? Is that better than requiring the promoters to commission an environmental statement from a neutral body? One danger is that an organisation that is asked to produce an environmental statement in support of a scheme may look at matters differently from an organisation that is asked to produce an environmental statement from a neutral point of view.

Mr. McLoughlin: That is a problem, but I think that it would be addressed by a public inquiry. An environmental statement which was made in the initial stages could certainly be questioned by a public inquiry and by anyone who wished to make representations to it.

Mr. Bennett: As Ministers have decided that the House should approve a measure first, surely the House should have that independent information before making its decision. I have coresponded with the Minister about the possibility of having two stages in Parliament, one before and one after an inquiry. I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's arguments about not having a second stage, although no doubt we shall come to that matter in Committee. If Parliament is to give its approval about a scheme before a public inquiry is held, it is important that it has available to it impartial environmental information before making any decision in principle.

Mr. McLoughlin: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. I am not dealing with a scheme's national significance, when Parliament would be asked to give a broad view: I am dealing with strict criteria and local public inquiries, rather than a later stage. The hon. Gentleman's point about independent environmental statements can best be discussed in Committee, when we can listen to the arguments in full, but it is certainly worth thinking about.

I hope that, in dealing with clause 9, I shall cover some of the points made by the hon. Members for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) and for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer). The clause is important, even though I do not expect its provisions to be exercised often. The Joint Committee noted that there were occasionally schemes of such importance that they touched on national policy, and a variety of devices had been used to bring them before Parliament. In the debates on the Joint Committee report, there were those in both Houses who wanted such a mechanism.

In the consultation document, we suggested that that might be done by affirmative resolution after a public inquiry, but a number of objections were put to us. Perhaps the most important is that, if Parliament is going to say no to such an important scheme, it should do so early in its progress rather than waste a lot of time and money and cause invonvenience to those who would be affected by the scheme. The Council on Tribunals was concerned that the inquiry system could be brought into disrepute if, after a long and thorough inquiry, the whole process were overturned by perhaps a single vote in Parliament. The Royal Town Planning Institute recommended that local decisions should always be taken in a strategic framework and, although I would not go quite that far, what we are proposing is consistent with its suggestion.

There is, of course, another point of view. There are those who say that no decision in principle should be made until all the details of a scheme are thoroughly investigated. I certainly agree that no final decision should be made until that has been done, but these schemes are so huge that it is simply not practical to work them and all the other options up in fine detail before making a decision in principle. No decision in principle often means no decision at all. If this country is to prosper, it must be able to make difficult decisions of this kind.

In any such case, the draft order and supporting documents, including the environmental statement, will be available to Parliament at least two months before any debate—that point, which was made by the hon. Member for Bradford, South, could certainly be considered in Committee. Both Houses would then be invited to pass a resolution which endorsed the need for the project and, broadly, the chosen option, but all the questions about detailed alignments, mitigating environmental effects and so on would be left to a public inquiry.

The Secretary of State would be prevented from making an order which was inconsistent with Parliament's resolution, but he would not be compelled to make the order. Those proposals should play to the strengths of Parliament, in making broad judgments, and the local inquiry, which is better suited to sorting out local details.

Clauses 10 and 11 deal with the handling of objections and inquiries. They provide for a full local inquiry and fewer formal hearings or written representations. A relevant local authority or the owner of land proposed to be taken by the order may insist on an inquiry or a hearing; otherwise, the method of assessing objections is left to the Secretary of State. The inquiry rules will be made under the Tribunals and Inquiries Act 1971. Once the objections have been considered, the Secretary of State will make his decision on the order under clause 13 and publicise his decision under clause 14. There will be no further parliamentary involvement unless National Trust or common land is to be taken, in which case special parliamentary procedures could apply.

One of the advantages of a private Bill is that all the consents for a scheme which would otherwise be required under different legislation can be obtained in one go. Clauses 15 to 20 seek to achieve that for orders.

Clause 23 makes provision for the handling in the courts of any proceedings about orders and is modelled on very similar provisions in the Highways Act 1980 and the Harbours Act 1964.

When we published the consultation document, we thought that there might be schemes so local in impact that they should be dealt with by local authorities. On examining the matter further, we have found them to be too few to warrant the legislative apparatus, including possible appeals, which would be required. Clause 24 gives power to the Secretary of State to transfer certain classes of case to inspectors on the model of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 if experience shows that to be the best way of dealing with them.

The system of orders which I have been discussing will not apply in Scotland. The existing Scottish system, governed by the Private Legislation Procedures (Scotland) Act 1936, is judged generally to work well. The greater part of the Scottish private legislation procedure is administered locally, is relatively informal and takes up very little parliamentary time. One effect is that cross-border schemes will continue to require private legislation. That requires an amendment to the 1936 Act which is contained in clause 25. However, such cases will be rare.

I come now to the safety provisions and, first, to the offences about drink and drugs in clauses 27 to 41. These provisions back up operators' strict policy on alcohol and drug abuse. It is a rule on BR that no one should report for duty under the influence of, nor take while on duty, alcohol or any other substance which might impair their safety, efficiency or vigilance. Similar provisions apply to London Underground staff. BR's code of practice views contraventions of that rule very seriously and regards dismissal as the normal result. BR has a policy of pre-employment testing for drugs of recruits to safety posts. It also has voluntary in-service and post-incident testing.

Although the operators' disciplinary codes are useful, experience has shown that statutory provision is necessary. Clauses 27 to 41 provide comprehensive powers. The House will no doubt be relieved to know that, as most of those clauses are based on road traffic legislation, I do not propose to describe them in detail. For nearly 150 years, it has been an offence to work on a railway while drunk.

After a railway accident at Morpeth in 1984, the Government undertook to modernise the drink offence and extend it to drugs in the light of the inspector's subsequent report. Since then, we have had the Cannon street case. After the inquest, the coroner wrote to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State about the absence of police testing powers. I have put a copy of his letter in the Library. We have concluded that the law must be brought up to date. Most people whom we consulted this autumn agreed with us and with what we propose.

Clauses 28 and 29 are the key ones. They create criminal offences of being unfit through drink or drugs or being "over the limit" of alcohol in the body while working on a railway, and of operating a railway where such offences have been committed without doing all that is reasonable to prevent them. We have specified the types of work in respect of which offences might be committed. They are all jobs where it is possible to affect directly the safety of the travelling public.

The operator has an important role to play in preventing incidents of this sort. Operators must show that they have taken all reasonable precautions to prevent drinking and drug taking if they are to avoid prosecution. As the House will see, at clause 56, it will be possible to prosecute individual directors as well as companies for safety offences under this Bill. The provisions also apply to tramways and other forms of guided transport.

We have decided that the alcohol limits in this Bill should be the same as for road traffic offences. It would be hard to justify a difference, say, for a tram driver or a bus driver on the same road. The best rule is for no one to work on the railway when under the influence. That is reflected in the operators' rule book. The limits in the Bill do not imply that drinking up to these limits is a safe practice. The offence of exceeding the prescribed alcohol limit is a second line of defence to operators' strict standards, and the prescribed alcohol limit is that which justifies a criminal—rather than disciplinary—offence. We will keep the prescribed limits under review, and clause 39 enables them to be amended by regulations.

This is not the place to discuss whether the road traffic alcohol limits are right. The British Medical Association has pressed for them to be lower, but I must say to the House that lower limits, whether on roads or railways, should be soundly based. If we are to criminalise an action, we must be sure that an act has been committed which justifies the term "criminal". The first line of defence must be the working rules operated by British Rail and other railway undertakers, which is a matter of employment practice. The limits in the Bill do not imply that drinking and drug-taking of any kind by railwaymen is a safe practice.

The remainder of the safety clauses are in the Bill principally because, without them, some private legislation would still be required. Clauses 42 to 44 give the railway inspectorate powers to carry out supervision of new work and to receive accident reports. We are taking this opportunity to implement the recommendations of the Fennell and Hidden reports on the King's Cross and Clapham Junction accidents which also pointed out that the legislation, which dates from 1871 and 1933, is inadequate to deal with modern conditions.

Consequently, clause 42 gives the Secretary of State a wide power to make regulations about the approval of new works and equipment to be used on railways, tramways, trolley vehicle systems and other systems of guided transport. Clause 43 extends the powers of inspectors to all those forms of transport. Clause 44 allows for the reporting not only of accidents but of those incidents which could easily have led to them, such as signals failing on anything but red.

The provisions at clause 46 and 47 are principally aimed at heritage railways and tramways which have blossomed all over the country. They are normally authorised by light railway orders made under the Light Railways Act 1896. They will now come within these provisions except in Scotland where the Scottish private legislation procedure will apply, but it is thought wise to take powers limiting speeds and loads and to ensure that these railways are properly insured against accidents involving third parties.

There has been some controversy about clause 48 and schedule 2, which amend the Highways Act 1980 so that footpaths and bridleways which cross railways can be stopped up or diverted on safety grounds. That can be done only by a private Bill at present, the most inappropriate means imaginable for something which is essentially local. In these provisions, we have tried to strike a balance between safety and convenience and we have provided for a local inquiry to examine all the issues.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: We are all worried about safety —there have been some horrific accidents—but does the Minister accept that, if the balance is to be right, the Bill should contain a mechanism under which British Rail, when speeding up train times on the line, should be required to provide either an underpass or a bridge?

Mr. McLoughlin: That might be one of the matters best addressed by the local inquiry. A private Bill is not the best method for such matters because of the possible delay involved. We could consider the issue in Committee, but it will need to be considered by the local inquiry because it is essentially a local matter rather than one that needs to come before the House.

The remainder of the clauses deal with safety at level crossings, especially private ones.

If Parliament passes the Bill, we would hope to have the new orders system running as soon as possible. As the House will understand, the Bill provides for a lot of secondary legislation—for orders and the safety provisions —which must be in place before the new system can work properly. It would be wrong of me to promise that we shall

[Mr. McLoughlin]

have it all ready by a particular date. There may be amendments which change the timetable. It is important that we get the secondary legislation right so that the new system has a good start.

In this necessarily brief tour of the Bill's provisions, I hope that I have said enough to describe broadly what we are trying to achieve.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Can the Minister make it clear to outside interests when he expects the House to stop accepting works Bills? That would be helpful and I should have thought that it would be very foolish for anyone outside—presuming that that legislation is passed—to expect to introduce a works Bill in the next Session of Parliament.

Mr. McLoughlin: I do not think that I can go further than I have already. The Standing Orders of the House do not allow issues to be introduced in private Bills if they could be introduced by any other means. When dealing with secondary legislation, we shall bear in mind what the hon. Gentleman said. Clearly, the time scale will depend to some extent on when the Bill finally seeks the approval of both Houses.

I do not think that the Bill's provisions are controversial, but they are necessary. The legislation arises from the recommendations of the Joint Committee and I have already paid tribute to the way in which my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest chaired the Committee and made the recommendations. I am glad that we have had this opportunity to introduce legislation which, I hope, goes some way to meeting the Committee's recommendations. The Committee comprised members of all parties and made its recommendations almost unanimously. I sense that there is cross-party support and I hope that today's debate bodes well.

I commend the Bill to the House and trust that it will have a swift passage through both Houses.

4.57 pm

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): I believe that the Bill commands a degree of cross-party support and I shall attempt to point out the issues on which we agree as well as the one or two which might cause some difficulty at a later stage.

Part I of the Bill will replace the current parliamentary procedures for Bills involving new railway works or harbours with orders granted by the Secretary of State and subject to public inquiry. Those changes should avoid the uncertainties of the private Bill procedure and will on occasion, as you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I are aware, reduce the parliamentary time spent on such matters.

The regulatory provisions in part II will make an important contribution to ensuring the safety of passengers on rail and other transport systems. As for part I, I am grateful to the Under-Secretary of State for outlining the principle of the changes inherent in this section and, basically, we welcome them. The existing private Bill procedures impose time-consuming and unpredictable obstacles in the passage of legislation and hon. Members from both parties have occasionally used the existing procedures to delay important railway schemes as a result, sometimes, of factors not wholly related to the scheme or to the Bill in question.

I will outline some of the reasons behind our welcome for the general thrust of the Bill. We believe that the public inquiry procedure has a number of advantages over the current parliamentary rules, especially for the general public. Such inquiries are better able to consider technical details than some parliamentary Committees are. Such inquiries can be held locally rather than in London and can consider alternatives broader than merely the provisions of a single Bill. The cost of attending a parliamentary Committee hearing would be eliminated for members of the public. I hope—I seek clarification from the Minister—that the new procedures would require environmental impact assessments to be considered where appropriate. I have no wish to linger too long on the Government's griefs over their present difficulties with the European Commission, but I hope that we shall receive some reassurance from the Minister that in future such assessments will be considered.

The Bill does not concern only conventional railway schemes. A number of light rail initiatives have been taken by local authorities and some of them have already become bogged down in our somewhat elaborate procedures. Some have been bogged down as a result of deliberate delay and obfuscation at the Department of Transport. The aims of part I will be achieved in the way in which the Minister would like them to be achieved only if certain issues are properly clarified.

Clear timetables must be set for inquiry hearings and for the announcement of a decision if we are to ensure that the new procedures work more effectively than the existing procedures. I suggest that a time limit be written into the Bill in Committee: a period of six weeks for the appointment of the inspector and a similar period for the inspector to report after the conclusion of an inquiry. The Minister looks a little doubtful. I have no doubt that his advisers will tell him, "That is very difficult, Minister." I can see some of their lips moving now on those lines.

I hope that Conservative Members who take an interest in such matters will agree that with schemes which might be embarrassing for any Government or might lead to difficulties in any area for a prominent member of any Government, the temptation without a laid down time limit would be to prevaricate, especially if an embarrassing political event, such as a general election, was due. I know that the Minister will want to do what he can to reassure people outside that such unworldly considerations will not unduly delay schemes to be considered under the Bill.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): I am pleased to hear what the hon. Gentleman has said. Will he confirm to the House for the record that, if a Labour Government faced an inquiry concerning one of the privatised industries—privatised industries, such as Associated British Ports, hitherto required private legislation—he would believe that a timetable should be instituted by a Labour Secretary of State who might be tempted to use the public inquiry procedure as a way to delay implementation of the reforms? That might hold up the trading position of that privatised industry.

Mr. Snape: I assure the hon. Gentleman that any transport industry affected by the Bill would be treated by an incoming Labour Government in exactly the way that I urge the Minister to treat such an industry. The hon. Gentleman may be artful in introducing such irrelevancies —*[Interruption.]* Once again the Whip, the hon. Member

for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick) cannot contain himself on the Government Front Bench. He obviously has not read the legislation. Of course, it is not his job to do so —his job is to get the Bill on the statute book regardless of what it contains.

The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field), who takes an interest in these matters even if his hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam does not, will be aware that the Bill is specific about the industries that it covers. It covers transport matters, most of which are railway matters. I assure the hon. Member for Isle of Wight that I urge its provisions, with the safeguards that I propose, not merely on a Conservative Government, but on a future Labour Government whom I expect to abide by them as well.

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Snape: I fear that the hon. Gentleman will not be able to resist some political barb about these matters. If he does make such a barb, I may pursue him down that road, with your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the early cross-party consensus may be prejudiced. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will contain himself for a moment. If, after reflection, he wants to intervene, I shall be delighted to give way.

The Secretary of State must adopt standard criteria for deciding which schemes come within the remit of clause 9 —"schemes of national significance". Before the hon. Member for Isle of Wight intervenes, I must tell him that such decisions should not be left simply to the discretion of a Secretary of State, even a Secretary of State as wise and as far-seeing as my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott).

Mr. Moate: I shall be as constructive and as cross-party as the hon. Gentleman always is to me. We all welcome timetables which require Secretaries of State to set up planning inquiries rapidly, although there are practical difficulties. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we are trying to make the normal planning procedures apply to railway works? Is the hon. Gentleman saying that he would urge any future Government to set up a public inquiry within a certain time? Is he saying that the Labour party commits itself to do the same on all planning matters? The arguments that apply to roads, highways and housing are the same as those that apply to railway works. If the hon. Gentleman is not saying that, why not?

Mr. Snape: The short answer is that it is vital that a time limit is laid down for minor schemes. It would be impossible and undesirable to put time limits on the length of an inquiry into a major scheme. However, a future Labour Government would approve such a time limit for appointing inspectors and for reporting after the conclusion of an inquiry. I stress that that does not affect the length of time of the inquiry because, for obvious reasons, some inquiries will be more detailed and technical than others. However, the time limits on either side which I have proposed are eminently reasonable and I look forward to urging them on the ever-receptive ears of my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East.

Will the Minister assure us that if a scheme does not come within the remit of clause 9, the rules for making objections under clause 10 will not unreasonably limit those objections? It would be highly unsatisfactory if inquiries were limited to very local and detailed issues concerning, for example, the precise alignment of a route and if they could not consider wider issues that might affect people locally.

There should be a clear separation between the order-making procedure and the role of the Secretary of State in grant-aiding, for example, light rail schemes. I should be grateful if the Minister would comment on that.

The Bill does not provide for local order-making power for minor schemes, although such a provision was included in the original consultation paper. Would it not be more sensible if in relation, for example, to small changes to previously aproved schemes, such local power was reinstated? Under the Bill, it does not seem logical that minor proposals would also go back to the Secretary of State and would be subject to the full-blown order-making procedures.

For railway proposals that include the closure of an existing line or station, it appears that the new procedure wil replace the closure consideration held by the local transport users consultative committees. Will the Minister give us an assurance that all objections will be heard at the public inquiry, and that both the relevant TUCC and any individual users affected will be given the status of statutory objectors under clause 2?

I will ask the Minister to comment on other provisions in part I in due course, especially if the Government are really committed to helping local authorities plan and implement light rail and other desperately needed public transport initiatives. Will the Government give a commitment during the passage of the Bill to review investment appraisal techniques and rules to ensure that differences in such techniques for road and rail schemes cease to result in discrimination against public transport schemes in the allocation of resources?

Will the Minister give us an undertaking that his Department will work with local authority associations to develop a package approach to transport investment in urban areas under the provisions in the Bill? Does he accept that there is a need to develop a transport investment programme embracing all transport modes, which would replace existing trunk road and the transport supplementary grants programme? Will the Minister undertake to inform the promoters of major public transport schemes whether such schemes have passed grant appraisal, even if the Treasury tells him and his fellow Ministers that funds are not available and, given its habitual parsimony, are unlikely to be available in the foreseeable future?

I want now to consider part II and the introduction of a new regime controlling the use of drink and drugs by those who work on the railways. Working in the railway industry is, from my experience, to become involved in a mixture of long-standing rules and regulations and to be subject to an everyday system of discipline which is almost akin to military life.

The observance of numerous rules and regulations by those working in extremely responsible albeit pretty shabbily paid jobs explains the 150-year-old safety record of railways and lies behind my belief that a modern railway system is still the safest mode of transport. However, over the years there have been a number of railway accidents which have been partly or completely alcohol—related. In a modern high-speed, high-technology railway environment, the provisions of the Railway Regulation Act 1842

[Mr. Snape]

about the conduct of what were known then, and in my experience are occasionally still known now, as railway servants, are obviously outdated.

Those of us who are interested in railway matters, railway management, the men and women who work in the industry and their trade unions all support the provisions of part II which deal with those matters. Having said that, there are a number of points that I want to put to the Minister about the introduction of the regulations which are based on the Road Traffic Act 1988.

My first point relates to the decision in the Bill to adopt the same limits of alcohol concentration for a train driver's offence as are prescribed for drivers of motor vehicles. At the outset, we should acknowledge that the driving of trains by drivers whose ability is in anyway impaired by alcohol could lead to consequences far worse than those caused by drivers of even the heaviest motor vehicles.

The British Medical Association has written to hon. Members about the Bill and has made known its concern at the possibility of a person driving a train with a blood alcohol concentration above 80 mg per 100 ml. It is right to draw our attention to that. The best possible concentration of alcohol while a driver is on duty is zero. It should certainly be less than the proposal in the Bill.

The possible anomaly to which the Under-Secretary of State rightly drew our attention was the subject of discussion behind the scenes. A Treasury solicitor suggested to the draftsmen of the Bill that, unless we varied the proposed limits, it would be anomalous, to say the least, for the driver of a Manchester metro vehicle to be prosecuted if his blood alcohol count was less than that of the driver of a motor vehicle with whom he had collided.

The Minister was right to say that this debate is not the time or place to consider blood alcohol levels and whether the levels should be reduced, but none of us would enjoy being told that the driver of our train had been breathalysed and had revealed a blood alcohol level slightly below the legal limit and was then, under the provisions of the Bill, free to drive the train. I am sure that all hon. Members would accept that the best alcohol limit for train drivers is zero. However, I appreciate the difficulty of enforcing such a provision.

Mr. McLoughlin: This important point requires clarification. Under BR's code of employment, it would be an offence for a driver to have taken alcohol before coming on duty. The Bill is concerned about criminal negligence or liability, and that is a point for wider debate. However, it should not be thought that we condone people driving trains if they have consumed alcohol before taking charge of those trains. The difference between criminal law and BR's operational guidelines is important.

Mr. Snape: I understand that, and I am grateful to the Minister for pointing it out. He is aware that the BMA has expressed considerable reservations about the enforcement of the levels and about the legislation, particularly given the lack of experience of the transport police in administering the law in respect of railway staff. Perhaps the Minister can clarify whether the provisions of the Bill will be operated specifically and only by the transport police.

Mr. McLoughlin *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Snape: We shall be asking for more details in Committee about who else will be involved and how they will discharge their duties. While I stress that we believe that the safest limit is no alcohol at all, we should be reluctant to see the Metropolitan police in London entering railway property willy-nilly to enforce the provisions of the Bill. Could that happen under part II? Will police forces other than the transport police be responsible for administering certain aspects of the Bill?

Mr. McLoughlin: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. Primarily, it will be for the British Transport police to carry out the tests. However, other police forces will also be able to enforce provisions if a transport police constable is not available, or in relation to systems not covered by the British Transport Police, such as tramways, preserved railways and the Tyne and Wear metro. Normally, however, one would expect the transport police to be responsible, but it is possible for other police officers to conduct tests.

Mr. Snape: I am grateful to the Minister for clarifying that, and we shall wish to return to the matter in Committee because there must be safeguards on both sides. In Committee we shall consider the way in which this merited and necessary change in the law can be administered.

Chapter II of part II provides for amendments to legislation dealing with railways and similar systems and the footpaths that cross them. It amends the Highways Act 1980 to allow closure or diversion of footpath crossings on grounds of safety. That part of the Bill has been strongly opposed by the Ramblers Association, but I imagine that it will be welcomed by railway locomotive drivers who, for example, face more than 100 such crossings whenever they drive from King's Cross to Newcastle.

The blocking of footpaths and the removal of rights of way are obviously contentious. As a former railwayman, I read the views of the Ramblers Association with some scepticism. In its brief, the Ramblers Association has stated that it

"doubts whether such new powers are needed."

That shows a failure to appreciate the dangers of crossing a railway line. Those dangers were amply illustrated by the recent terrible accident at Carr lane crossing, Doncaster, when a woman and two small children were killed.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett *rose——*

Mr. Snape: I know that my hon. Friend will have something to say about this matter and I shall give way to him later.

In the case to which I have referred, the footpath to a privately owned nature reserve crossed five railway tracks. The maximum speed of trains on at least two of those tracks was 125 mph. At that speed, pedestrians would have had seven seconds from the time the train came into view until it reached the crossing. For the Ramblers Association to state:

"BR should be required to improve safety or make reasonable alternative provision, for example by building a bridge"

demonstrates a lack of feeling for the views of the bereaved and for the two drivers involved, both of whom will remember that tragedy every day for the rest of their lives.

Mr. Bennett: The Ramblers Association does not dispute that there is a problem. It has made it quite clear that it believes that the existing legislation can deal with

such matters. The association has stated clearly that it is up to British Rail—and, perhaps, the Government—to take such dangers into account if they wish to increase railway speeds, as many of us would like, and to ensure that people can cross the line safely, even if that means the Government providing the money either for an underpass of for a bridge over the line.

Mr. Snape: I am aware that the Ramblers Association has said that, but there are 100 such crossings on the east coast main line, which is the example that I gave. Is my hon. Friend saying that an alternative method of crossing should be provided for each and every one? If so, I must advise him—and Conservative Members before they intervene—that that is not a commitment that I should like to make on behalf of any future Labour Administration because it would be an unreal commitment.

Indeed, the Ramblers Association has gone further than my hon. Friend has suggested in connection with that line, and has stated that, if British Rail increases the speed on a line, it will also be reducing the safety on it. I do not see it like that, and I am sure that the nation as a whole would not either. If we were to take the Ramblers Association's argument to its logical conclusion, every train on the east coast main line would be preceded by a man on foot, carrying a red flag, in case someone wanted to walk in front of the train.

Mr. Bennett: Does my hon. Friend accept that, if British Rail has decided that only 13 of those crossings are unsafe, it therefore appears to believe that 87 are perfectly safe? Is that not an interesting observation? Surely, if only 13 of the 100 crossings are unsafe, it is not unreasonable for British Rail at least to propose alternative crossings at some of those points. I am sure that if British Rail had done that, the ramblers would have been prepared to compromise. They were upset because British Rail wanted to close 13 crossings as unsafe without offering to provide alternatives at any of them.

Mr. Snape: I am not here to defend British Rail's management decisions—I am usually better at condemning them—but during the passage of the legislation to which my hon. Friend referred earlier, British Rail stated that it had picked the least safe of the 100 crossings to which I have referred. From my discussions with British Rail, I know that it made specific proposals for the diversion of at least four of the crossings and that the Ramblers Association objected to them all. There must be some co-operation from both sides.

I do not think that British Rail should be given carte blanche to abolish rights of way on every railway track, but where train speeds and frequencies are as great as on the line to which I have referred, we must recognise that the combination of pedestrians and such high-speed trains is deadly. The evidence that proves just how deadly that combination can be is on my side. I hope that at a later stage we can persuade the Minister that a compromise is possible, feasible and affordable.

Opposition Members support clause 56, which seeks to make the directors and managers of British Rail personally liable for offences attributable to their neglect. In the aftermath of the Clapham disaster, I am sure that the House will agree that such a provision is both necessary and overdue.

We also welcome the provision in part III that removes the use of the private Bill procedure to obtain powers that could be granted by orders for harbours. I should, however, like the Minister to clarify the issue of rights of way in dock areas, where I do not think that many trains will be travelling at the high speed of 125 mph. Such orders are often made in connection with works. However, diversions or blockages of a right of way can be considered under the provisions of part I.

So far, we have achieved a degree of unanimity. Although we welcome the Bill, we shall subject it to detailed scrutiny in Committee. I give an undertaking, however, that we shall not attempt to delay its progress unduly. Both sides of the House could and should support most of its provisions, but where improvements are necessary we shall be pressing them on the Minister, and I hope that we shall receive as fair a hearing from him as I have tried to give his Bill this afternoon.

5·25 pm

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): As this is a tightly drawn Bill, there is no opportunity of making a general speech on transport matters, and I have no intention of trying to abuse the procedures of the House by doing so. I welcome the presence on the Treasury Bench of my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport, in addition to my hon. Friend the Minister for Shipping. I have rarely met two Ministers who take more trouble to carry out the duties of their ministerial office. The presence of my hon. Friend the Minister of State shows that he does not miss any opportunity to listen to his colleagues.

We are dealing with a time-honoured procedure. Those who have some knowledge of railway history will recall what was known in the last century and in the early years of this century as "the railway interest". One can only assume that, if the Bill had been introduced 70 or 80 years ago, the House would have been rather more crowded than today. Although I welcome the presence of my. hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Amos) immediately in front of me, I should have welcomed equally the presence of the attractive blonde lady who was sitting in front of me last week, but she obviously has other things to do this week.

Although it is clear that the House welcomes the Bill, the provisions appear to have been drafted largely with British Rail in mind. Before I comment on the Bill in any detail, I must declare a possible future interest with British Rail in activities that are unrelated to my parliamentary duties. I say that more in hope than expectation, but one never knows.

My main concern about the Bill is its possible effect on some of our preserved railways. I am not sure, but I believe that I am the unpaid, unofficial "parliamentary friend" of the Association of Independent Railways Ltd. That body has not yet contacted me about the Bill although the Association of Railway Preservation Societies and David Morgan thereof certainly have. I should like to put to my hon. Friend the Minister one or two points which, due to his courtesy, I have been able to discuss with him briefly during the past few days. I hope that he will take on board some of the concerns that have been expressed to me.

Almost all the proprietors of the preserved railways are members of either the Association of Independent Railways or the Association of Railway Preservation Societies, and carried more than 6 million passengers on their railways in 1989, which is the latest year for which I have the full figures.

[Mr. Robert Adley]

Like any other railway, a preserved railway normally requires statutory authority for its operations, which nowadays—until the Bill becomes law—is, in practice, enacted under a light railway order. It is likely that, in recent years, a majority of such orders have been sought by the preserved railways under the very procedures that are to be replaced by those laid down in the Bill. Thus, the Bill is of vital interest to those railways, and they are probably much more affected by it than the two earlier speeches have suggested.

If we are to look after the legitimate interests of the preserved railways, one or two changes need to be made to the Bill. The first is in connection with Scotland. Although there are no hon. Members from Scottish constituencies in their places at the moment, my hon. Friend the Minister made a passing reference to Scotland, which is one of the issues that I discussed with him the other evening.

The memorandum at the front of the Bill refers to ministerial orders in England and Wales, but schedule 4 shows that the whole of the Light Railways Acts 1896 and 1912 are to be repealed; so Scotland will find itself in an invidious position. My hon. Friend the Minister touched on the matter, but his interpretation was not one which I or the Scottish preserved railways share. He said that, if the Bill is passed unamended, the preserved railways in Scotland would have to be dealt with under the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936. That is correct, but not satisfactory. Such an arrangement is potentially much more complex than the existing one. It would be a time-consuming and expensive procedure which required provisional orders under the Act.

It seems wrong that a few legitimate private railways in Scotland should be disadvantaged by the Bill. The only beneficiaries would probably be the lawyers. It is my impression that the Department of Transport has not so far been sympathetic to the potential plight of some of the preserved railways in Scotland. I should prefer to see the Bill amended so that the two Light Railways Acts were repealed only in England and Wales.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will give serious consideration to that point. The Conservative party is not exactly in the ascendant in Scotland. I remind my hon. Friend the Minister, who has Scottish ancestry, that to upset large numbers of railway enthusiasts in Scotland would not be of additional help to the Conservative party north of the border. If that is special pleading, so be it.

The second point that worries me is also a minority concern. For some reason best know to those who drafted the Bill, line 23 of clause 60 says that a railway means a system of transport employing parallel rails which

"(b) form a track of a gauge of at least 350 millimetres."

At least one narrow-gauge railway in Britain operates on a gauge of 10·5 in, and there may well be others. If those words are retained in the legislation, those railways would still require a light railway order at some time. I suggest to my hon. Friend the Minister that he could simply delete that line of clause 60. I cannot see that it serves any useful purpose.

Everyone in the House welcomes the proposals in the Bill which relate to safety. I have considerable sympathy with the point made by the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape). He dispassionately and properly referred to the feelings of locomotive drivers. They are people whom we rarely consider in this House, but when there is a suicide or accident on the railway, the driver, and his mate if appropriate, may be mentally scarred for life by the experience. It is surely incumbent on us to do everything possible to ensure that safety is paramount. The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East made the simple proposal that it should be a criminal offence to take any alcohol if one is driving a train. I should certainly like to see the Bill amended to take care of that point.

In his few remarks on clause 56, the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East assumed that it referred to British Rail. He talked about British Rail's management. I should like my hon. Friend the Minister to imagine the effect of the Bill as it is presently drafted on the preserved and private railways. Such railways are manned mainly by volunteers. Clause 56 could put a terrific burden on the unremunerated directors or officers of a preserved railway. If a ganger was working on the track and was found to be over the limit, a director or manager could be found guilty of a criminal offence.

Will my hon. Friend the Minister allow me to bring a delegation from the Association of Railway Preservation Societies to discuss the matter and the other two matters that I have raised? It would make the association feel that it had had a better hearing if it saw the Minister face to face rather than pursuing the matter in correspondence.

Mr. McLoughlin: I give the undertaking that I will meet any delegation that my hon. Friend wishes to bring to me.

Mr. Adley: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend. I had no doubt that he would say that.

Railway safety is a big subject. It is just one illustration of the double standards that we have tolerated for generations that, for one and half centuries, the House has rightly imposed the strictest safety rules and regulations on the railways, while doing virtually nothing about the roads. The result is that we kill 5,000 people and maim a quarter of a million on our roads in the name of personal convenience. I have often thought that I should like to push through the House a simple single-clause Bill which would reduce death and injury at a stroke: it would be to insist that road traffic operated with signals in the same way as trains. That would save an awful lot of lives and make travelling by train a great deal more attractive and competitive.

I understand from a brief discussion that British Rail is reasonably happy with the Bill. I echo the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest (Sir P. McNair-Wilson) about the delays that could be inherent in the new system proposed by the Bill. None of us would want to find that, at the end of our work, we had produced a piece of legislation that increased the delay in obtaining the approval necessary to build new railways. My hon. Friend the Minister must pay attention to the point that has been made—that time limits must be set for, first, appointing an inspector and secondly, the production of the inspector's report once the inquiry is complete, if not necessarily on the length of the inquiry.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) made several interventions—I was going to say on behalf of, but that sounds rude; in which he put the view of—the Ramblers Association. I share the view of the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East that it does not make sense to go back to the days of the red flag, but we

must find a compromise between the passenger's interest, which is the interest of the railways, and the pedestrian's interest. I say to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish and my hon. Friend the Minister that I do not see why British Rail, as ever, should be expected to bear the full cost. That simply illustrates yet again the inequality and double standard which we employ in the treatment of road versus rail.

If the Government of the day decide that a motorway is to be built and a footpath is to be built over the road, the cost of building a bridge or underpass is all part of the cost of building the motorway, and it is borne by the taxpayers. I see no earthly reason why we should shackle British Rail in providing a better service still in terms of safety and speed if it comes into conflict with those who want to walk across the line. We must find an equitable solution that does not put a yet greater financial burden on British Rail.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, if he is as keen as I am to provide a level playing field for road and rail, he should recognise that, when motorways were built around Greater Manchester, of three footpaths that crossed the motorway, one was closed or diverted and bridges or underpasses were put in for the other two. That sort of compromise would be reasonable in dealing with footpaths that cross railways.

Mr. Adley: The hon. Member illustrates my argument —there are double standards. As he said, two of those motorway crossings were paid for by the taxpayer. I shall not pursue the matter further, as I have bored my Back-Bench and Front-Bench colleagues endlessly with it, but it is fair to say that there should be an equal playing field.

Talking of double standards, of road versus rail and the Bill, where footpaths are concerned we are talking about the removal of ancient obligations. British Rail has an ancient obligation to pay for its own police force. In this day and age, why should we expect that? Let us think of the cost that the police incur on all our behalfs by attending accidents. Think of the untold billions of pounds spent by the police on attending court cases dealing with so many facets of the internal combustion engine. However, nothing in the Bill would relieve British Rail of that burden, which costs in excess of £40 million a year.

I do not think I would be out of order in recalling a private conversation with the Secretary of State for Transport about a year ago on this subject. He said that he did not think that it was a high priority to ask the Home Secretary to take £40 million out of his budget and put it on to the Secretary of State for Transport's budget. He did not think that he would get away with it. It is a shame that the Bill does not deal with that matter.

Nor does it deal with the historical obligation for British Rail to maintain hundreds of listed buildings. It offered an opportunity to do so. Perhaps those matters may be attended to during the passage of the Bill.

Finally, clause 56 states:

"Where an offence under this Part committed by a body corporate is committed with the consent or connivance of, or is attributable to any neglect on the part of, a director, manager, secretary or other similar officer of the body, or a person purporting to act in such a capacity, he as well as the body corporate shall be guilty of the offence."

We are prepared to clobber the ganger working on the Keighley and Worth Valley railway or his notional supervisor, or send him to prison. Meanwhile, large supermarkets are defying the law by opening on Sundays and abusing society in almost everything they do, but we are doing nothing about it. I should like clause 56 to be utilised to deal with the activities of many other organisations.

I welcome the Bill, I wish it a speedy passage and I hope that some of my suggestions will result in one or two minor changes in it.

5.41 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I welcome the Bill, even though on the surface it hands considerable powers from Parliament to Ministers. I have spent too many hours on these Benches arguing on behalf of Bills, often at considerable length. I have meandered round all sorts of fairly obscure topics, just about pleasing the Chair by remaining in order, knowing that whatever I said it would not make the slightest difference to the outcome of the private Bill. Provided that I and my colleagues could keep going until 10 o'clock, the fate of the Bill would be decided by whether 98 hon. Members returned from dinner or 102. It was a pretty farcical procedure.

Mr. Snape: My hon. Friend is far too modest. We all know that what he terms his "meandering" round private Bills has been responsible for a good deal of heartache and not a little management time in British Rail spent trying to meet some of his objections. Those objections might not always have been covered by the Bill that we were discussing, but we understood his argument.

Mr. Bennett: I accept that, and I admit that there have been occasions when I and other hon. Members have blackmailed various organisations, including British Rail, with the amount of time that we would take in the House unless they did something to improve the position of our constituents.

It is high time that the private Bill procedure was reformed. However, we must be clear in our minds that we are dealing with substantial issues. We are considering the rights of individuals as against the rights of the state and of corporate bodies. We must also recognise that any changes that we make will almost certainly not satisfy people outside. I sometimes think that it would be almost impossible to satisfy them. If someone wants to put a nuclear power station, a new road or railway, a science park, a supermarket or even a public convenience at the bottom of one's garden, most people would not want it. However one designs the procedure—whether a parliamentary procedure or a public inquiry—the majority of poeple will think that it is unfair that it is being forced or inflicted on them.

The Bill will be a better way at least to convince people that they have an opportunity to influence events than the present private Bill procedure. We all know what is supposed to happen. The House debates a Bill on Second Reading and it is passed by chance rather than as a benefit of the arguments. Then the Bill goes to Committee. Four hon. Members are appointed—two from each side of the House—as well as the key appointment, the Chair, who has a casting vote. We all know that all sorts of manipulations take place during the appointment of the members of a Committee.

It always amazes me how Bills which the Government support end up with a Chairman from the Government side of the House, thus giving the Government a majority.

[Mr. Bennett]

People argue and give evidence to the Committee, for perhaps 10 or 12 weeks or longer. In theory, everyone listens carefully to the evidence, but some of us know that the reality has much more to do with the political persuasion of hon. Members appointed to the Committee and to discussions that take place when they are debating.

It can be extremely frustrating for people who have to travel to London and face the expense of preparing a case —sometimes employing parliamentary counsel to put their case—knowing that decisions are not necessarily taken on the merits of the arguments but on political considerations.

Mr. Barry Field: I apologise for taking up the time of the House. I chaired the Committee that considered the London Underground (Safety Measures) Bill, which will improve the safety of a number of London underground stations when it takes effect, including Oxford circus, which several million commuters pass through every day. The Labour party, to which the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) belongs, objected to that Bill and voted against it. Is he suggesting that, by wanting to improve safety in one of our biggest undergrpund stations, I am a Government stooge?

Mr. Bennett: I am not suggesting that. However, various political considerations come into play with some Bills rather than their merits. Any hon. Member who does not understand that is relatively naive.

It is important that we discuss the [illegible] procedure. There may be problems and differences between the two sides of the House over the way in which we plan Britain, especially as we move into the next century. The Conservatives have a tendency to believe that planning decisions can be taken on the profit motive. Opposition Members believe that there should be more objective planning criteria.

Some of the measures that will come before us will have international or national significance and others will have regional or local significance. Under the Bill there will be problems deciding whether the matter has local or national significance. Perhaps I may pursue that in Committee.

Another question is whether Parliament should give its approval first before a public inquiry is held or whether Parliament should have a say after the inquiry. There is also the question of the evidence put to Parliament, and I want to take up those issues in Committee.

I press the Minister to consider carefully the order-making procedures. For most of my time in the House, I have been dissatisfied with them in the same way as I was dissatisfied with private Bills. I am dissatisfied with the way in which the House deals with secondary legislation. Whether it is affirmative orders for national schemes or negative orders for local schemes, the procedure is very unsatisfactory.

When hon. Members table an amendment to a Bill, it can concentrate the Minister's mind on a clause or section and occasionally hon. Members can be persuaded to force amendments on the Government. It is almost impossible to form a coalition of interests to get something changed in a statutory instrument or an order, so if there is broad agreement that an instrument is a good idea, one must either take it all or have nothing to do with it.

Mr. Cryer: Will my hon. Friend further agree, on that important issue, that it cannot be argued that there are no precedents of statutory instruments being subject to amendment? For example, orders relating to the census are subject to just that procedure.

Mr. Bennett: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I regularly argue with the Table Office that we can table amendments to Bills which make provision for orders that are amendable because of the census legislation. I cannot recall it precisely, but I believe that there is one other parliamentary precedent to that effect.

In Committee, the Minister invariably points out that Parliament has a simple way of dealing with orders and that we should stick to it. He points out that they are negative or affirmative orders and that the Standing Orders of the House lay down that such matters may be debated for an hour and a half after 10 o'clock.

Although we are now debating a piece of works legislation, it represents a major reform of parliamentary procedure, so I put down a marker at this stage to the effect that the Minister should be more forthcoming in considering whether we should have new procedures for dealing with orders. Such new procedures could allow for longer debates, perhaps in Committee, with the ability to amend regulations and with provision for an effective vote to take place in Committee.

It is nonsense for us to debate such matters in Committee for an hour and a half and then, at the end of the debate, we vote not on the merits of the matter but on whether it has been considered. A day or two later—whenever it suits the Government—the theoretical actual vote takes place on the Floor of the House and, if a Division is called, most hon. Members do not know what they are voting about.

On this occasion, because of the unique nature of the measure, we should be prepared to consider in Committee changing the way in which we deal with statutory instruments, enabling us to give them more adequate scrutiny. That is especially so at this time, when we are effectively handing from Parliament to Ministers the right to decide, on private Bills, to lay orders. That is a considerable sacrifice of parliamentary power. Although I accept that it is right for us to do that, a counterbalance should be a more effective way of scrutinising affirmative and negative orders.

Various organisations have lobbied me about the Bill. I join the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin) in pointing out that the Inland Waterways Association believes that it was not sufficiently consulted on the Bill. That association is particularly concerned about a measure that is proceeding through the other place and the question whether it will be dropped and be replaced by the provisions relating to canals in this legislation. I hope that, when we come to that part of the Bill in Committee, the Minister will assure us that the association has been consulted and its fears allayed.

The fears of ramblers' associations about closures have been rehearsed. I appreciate everything that has been said about the need to maintain safety standards. We must be equally concerned about the effect of what we do on engine drivers. Historically, British Rail and its predecessors have argued to the House for certain railway lines to be built in a particular way. They argued at that time that pedestrian crossings of railways were perfectly safe.

For almost every railway line built by the different railway companies—permission for which was passed by the House in different eras—we laid down different procedures. It was common for some to build footpaths across the lines and in other cases bridges were built. Indeed, on some lines, bridges were built on almost all occasions. It should be possible to obtain a compromise which is effective in the legislation and which says, in effect, "There will be some crossings which are so rarely used that people are not inconvenienced by their closure." In other cases, a simple diversion, often involving the use of a private crossing that already belongs to British Rail, could be brought into use to enable people to cross in safety. In some instances it will be necessary to provide a bridge or underpass.

I am often upset when people approach British Rail on the safety issue and ask how much it would cost to do the job properly. The price quoted for a bridge or underpass is always horrendous. The old railway companies had almost Meccano kits for bridges which were built as standard in various places. They varied only according to whether the approach was from the right or left. If it was possible to do that in the past, it should be possible now for British Rail to design relatively cheap crossing facilities.

I appreciate that there are problems. In one instance, when a local authority was asked to approve a bridge, which could have been built relatively cheaply, the authority refused because, it said, the bridge must be suitable for use by the disabled. I appreciate the arguments that go on nowadays, but let us not forget that the old crossings were not suitable for the disabled, which is why, in the case to which I am referring, it seemed unnecessary for the authority to insist on a ramp being built. I hope that in Committee we can make some progress on that front.

I have received a set of objections from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. It is concerned about the implications of the legislation on estuaries. I am keen for the Bill to cover estuaries, in view of my experience with private Bills over the years. In the 1970s many local authority Bills were introduced dealing with issues such as procession clauses. More recently, we have had many railway Bills. I predict that, if we do not reform matters, we shall have introduced a large number of Bills dealing with estuaries.

There are power schemes and other proposed developments involving estuaries. That particularly applies to the Severn and the Mersey. There are schemes on hand for virtually every estuary in the country and it is important for the legislation to cover them. At the same time, we must have a proper national debate to see how many estuaries can be changed from being tidal areas, where there is extremely good feeding for birds, to areas which, in effect, become inland lakes.

That has significance nationally and internationally, especially if we reduce the facilities for large numbers of birds. We must ensure that there are proper safeguards in legislation. Although a scheme may appear local in nature and the amount of an estuary that it encloses or otherwise alters, we must take the national significance into account for breeding birds. I am worried by the enthusiasm of some of my constituents for the Bengal tiger and rare species in various parts of the world, while tending to disregard animals in our local habitats. I hope that we can deal with that, too, in Committee.

We must look carefully at environmental statements which accompany orders flowing from the legislation. I appeal to the Minister to give at least some consideration to how far the environmental statement should come from a neutral source rather than from the promoters. Although promoters may employ reputable consultants, it is difficult for a consultant to a project to put all the disadvantages from the environmental point of view as thoroughly and firmly as would be done by a totally neutral person. I urge the Minister to bear that in mind.

Many attempts have been made in the House to reform the private Bill procedure and many of them have collapsed because it has always been easier for a private measure to be introduced. We must do all we can in the coming few years to block any parliamentary private Bill which could as easily be dealt with through this legislation. It is a question for the Court of Referees, and it will be a matter for the House.

I would have hoped that the Minister might have spelt out more clearly the fact that he would not expect any more private works Bills to be introduced. We have had 23 this year, of which 13 or 14 have been works Bills. They may go through, but I hope that he will make it clear that, in the next Session of Parliament, this legislation will apply, and anybody considering introducing a works Bill will do so through this legislation and not as a private measure.

I hope that we shall have a useful Committee stage in which many of the points that I have made can be answered.

5.59 pm

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): No mention of private Bills would be complete without paying tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest (Sir P. McNair-Wilson) for the way in which he chaired the Committee which sought to untangle this web. His knowledge and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Adley) is considerable. I also pay tribute to Mr. Willoughby and the staff of the Private Bill Office, whose courtesy is unfailing. They have assisted many hon. Members, including myself, in fathoming the difficult procedure.

No mention of private Bill procedure would be complete without mentioning the Dartford warbler. It is always endangered and turns up whenever we discuss a private Bill. Whether it is the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill or the Hampshire (Lyndhurst Bypass) Bill, the Dartford warbler is always certain to be nesting in the middle of the projected works. If we ever want to save endangered species, the private Bill procedure may be one way to ensure that they are more plentiful.

The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) assured me that a Labour Secretary of State would be bound by the timetable that he proposes for public Bill procedures. However, the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill took 41 hours to be discussed in the Chamber and 86 hours on 24 days, spread over five months, to be discussed in Committee. After several weeks, the Committee's proceedings were suspended because a Labour Member departed from the Committee. As Chairman of Ways and Means, you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, attempted to resolve the situation and eventually you made history in the House by deciding that the Committee would be quorate with just two members.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. As I recall, the Chairman of Ways and Means did not attempt to resolve this situation—he did so.

Mr. Field: Indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you did so most expeditiously. I would not be so ungallant as to doubt the word of the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East today, but given the pressure that Labour Members placed on that Bill, a serious question mark would hang over any Labour Secretary of State who did not give way to pressure regarding the timetabling of a public inquiry procedure and who did not take some time to allow the result to be published or deliberated on.

Mr. Snape: I was beginning to fear that the preamble to the hon. Gentleman's speech was part of the delaying tactic that he denounces. I made a couple of moderately long speeches on the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill, but we are not discussing existing procedure. The undertaking that I gave refers to the Bill before us. It refers not to truncating the inquiry but to the timescale before appointing an inspector and publishing the report. I can only give an undertaking and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept it in the spirit in which it is given. I hope that he will also accept that Conservative Members have used the existing procedure to delay legislation which they have disliked over the years, which is why we want to change it.

Mr. Field: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that it would not be the first inspector's decision that took some time to see the light of day once it had been referred to a Department. That was the point that I was trying to make.

I have been in the House for only a short time, but since I have been here I have been involved in a number of private Bills. The Isle of Wight Bill was my alma mater. Because of the activities of the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) in holding it up, I eventually became the wrecker of every other private Bill. It always amuses me when Liberal Democrats accuse me of having a ministerial career. If only they had seen the correspondence that flowed to party chairmen from "Horrified of the Home Counties" when some of those Bills hit the deck; one example was the correspondence from the lighthouse keepers association. Some of my colleagues, even to this day, hardly speak to me because of how their Bills were delayed. With your wonderful knowledge of the Bible, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you produced the Lazarus motion which revived them all from the dead and they eventually passed on their way through the House.

I also served on the Committee considering the London Local Authority Bill which was, remarkably, opposed by the ice-cream alliance when the SDP and the Liberal Democrats were in a state of meltdown. That Bill abused the rights of individuals to object to private Bills. London local authorities had delayed hearing petitioners' cases and put them to considerable inconvenience.

In July 1990, I chaired the Committee on the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill, which subsequently passed into the trust ports legislation, about which I hope we shall hear more before the end of the year. Recently, I chaired the Committee on the London Underground (Safety Measures) Bill, to which there were some 56 petitioners. We resolved the situation and the Bill was out of Committee within two weeks, so the fact that there are many petitioners or objectors to private legislation does not always delay it.

For more than three centuries, large-scale projects of public significance, such as the building of railways, the construction of bridges, and the regulation and construction of ports, have required the authority of an Act of Parliament. The sanctioning of transport infrastructure, central to the development of national commerce and industry, requires the careful balancing of national and local needs, environmental issues and the interests of the private individuals affected. It has long been recognised that Parliament is the ultimate planning authority best suited to deal with such issues.

There are important constitutional aspects to the Bill. We are transferring substantial power to the Executive and taking away from Back Benchers a power to make decisions, as Committee members, that affect people's lives. The ability and right of hon. Members to legislate on behalf of individual citizens is important. I am worried that the desire for an easy life could lie behind the Bill. Those of us who remember the late-night sittings associated with the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Bill will remember how difficult the parliamentary timetable was.

Anyone who suggests that public inquiries are a speedy way to resolve matters worries me. Planning inspectors who reach speedy decisions ar rarer than rocking horse manure. As a device for speeding up matters, the Bill seriously concerns me. If the Crossrail Bill currently before the House were the subject of a public inquiry, I wonder how long it would take. The channel tunnel and Winchester bypass legislation are examples of how public inquiries go on and on. I wonder why we have put our faith in public inquiries in this Bill, especially given that the Government have been so pleased with the result of some of the private Bill procedure.

The other day, Commissioner Ripa di Meana said that one reason why he took action in this country was the amount of correspondence that he receives from the United Kingdom compared with any other EC state. The attention that this country pays to those matters is one reason why it takes so long to resolve them in public inquiries.

I am pleased that marinas are included in the Bill. In Ventnor in my constituency, we had a proposal for a marina. Half the population thought that I had a magic parliamentary wand and the other half thought that I was fully in agreement with it, because, knowing private parliamentary procedure as I did, I realised that it would take at least 18 months to two years to come to fruition. They interpreted my rather laid-back approach as an indication that I agreed with the marina, and did not realise that I would not be allowed to take part in the debate.

The Bill allows for guided transport schemes. Will that include buses of the type that are used on the continent? They travel on guided tracks and switch from diesel power to electrical power which allows the bus to be driverless. We shall see more of that sort of transport in the United Kingdom and certainly it is much better for the environment of cities. I hope that the Bill takes cognisance of such future developments.

Clause 7 deals with redundant transport facilities and mentions military installations. Will the clause affect the redundant Victorian piers on our shores? If it does, it will be welcomed in many seaside towns with rather decrepit

structures. A long time ago, I asked the Civil Aviation Authority whether it tested its air traffic controllers for drugs or alcohol and I was told that it did not. As I say, I asked a long time ago and I am open to correction.

Mr. Adley: My hon. Friend's mention of clause 7 prompts me to pick up a point that did not occur to me before. My hon. Friend will be familiar with the piers of the former Fort Augustus railway in the highlands. Because of the Bill's effect on Scotland, at what stage could somebody who did not like the piers in the middle of the river use clause 7 in a way which I am sure nobody could have intended?

Mr. Field: Whether intended or not, I hope that they do and that the Minister will offer some comfort on that. Many seaside resorts are fed up with the state of their piers and the Isle of Wight is no exception. We would like a procedure to resolve that so as to make our sea fronts more presentable. I hope that the clause encompasses such structures.

I was speaking about the fact that the CAA does not test its air traffic controllers for drugs or alcohol. That seems remarkable—if it is still the case. We now rightly propose to test train drivers for drugs and alcohol, but it seems that air traffic controllers are not tested. If that is correct, perhaps we could extend the Bill's provisions to include such testing. The Minister will appreciate that it is an important matter, although I do not say for a moment that air traffic controllers suffer from problems of alcohol or drugs. Many companies now adopt such test procedures. Esso tests its bowser drivers and merchant naval officers. This is a suitable area for extension.

Mr. McLoughlin: I can help my hon. Friend on this. Under the Air Navigation Order 1989, it is an offence for air crew to be under the influence of drink or drugs. From 1 October 1991 air traffic controllers have been subject to the same requirements as air crew. I hope that answers my hon. Friend's point. We shall consider the matter to see if further legislation is needed.

Mr. Field: My hon. Friend has given me a full answer, and I am pleased to note it.

Will the harbour orders cope with the fact that for some time the Royal Navy has been trying to give up its Solent navigational and harbour duties outside the Queen's harbour jurisdiction? I do not know whether the Royal Navy is on the record about that. It is extraordinary that the Navy is responsible not only for the eastern part of the Solent but for the navigational aids in that area. I have often asked the Secretary of State for Defence about what defence purpose that fulfils. Jurisdiction over Wootton creek on the Isle of Wight by the Queen's harbourmaster seems arcane in this day and age. In that respect, will the harbour orders serve a useful purpose?

For some time I have felt that there is an air of Government morality in the private Bill procedure. The Government have worked wonders in rolling back the areas of state ownership and have returned hundreds of valuable assets to the efficient control of private enterprise for the benefit of customers and shareholders. They have not fulfilled all their duties towards those companies, which are required always to jump the hoop of the private Bill procedure. I welcome the fact that recently the Government have been taking over some private Bills, such as the trust ports legislation, and they took over the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill.

I hope that the Bill will be a natural precursor and will pave the way for the easier privatisation of British Rail in which, as the Minister knows, I take a deep interest. I even found a purchaser for British Rail's interests in the Isle of Wight. To my consternation, I was held up over that, but it has always been the case that where I lead others will follow tomorrow. I hope that I may soon take the Government with me and that the legislation will enable privatisation of British Rail to proceed much more quickly.

I remain concerned about the speed of public inquiries and I hope that the Minister will be able to respond to that. If he cannot do so now, perhaps he will deal with it in Committee. Otherwise, I welcome the Bill's principles.

6.16 pm

Mr. Ronnie Fearn (Southport): Most hon. Members seem to agree that the principles for approving transport projects are antiquated and in great need of reform. I welcome the principle of clause 1, which lays down new procedures for the consideration of transport schemes. Whether it will continue to have my support depends on Government or Opposition amendments in Committee.

I am concerned about some parts of the Bill. When any new transport infrastructure is proposed, conflicts of interest between those affected by the scheme and the need for the infrastructure are difficult to reconcile. Although I accept that the private Bill procedure has not proved to be competent in resolving such conflicts, I am not yet convinced that the public inquiry procedure and our system of compensation are any better.

The Bill gives little detail about the new procedures and leaves much of the process to be decided by rules issued by the Secretary of State. The amount of discretionary power that the Bill gives the Secretary of State is quite wide, and in some areas that is a matter for concern. For instance, clause 9(6) deals with schemes

"which in the opinion of the Secretary of State are of national significance".

The Bill does not set out the criteria to be used by the Secretary of State when exercising his powers to decide what is of national significance. The national interest and what is of national significance are far too important to be left to the opinion of the Secretary of State. Perhaps the Minister will deal with that in his winding-up speech. I hope to have an opportunity to clarify that point in Committee and to define on the face of the Bill the specifications which constitute a scheme of national significance.

I share the concern of the Council for the Protection of Rural England that clause 9 appears to provide for parliamentary authorisation for the principle of a scheme before a public inquiry is held. This is in contradition both with the recommendations of the Joint Committee and with the Department of Transport draft paper.

We cannot tell from the Bill whether the order to be presented to Parliament will be accompanied by an environmental statement. Hon. Members will not be able to make a proper judgment about a transport scheme unless they are aware of the impact that its proposals will have on the environment. I was pleased to hear the Minister's reassurances at the beginning of the debate on that matter.

[Mr. Ronnie Fearn]

However, I was surprised that a Bill such as this, which has the potential to create an explosion in the number of transport projects and wreak havoc with the environment, contains so little about the protection of the environment. The Government's continuing argument with the European Commission about the environmental impact assessments of the east London crossing and the Winchester bypass—the latter has already been mentioned—are examples of their lack of commitment in this respect. The Government should take the opportunity of the passage of a Bill such as this to make a clear statement about their objectives on environmental issues.

If the procedures set out in clause 9 are not reversed, the clause will limit the terms of reference of any inquiry and may prevent consideration of alternative schemes. It may also hamper legitimate and important objections, particularly if they raise issues of principle. Under the present procedure, a Select Committee can reject a scheme after investigation, whereas in the proposed procedures, the outcome of the public inquiry will be limited to modifications of the scheme rather than outright objection. I hope that the Minister will comment on that.

Before giving full approval to part I, I shall be looking to ensure that the right for members of the public and their representatives to be heard is not diminished by the proposals. Those who can demonstrate an interest, including amenity bodies, must be ensured of a full hearing. The Bill must set out clearly the conditions within which a public inquiry will be held, the consultation process and the rights of third parties. Only then can we be sure that the powers in the Bill will not be used to ride roughshod over the wishes of local people and the public at large.

I do not see any new procedures working without a clear statement from the Government setting out a coherent transport strategy. The removal of the decision-making process from Parliament to the hands of local government and public inquiries may be welcome, but it must be accompanied by a transport strategy and that we do not see here. The decision-making bodies must have a framework within which they can work, confident that their decisions will be upheld.

Our transport systems have suffered from lack of investment, lack of direction and short-term piecemeal decisions without a clear and coherent policy. The Bill could plunge us deeper into the mire by an explosion in the number of projects for light supertram systems, built for their entrepreneurial opportunities rather than in the interests of the community.

The Bill is an enabling Bill. Its powers are permissive rather than mandatory. The Secretary of State is the one who blows the whistle. The interpretation and application of the Bill may reflect the ideologies of a Secretary of State rather than the transport and environmental needs of the country. The Bill must be seen in the light of the Government's desire to give free rein to the market economy and to privatise the railways and any other form of public transport. Some of the clauses in part I should be amended to clarify the proposed procedures and make them more specific. I hope that the Secretary of State will make draft rules available to the Committee before we start our proceedings.

Part II, which provides for safety on rail and other guided transport systems, has my full support. Some clauses may require amending, or will at least be the subject of much discussion. These are the clauses pertaining to the permitted levels of alcohol and to the procedures of evidence. Some of the discretionary powers of the Secretary of State should perhaps be amended to place a duty on him, but that will be a matter for the Committee.

Another subject that will require attention is the stopping up and diverting of public footpaths and bridleways in the interest of safety. As the Bill stands, there will be no requirement on British Rail to provide alternative means of access. That is a cause of concern to the Ramblers Association, the Open Spaces Society and other groups. Judging from what I have heard, other hon. Members will, like me, be seeking assurances that the provisions will not seriously reduce access to the extent that it affects the quality of life, particularly for the elderly, infirm or disabled. Near Southport is what people call the "devil's crossing". To my knowledge, at least three people have been killed there and I have heard that it may be as many as six, so we need a safety provision that will satisfy the Ramblers Association and others who have complained about it.

On the whole, I expect part II to be given a smooth passage through all its stages. However, I stress that I do not see the safety measures taking the place of more effective means of making our transport system safe. The criminalisation of public transport drivers may be necessary, but it should not deter us from insisting on adequate investment to introduce other measures which may provide a greater guarantee of safety. For example, the introduction of automatic train protection to stop drivers going through a red light is probably a more effective measure. The Clapham and King's Cross disasters arose from under-investment and overworked staff, not irresponsible drivers.

I and my party are in full agreement with the principle behind the Bill. We have reservations about part I, but these could be partly dispelled if the Government would announce a clear and coherent transport strategy.

I hope that the Minister will answer one question for me. Once the proposed procedures are in place, what role will the Secretary of State for the Environment play in transport matters? He is the Minister responsible for local government, where many of the decisions will be taken. The recent transfer of the docklands light railway from London Transport to the London docklands development corporation has brought that system within his sphere. His plans for the development of the east Thames corridor will, I am sure, encompass various transport schemes, including the channel tunnel. Given all this, will the Minister clarify who is to have ultimate responsibility for transport matters? Will he clearly spell out the lines of responsibility, and where they lie?

6.26 pm

Mr. Alan Amos (Hexham): I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Minister for Shipping on bringing forward this much-needed and sensible measure. The Bill will improve the way in which transport schemes are dealt with, while reducing the burden on Parliament and thereby enabling it to concentrate its time on those matters which are more properly its responsibility.

Part I provides a much better system, by which railways, tramways, other guided transport schemes and canal works can be approved by ministerial order instead of, as at present, by a private Bill. The order will give all the necessary and specific authority, including compulsory purchase and planning permission. It implements the recommendations of the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure and will reduce the number of private Bills by an estimated half. Replacing private Bills in this way will play an important part in the Government's wider plans to release more time and reform the grossly inefficient and antediluvian way in which Parliament conducts its business in the last decade of the 20th century.

The growth in the number of private Bills relating to rail and light rail projects, together with a much greater interest in, and highly organised support for and opposition to, such schemes has meant that the burden on Parliament has become intolerable, while the time taken to process the applications has dramatically increased. This is not in the interest of Parliament, the promoters of private Bills or those affected by the planned developments. In the last Session, 23 of the 28 private Bills dealt with transport or transport-related matters and took on average 19 months to receive Royal Assent.

Any proposal to speed up this process is to be warmly welcomed, particularly given the escalating construction costs of those much-needed projects, which are frequently delayed in the House not by reasoned and constructive debate but by filibustering designed to block the whole project and kill the Bill—a ploy that can succeed unless 100 Members happen to be available to support a clause. The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) referred to this earlier on.

It is wrong that procedures should be allowed to get in the way of improving our transport infrastructure. The job of Parliament is to remove as many unnecessary obstacles as possible to the ability of private and public enterprise to undertake capital projects. As the Joint Committee rightly said:

"Private Bills are not in the opinion of the Committee an appropriate system for authorising works of purely local significance. The Committee would regard the transfer of power from Parliament in these cases not as a substantial constitutional shift, but as a logical step in a pattern of historical development and a necessary response to modern requirements."

Sensibly and neatly, the Bill makes the distinction between local and national schemes. Those that are of essentially local importance will henceforth be authorised by means of a local public inquiry rather than detailed scrutiny by Members. These schemes will inevitably be speeded up considerably. For those projects of strategic and/or national importance, Parliament will properly have an opportunity to debate and approve the principles and policy involved before the scheme goes for detailed scrutiny to a local inquiry. In that way, due weight can be given by the inquiry to the wider implications of the scheme.

There must be a suitable balance between national and local interests, but it cannot be acceptable that very localised concerns should prevent a major strategic project from proceeding as soon as possible. If public funds are responsible for the construction costs, the wider public have the right to expect that their interests are given due account. But even private sector promoters are entitled to have the wider national benefits of their schemes given maximum weight.

Part II deals with important safety measures, including new police powers to test drivers and other persons working on the railways for drink and drugs. The measures are to be warmly welcomed. I hope that the proposals, which have been both warmly and widely welcomed within and outside the railway industry, will go through the parliamentary process unopposed.

Also to be welcomed are the new powers for the Secretary of State to approve the safety standards of new works, plant and equipment, and to require more reports on accidents and occurrences. The amendment of the safety regulations to ensure that all serious incidents are reported to the railway inspectorate, whether an accident occurs or not, will implement recommendations of the Fennell and Hidden reports. The drafting will cover existing and anticipated forms of transport, and it is a sensible piece of foresight. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will tell me what other forms of transport he might be anticipating. As I have said, it is sensible to include such foresight in the Bill in a technological age.

I am especially pleased to see that the Bill will give the police new powers to allow them to breathalyse train and tram operators where there is even a suspicion of an offence, or after an accident. The powers will extend to include all those whose job involves controlling the movement of a vehicle, such as level crossing keepers, as well as guards and drivers.

Train drivers are responsible for far more passengers than car drivers, so the effects of alcohol and/or other drugs on their actions are correspondingly more serious. I agree, therefore, with the British Medical Association that the Bill should require a zero level of blood alcohol for those driving or involved in the operation of railways, trams, and other means of guided transport. I support random breath testing for car drivers, and to be logical and consistent, I should like to see that approach extended to those who are involved in the operation of rail systems.

It is important also to ensure that there will be adequate special training for the British Transport police to enable them to use breath-testing equipment properly in accordance with their duties under clause 30. I am sure that that is something to which my hon. Friend the Minister will be giving attention.

Safety is and will remain British Rail's highest priority. Investment in safety last year was £140 million, and it will reach £330 million over the next three years. All new and recently built trains are being fitted with black box recorders, and pilot tests of automatic train protection equipment are to begin shortly.

The Government have rightly made it clear to British Rail that high standards of safety must remain its top priority. All the recommendations of the Hidden report on the Clapham junction accident, which were published in November 1989, either have been or are being implemented. New procedures have been introduced for wiring and testing signals, staff training has been reviewed and procedures for dealing with emergencies have been updated. A further 24 measures are in the pipeline, and two are for later implementation. British Rail's external financing limit for 1990-91 was raised to £700 million in July 1990—an increase of over £100 million—to pay for safety measures.

British Rail has taken many initiatives which demonstrate its commitment to safety. For example, all staff have been issued with a safety policy statement, and last February a safety plan was published. The fitting of

[Mr. Alan Amos]

black box data recorders has now begun, as has that of cab radios, together with automatic train protection, a device that is designed to prevent a train from passing a signal at danger and to control a train's speed if the driver does not. Two pilot schemes are now being tested on the Chiltern line and on the Paddington-Bristol line.

In conclusion——

Mr. Cryer: Who wrote this?

Mr. Amos: I did, this morning, and I wrote it in great detail.

Although road projects are already catered for by the planning and public inquiry system, this is a good opportunity to urge the taking of action to speed up pre-construction procedures for road improvement, which already tend to be slower than the existing procedures for railways. Many of the delays occur when the Department of Transport is considering the next stage—for example, at the conclusion of public consultation or after a public inquiry.

Gestation periods of 20 years or more are common for major road schemes in Britain, and not only major motorway schemes such as the M40 extension from Oxford to Birmingham, the M3 Winchester bypass and the M20 missing link from Maidstone to Ashford. I shall not pursue that, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I know that you would rule me out of order. I have made the point, and I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister has noted it.

The Bill is a good, sensible and useful measure, and I wish it a speedy passage.

6.36 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I rise with some pleasure because I dare say that I am the only hon. Member who for many years past has had the pleasure of obtaining a light railway order and transfer order to transfer the powers of the Light Railways Act 1896, as amended by the Light Railways Act 1912, to apply to the five-mile Keighley and Worth Valley light railway in west Yorkshire. I am the owner of five shares, which have never received a dividend. They were part of the £3,500 capital with which the venture was started. That is when the railway was transferred to the Keighley and Worth Valley light railway.

The procedures under which powers were obtained to run what was a standard-guage standard railway for the purpose of a light railway operation proved to be flexible and reasonable. They ensured that there were proper and adequate standards of operation. The fact that amateurs run many light railways does not detract from the need to ensure that they have the highest standards of operation, which is commensurate with public safety. Light railways have proved that they have been able to meet those standards. The Keighley and Worth Valley light railway has been a tremendous success. When it was started, many potential critics thought that it would go bankrupt in a year or two.

I seek an assurance from the Minister that the new legislation will not prevent access and flexibility through the repeal of existing legislation. The Light Railways Acts 1896 and 1912 are both to be repealed by the appropriate schedule to the Bill and I am not too happy that that legislation should be replaced by a series of orders.

We recognise that the private Bill procedure has been unsatisfactory, and dissatisfaction has been stimulated by the way in which the Government have abused the procedure, and by little else. We must ensure that it is replaced by a good system and that we do not succumb to the temptation merely to hand over order-making powers to the Minister so that Parliament is reduced to a legislative sausage machine in which there is no scrutiny of legislation.

Nearly all orders are subject to the negative procedure, which means that a prayer has to be tabled to ensure that an order is considered. The procedures for ensuring that prayers are debated are less than adequate and Parliament does not scrutinise delegated legislation in an adequate fashion. It is a matter of concern, therefore, that so many powers should be allocated to the Minister.

All the procedures are negative, with the exception of those relating to the powers in clauses 9 and 39 on alcohol limits, which are exercised by the affirmative procedure and require a resolution of the House to gain approval of the instrument.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) said, the maximum debating time permitted for an affirmative order is one and a half hours and no amendments are allowed except for a tiny class of instruments. There is no reason why the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments could not consider a new orders procedure that would allow amendments to be produced and for debate to extend beyond the usual one and a half hours when such legislation is considered in Standing Committee.

The Bill provides an opportunity to introduce far better procedures than are now available. I say that in the knowledge that the number of instruments considered by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments and by the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments in 1978-79 was 794, and that in 1979-80, in the first Session of a new Government who were meant to take legislation off our backs, the number was 1,800. In 1980-81, the figure dropped to 1,225; in 1981-82, to 1,076; and in 1982-83, to 786. That latter figure was markedly lower because it was a general election year.

In 1987-88, the number of statutory instruments shot up to 1,947; in 1988-89, to 1,380; in 1989-90, to 1,457; and in 1990-91, to 1,366. That is an enormous number. In one two-year period, 260 were reported by the Joint Committee or Select Committee as being defective in some way.

I am concerned that clauses 6, 7 and 10 allow powers to be exercisable by statutory instrument. Where the negative procedure is invoked in respect of other clauses, that is mentioned. I hope that the Minister is noting my comments, because these important points need answering. Clauses 6, 7 and 10 state that the powers that they confer

"shall be exercisable by statutory instrument",

but the procedure is not defined. That is the draftsman's way of saying that the Secretary of State is being given powers to make a statutory instrument that he is not even required to put before Parliament.

That is a legislative disgrace.

If my interpretation is correct, the Minister should come clean. He should make it clear whether that is the case, or whether the fact that the Bill does not state that

clauses 6, 7 and 10 shall be subject to annulment is an omission or oversight. That requirement is stated in all the other clauses where order-making powers are listed.

Too often in primary legislation, Ministers are given excessive powers. Those included in clause 6 embrace all forms of application for orders under the Bill's general provisions, the rules that apply in respect of any such application, and the fees payable. Therefore, the Secretary of State appears to be giving himself money-making or money-raising powers without any parliamentary accountability being required.

Clauses 6 and 46 give the Secretary of State the power to make directions, but they are not defined in the Bill. Do they have to be in writing? Will they be published? If so, where? Under the other application procedures, reference is made to the *London Gazette*. If we are to shift a system away from Parliament and the private Bill procedure, we should retain at least some element of occasional parliamentary scrutiny.

Clause 48, which follows on the failure of British Rail's Bill on the closure of rail crossings, allows a Minister to close a railway crossing by order. Although it is true that the clause stipulates certain criteria, I echo the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish in arguing that there must be cases where the Government could provide a little money to make crossings safer, or to provide bridges to enable pedestrian access.

The railways were built under powers granted by the House which provided for access across railways, and that provision for access should be honoured rather than removed by ministerial fiat.

Under clause 24, applications can also be dealt with by appointed persons. The Secretary of State is given the authority to appoint persons to exercise powers given by the Bill—which makes it clear that officers of the Department of Transport, Department of the Environment and the Welsh Office will be permitted to carry out the duties of the Secretary of State.

Many years ago, Thomas Dugdale established an honourable precedent: everyone thought that he was a wonderful man for resigning over the Crichel Down issue, in which he was not directly involved. That precedent has long disappeared. Today, we had the example of the Home Secretary coming to the House to say that he is appealing against a judgment which found him guilty of contempt of court.

If the Secretary of State is to have powers to give civil servants the power to exercise primary legislation, it must be made absolutely clear that the Secretary of State will take responsibility for their actions without qualification and that there will be no shrugging off of responsibility for accidents or errors because something happened to be done by a civil servant. In view of recent examples, we must ask the Minister to make it clear where responsibility will lie in such cases.

The hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Wiggin) expressed concern that there had been no consultation with organisations representing the interests of waterways and said that it was understood that they would not be included in the Bill. The Minister replied that consultation was continuing, but that is not very satisfactory. We want an assurance that the Minister is prepared to meet delegations from the waterways industry as and when necessary—and that, if they can make a strong enough case, he will table amendments in Committee.

There is agreement in all parts of the House on clause 39 and the affirmative procedure in respect of prescribing alcohol and drug limits, but let there be proper standards across the board. The Government should examine, for example, proper ways of dealing with alcohol abuse, which is a serious national problem. In Bradford, an important hospital, Scalebor Park, was closed, with the result that there are no facilities in Bradford now to treat people suffering from alcohol abuse.

It is not enough to impose punishments or to increase penalties. They may be necessary, but alcohol is a disease of society. Let us see Government action in curbing advertisements and the glamourising of alcohol. Consider the cheating that goes on when sporting events are televised and huge placards advertising alcohol can be seen in the background. All that should stop.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Will the hon. Gentleman allow me to intervene?

Mr. Cryer: I would rather not, because I know that the hon. Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) hopes to contribute to the debate and I do not wish to prolong my remarks.

I hope that the Minister will give positive replies to the points that have been made. I welcome the Bill in principle, but I remain cautious about its detailed application.

6.48 pm

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): I appreciate the courtesy of the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer). I also appreciated listening to his experiences as the director of a successful privatised railway company. I hope that we shall soon hear him advocating the extension of that privilege to many more people throughout the country.

I welcome the support that has been given to the Bill by all the parties and the constructive, co-operative approach that has been adopted. I say that as one who sat for what seemed like endless months on the Joint Select Committee on Private Bill Procedure under the excellent chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest (Sir P. McNair-Wilson). That co-operative approach is warmly welcomed.

The Committee agonised for a long time over whether to adopt this radical approach to the transfer of public works Bills out of parliamentary procedures and into the planning procedures. It was not an easy conclusion to reach. We heard representations from many interested parties. I believe that the Committee reached the right decision and that that view is now being endorsed by the reaction of all the parties and, generally speaking, by outside bodies.

It is a historic decision. The fact that it is being debated in a spirit of co-operation and amity does not mean that it is any the less decisive. A system that has grown up over the centuries is to be changed. The way in which public works of this sort are to be considered during the next century is to be decided by this legislation—if, indeed, to sound a note of caution, it reaches the statute book this Session. I welcome the Bill's early arrival this Session, but who knows what other events might occur to truncate our legislative programme?

I very much hope that the Bill reaches the statute book. It provides a much more efficient and fairer system for dealing public works matters. It cannot be right that

[Mr. Roger Moate]

decisions on motorways which carved up the countryside were taken by inspectors at public inquiries and by the Secretary of State while the house spent hours and hours debating very small matters such as minor railway diversions and even footpaths. It was an illogical system. The one that we propose is much more logical. It will treat railways—we hope that there will be more of them—as we have treated roads. If one can be dealt with seriously, sensibly and fairly under the planning procedures, I believe that the same logic should be applied to railway projects and, for that matter, to ports. Moreover, the public would regard it as logical.

I believe, too, that it is fairer. Like many hon. Members, I have served on many private Bills, but I have never been completely satisfied that it is a fair system. Hon. Members often enjoy taking part, but the system is not always fair to petitioners and promoters. I have sat on Committees that considered Bills at great expense, only for them to return to the Chamber and be defeated by what we, as parliamentarians, believe to be legitimate tactics. However, is it fair to use what is a quasi-judicial system as a means for indulging in parliamentary tricks that should be reserved for public Bills? We have some way to go yet in tightening up the procedures for all private Bills so that they receive fair treatment at all stages.

My hon. Friend the Minister should clarify—not necessarily today, but at some stage—the criteria that will be used to determine what is a matter of national significance. It may be impossible to specify that in legislation, but guidelines should be provided.

I had intended to ask about the Bill's impact on the biggest issue of national significance that will come before us—the high-speed rail link. We need to know whether it will be dealt with under this procedure, as a matter of national significance, or under the private Bill procedure as it stands, which it might well have to do, or whether it will be dealt with under the hybrid Bill procedure, in which case all the rules and dangers of that procedure will apply.

It is vital that we should be told soon what procedure will be adopted for that scheme. The success or failure of the high-speed link will be determined by the procedures that are adopted. If it is the hybrid Bill procedure or the private Bill procedure, the scheme could be delayed for several years, and I am anxious that that should not happen.

I think that we should all give a warm welcome to the Bill. I hope that it reaches the statute book soon. We must endeavour to get it through Parliament as quickly as we can so that it is not endangered by a general election. I share the wish that public works coming forward for consideration next year should be dealt with under the new procedure, not under our outdated and inadequate procedure.

6.54 pm

Mr. McLoughlin: Unfortunately, I shall not have time to deal with many of the points that have been made in the debate, but I shall endeavour to deal with specific points in Committee.

For obvious reasons, the House has given a warm welcome to the Bill. Some of my hon. Friends referred to the interesting and not so interesting debates that have taken place throughout the past few years on a number of private Bills. It is right, therefore, to try to devise an appropriate procedure to ensure that Bills which go through all their parliamentary stages are not prevented from reaching the statute book late in the day.

A number of hon. Members consider that time limits should be imposed on public inquiries. We shall have to consider that issue in Committee. Some difficulties may be encountered, however, over imposing strict time limits on how long the Secretary of State may have to consider inspectors' reports.

My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate) made an important point regarding how schemes of national significance are to be decided. He referred to the high-speed rail link. If it were to come under this procedure, it would be regarded as a matter of national significance and would be debated in the House.

The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) wants us to adopt criteria. We believe that the criteria may be too inflexible. The Secretary of State will decide each case on its merits and expects only the biggest schemes to be subjected to parliamentary scrutiny. The Secretary of State needs to be flexible, but schemes that are regarded as of great national importance will have to come automatically before the House.

A meeting is being arranged regarding inland waterways. The Bill will have no effect whatever on the Bill that is now in the other place. That should not cause problems for hon. Members.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Does the Minister accept that the fear is that this Bill duplicates some of the provisions of the Bill now being considered in the other place? Will the Minister agree to meet those concerned before the Bill is considered in Committee so that time can be saved?

Mr. McLoughlin: I very much hope that we can set up a meeting as quickly as possible. It would obviously be practicable to do so before the Bill reaches Committee.

Many references were made to whether we should or should not close public footpaths. That is an important issue. We believe, however, that that is best left to the discretion of local public inquiries. I was grateful for what the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East said. I do not believe that every time a public right of way or public footpath is proposed to be closed it should be necessary to come to the House for approval. My hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field), who has great experience of private Bills and other private legislation procedures, amply illustrated the need for the Bill.

I am glad that the Bill has received a generally warm reception. We shall have to discuss a number of issues in Committee, but I believe that all hon. Members wish the Bill to make progress. However, progress must not be made at the expense of getting the legislation wrong. It is important that the legislation can be adapted to meet the many needs that are catered for in private Bills. The aim is not necessarily to speed up their passage, but to ensure that there is a better way of securing progress. I commend the Bill to the House.

6.59 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I hope that, before the Bill returns to the Floor of the House, there will be virtually a zero alcohol limit for professional drivers, not a bottle of wine in an hour.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time, and committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

TRANSPORT AND WORKS BILL *[MONEY]*

Queen's Recommendation have been signified—

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Transport and Works Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenses incurred by the Secretary of State under the Act, and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment.—*[Mr. McLoughlin.]*

British Railways Bill

(By Order)

As amended, (in the Standing Committee), considered.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

7 pm

Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson (New Forest): The nice juxtaposition of the remaining stages of the British Railways Bill and the Transport and Works Bill, debate on which preceded it, will not have escaped hon. Members' attention. The latter is likely to make Bills such as the British Railways Bill unnecessary.

The Bill was deposited in November last year, had an unopposed Second Reading on 19 March and was reported on 13 June. It may assist hon. Members if I refresh their memories by saying that the Bill has 47 clauses. In their various ways, all are concerned with improving the general structure of British Rail's operations throughout the country and, so far as is possible, continuing the policy which has been in place for some years of encouraging the transfer of the movement of goods and passengers from road to rail.

In some instances, the principal works outlined in the Bill are reinstatements of old works. For the convenience of the House, I shall go through some of the more important works provisions. Work No. 1 provides for the reinstatement of a chord line at Guide Bridge in Greater Manchester to assist the construction industry in moving stone by rail rather than by heavy lorries. Work No. 2 provides for the reinstatement of a curve at Edge Hill, Liverpool, to allow coal trains for Gladstone dock to reach Fiddler's Ferry power station—again, a move from road to rail.

Work No. 3 provides for the restoration of the rail link between St. Helens and St. Helens junction on the Liverpool and Manchester railway to take account of the new passenger service between St. Helens and Warrington. Work No. 4 provides for a temporary diversion of the railway at Bingley to allow the construction of a bridge for the Airedale trunk road. Works Nos. 5 and 6 allow the construction of two extra tracks on the western approach to Leeds station to handle the increasing number of passenger trains planned for the future with West Yorkshire passenger transport executive.

Work No. 7 relates to the rail link to Dover, which ultimately will be of great significance to the channel tunnel plans. A new footbridge will be provided for pedestrians and the nearby Crow Corner bridge will be widened to take the extra road traffic. It will mean a general improvement in traffic flow in the area.

Work No. 8, which was of significance on Second Reading, provides for the establishment of a chord line at Clarborough near Gainsborough, which will allow coal trains from the Immingham coal terminal to reach Cottam power station direct. It was agreed that it is far better to move coal by rail than by road.

Work No. 9 is for a new siding at Sherburn in Elmet, between Pontefract and York, to carry gypsum trains. That gypsum is a by-product of the flue gas desulphurisation plant at Drax power station, and trains will use the new railway siding which is to be built there.

Small changes were made to the Bill in Committee. As hon. Members will see, they are typographical changes.

[Sir Patrick McNair-Wilson]

Under clause 29, three level crossings were to have their status reduced. The Bill was amended so that all three crossings would retain their status as bridleways. That is the only change of any significance. The rest of the Bill contains the normal, standard provisions with which the House will be familiar. They have been included in every British Rail Bill so far and I do not intend to waste time explaining them yet again unless specific questions are raised.

It is essential to recognise that the Bill is part of a continuing strategy. It is important, therefore, that it should progress swiftly to the statute book. I am always delighted to play a small part in assisting British Rail to achieve powers which are of such significance to its operational future. I hope that the Bill will be given a Third Reading.

7.6 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I do not intend to detain the House for more than a few moments on a Bill which, as the hon. Member for New Forest (Sir P. McNair-Wilson) pointed out, makes some additions to our railway system. I am bound to say, however, that a Bill which adds a few metres to our railway system is a poor comparison with provisions in France, where they add to the railway system by hundreds of kilometres at a time. I found it painful to have to talk in metres and kilometres rather than the furlongs and miles which are the normal way of describing lengths of railway, but there is a big difference between what happens in this country and what happens in France, whatever measurements one uses.

My point arises from a statement on behalf of the promoters, which was made available to hon. Members. It stated:

> "The Board are continuing with their attempts to negotiate a settlement with those opposing the Bill and, meanwhile, respectfully submit that the Bill should be permitted to pass Consideration stage and proceed to Third Reading."

I wish to counsel hon. Members that all the undertakings and all the arrangements that BR negotiates with people to secure the passage of the Bill must be considered in the light of experience.

My experience is that, when BR undertook to restore overnight services on the east coast main line, it did not carry out its undertakings. The result is that I continue to receive a great deal of correspondence from angry constituents who want to know why they cannot have an overnight service to and from London, which they used to have and which could readily be provided.

When those who are still worried about some aspects of the Bill are approached by members of British Rail bearing gifts of concessions and arrangements which they expect to be the basis of letting the Bill proceed through all its stages, I hope that they will bear that experience in mind and recognise that sometimes those undertakings are not worth the paper they are written on. I hope that reminders of what happened in the past will eventually persuade BR to reverse that foolish decision.

7.8 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I recognise that I spoke just before 7 o'clock on the Transport and Works Bill, and it may be worth linking it with the British Railways Bill. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest (Sir P. McNair-Wilson) on the way in which he presented the Bill.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. Perhaps I should give a little guidance and remind the House that this is a most historic day and a most historic time. For many years, the House has sought to improve the private Bill procedure. It made the changes a short time ago and the rules of debate are therefore new to us today. We are now on Third Reading and the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) can refer not to what might have been or to what should have been but only to precisely what is in the Bill.

Mr. Bottomley: If that debars me from continuing to congratulate my hon. Friend on the way in which he has presented the Bill, I apologise, but it will probably be in order for me to congratulate a fellow hon. Member on his speech, which is what I was trying to do.

Madam Deputy Speaker: But not to link it to the previous Bill.

Mr. Bottomley: I was going to say, by way of apology, that my service on European Standing Committee B prevented me from being here during the previous debate. Those words are not part of this Bill—I am fully aware of what this Bill is about.

I had not intended to oppose the Bill. My precise reason is dissimilar to those of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), but British Rail has annoyed me. It has found a way to let an operator use part of British Rail property for a market without planning permission. If that continues to be an option for British Rail, I regard it as a suitable reason to oppose many British Rail Bills.

In view of all the fuss about shops opening on Sundays, for British Rail land, made available by agreement or by authority under such Bills, then to be used for another purpose to the exclusion of those who wish to use the railways, makes one wonder whether the new procedures are right or whether Parliament should retain some control under the procedure which will operate if the previous Bill receives Royal Assent. I think that I am right in saying that the Bill received a Second Reading but has not gone through all its stages.

The issues that we are discussing are basically about safety and level crossings. I strongly support the idea of British Rail having powers to get rid of unsafe crossings of railway lines, because the speed at which trains now move requires more bridges and more grade separation. It is a mistake for British Rail Bills to leave out powers to close bridleways. My hon. Friend mentioned—as I do in passing—that that change has been made to the Bill since it was last considered on the Floor of the House. As more trains use the lines, and as headway is reduced, people must accept that there is greater danger for those who cross railway lines at rail level.

During my service as a junior Northern Ireland Minister, I had the experience of going to the Slaght level crossing crash outside Ballymena. Anyone who has seen the effect on a train—let alone on a car—of a train hitting a car will understand the importance of supporting British Rail in its basic aim of increasing safety of railway lines.

My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest mentioned bringing back into use lines which had previously had

railways on them. It is an issue on which this country made a mistake compared with France. I think that I am right in saying that, where a railway line was taken up in France, it was not available for other use but was protected.

In the United Kingdom—this applies to Great Britain and to Northern Ireland—we have too often allowed small sections of land to pass into other hands at low prices. That is partly due to the ideology of the present Government during the past 12 years—they were not willing to look ahead to see changes in transport needs and to accept that there might be different competitive advantages in different forms of transport.

I strongly support what my hon. Friend said about trying to help to move traffic from the roads to the railways where that is commercially viable and, if necessary, with some subsidy. Again I refer to previous experience, this time at the Department of Transport. Although I was called the Minister for Roads, I strongly supported the apparent subsidies to have heavy goods railheads in quarries and to allow other goods to go by rail where possible and thus to allow British Rail to get freight business as though between consenting adults instead of by Government diktat. That is an important way of allowing British Rail's freight business to become more prosperous.

British Rail should give more consideration to replacements for unsafe and unsatisfactory pedestrian bridges over railways. That also applies to subway tunnels. Many of the bridges and tunnels built in the 1920s and 1930s are no longer satisfactory. There is a greater expectation that people with pushchairs and shopping and that elderly people should be able to take gentle ramps rather than decaying concrete steps.

I hope that, if British Rail is willing to consider the issue, it will examine not only the Sunday market in my constituency, which I regard as unsatisfactory, but the crossing of the railway line at Middle Park, which, although it is not part of this Bill, should be.

7.14 pm

Sir John Farr (Harborough): I do not want to delay progress, but someone must say that he is not entirely happy about the way in which British Rail has promoted the Bill and about the contents of some of the clauses. Many of us believe that parts of the Bill—especially part III, which has been considered in Committee—could be improved.

There is a widely held view in Leicestershire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and the east midlands in general that British Rail is riding rough shod over many thousands of people and their elected representatives merely by failing to take the opportunities available. For example, part III contains provisions for the purchase of and rights over land, part IV relates to protective possession and part V contains the usual provisions relating to planning permission and arbitration.

A great sense of frustration is building up because many hon. Members feel that the Bill represents a lost opportunity for British Rail. I shall seek to remain in order by referring to what is in the Bill. Nevertheless, I must say briefly that the constant inability of British Rail in successive British Railway Bills to recognise a real need is causing much frustration. If one writes to British Rail, one gets the brush-off. If one writes and asks—or begs—British Rail to include improvements in the Bill which it could easily have done by extending part III, one gets the same treatment.

Part III deals with purchase of land and the rights over land and schedule 3(1) specifies the purpose. Those parts of the Bill are vehicles for British Rail to do work that is publicly demanded but which it resolutely refuses to give even the slightest hint that it contemplates.

I thoroughly welcome the Bill, but it is what is missing that worries me. What is missing and what concerns tens of thousands of us is that the midland main line should be electrified as soon as possible.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have given guidance on the rules of debate. This is Third Reading.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Construction Board (Training Levy)

7.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): I beg to move,

That the draft Industrial Training Levy (Construction Board) Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 13th November, be approved.

The proposals before the House seek authority for the construction industry training board to raise a levy on employers in the building and civil engineering industries to finance the running costs of the board and to fund a range of training initiatives, including a grants scheme.

The basis of the proposals is a levy of 0·25 per cent. on the payroll of employers in the industry and a levy of 2 per cent. on all payments made by employers for sub-contract labour. Employers with a payroll of £45,000 or less will be exempt from the levy. The proposals have the support of the employers, as required by the Industrial Training Act 1982, and have the full support of the board.

The House will know that the Government thought long and hard about their decision to retain the statutory training board. In principle, we believe that independent employer-led arrangements which have the full support of employers offer the best way forward for industrial training. In general, the track record of compulsion through statutory levies in raising the quality and quantity of training is not good.

In the White Paper "Employment for the 1990s", we recognised that the industry has particular characteristics which create peculiar problems for training. The mobile nature of the work of the industry and the mobile nature of its work force, both geographically and between employers, together with the large-scale use of sub-contract and self-employed labour, produce a unique set of circumstances.

Against that background, we consulted the industry widely about the contruction industry training board. There was a widespread and strongly held view that the CITB should be retained, but that its management should be streamlined and reformed. In addition, the employers in the industry argued strongly for the retention of a statutory levy because of the largely self-employed nature of the labour force.

We were persuaded to give the industry a chance to reform its training board, to remodel it as an employer-led body and to alter the basis of levy collection. I am happy to say that much progress has been made. The board was reconstituted with a majority of key employers from within the industry, its operations and financial systems have been restructured and a strategic plan has been produced which sets out clear objectives against which the success of the board's actions can be judged. New measures have been introduced to counter the effects of the recession on training, and the board is on schedule to create national vocational qualifications for all major occupations by September 1992.

All the signs are that the board, under its chairman, Sir Clifford Chetwood, is fully committed to demonstrating its value to the industry and others. I especially draw the attention of the House to positive relationships that the board has established with 102 training and enterprise councils and local enterprise companies for the provision of training for about 20,000 young people on its youth training schemes and to the £6·5 million that it is using from its reserves this year to maintain the momentum of training in the industry. The improvement in effectiveness will be taken into account next year, when we review the continuing need for statutory arrangements in the industry.

It is right for 1992 that the House should approve the draft order. I commend it to the House.

7.21 pm

Mr. Henry McLeish (Fife, Central): The construction industry is an industry in crisis. The crisis has been created by the Government and it provides the context in which there have been tremendous implications for training. The Minister introduced the order characteristically, outlining the Government's interest in voluntarism and the fact that the order has the support of the construction industry training board. The reality is far removed from his speech.

We have no desire to divide the House, because this is a procedural order. It allows the board to continue with the levy, which ensures that income will be gained and that training can continue. However, important issues should be raised this evening. The order does not command the support of the CITB. A pistol is pointed at its head, because it has been warned that, in the next year, there will be a further review under which it is likely that it will again lose its statutory framework and be cast adrift into voluntarism along with the 22 other boards which have been dismantled in the past eight to nine years.

In that context, it is important to identify the flaws in the order. The crisis in the industry has now been reflected in the near-collapse of skills training in the sector. There is probably no better example of an industry and a sector in which economic policies are causing so much damage. The crisis has been created over the past 10 years, and this is the second recession in which the building industry has been hit hard.

A number of strands to the crisis should be identified. First, there is the recession. It is clear from all those in the industry that the recession has a devastating impact on emloyment and on the ability to train. It is measured in the repossession of houses and in the lack of new house starts.

Secondly, the crisis is measured in terms of Government cuts in training. Over a year ago, just after the autumn statement, the Government cut almost £340 million from the training budget, including the budget for adult training and the budget for youth training. Over the past year, some of the cuts have been reinstated, but the damage has been done. As will become clear tonight, the construction industry still suffers from the irresponsible cuts imposed by the Government.

Thirdly, uncertainty now surrounds the future of the industry. The Minister suggested that the Government had listened to the employers and had decided to provide a statutory framework for the CITB. We welcome that. However, the decision to allow the board to continue was cloaked in Ministers' remarks suggesting that the statutory provision would be short-lived. We have the major problem that one of the key sectors in British industry has hanging over it the threat that, in a year's time, the decision will be further reviewed and the industry will again lose its ability to impose a statutory levy.

Fourthly, the threat is an example of the Government's lack of commitment to training and to skills development. Every other nation in Europe puts that at the top of the agenda, but in Britain training is used as a political

football by the Conservatives. The Government have launched TECs, but they have then provided less funding than was envisaged. Morale is low, and many people are disillusioned.

One problem above all is the lack of commitment to sector-based training. The French, the Germans and, increasingly, the Italians value strong sectors producing quality training in which the employers and the trade unions have confidence. That is very different from the approach of the Government, who have not only abandoned a serious commitment to training, but have suggested that sectors do not have a valuable role to play.

We have one of the best construction industries in Europe, but unfortunately, it has one of the worst Governments. In a "State of Trade Enquiry" report published in November by the Building Employers Confederation, we read the outline of one of the bleakest futures for any construction sector in the whole of Europe. The confederation asks why, after two recessions and amid the deepest recession since the war, the Government show no sign of listening to the pleas made, or to the concerns expressed on the training front and, more importantly, on the need for investment.

The Building Employers Confederation had a meeting with the Prime Minister, which was reported on 1 October in *The Independent*. It was clear that the employers proposed a plan to generate more immediate investment in the sector to provide some stability and to ensure that quality training would be provided. The article says:

"Mr. Major disagreed with the delegation's gloomy forecast of when the recovery in construction would begin, saying he expected industry to emerge from recession in the middle of next year."

Clearly the construction industry has extremely bleak prospects, and the Government do not take its major concerns especially seriously.

We talked about the importance of the sector to the economy. One would not think that it was important from the statistics that have been compiled about the industry under this Government. Over the past 10 years under this Government, the number in employment in the construction industry has declined by almost 250,000. In the present recession, almost 100,000 jobs have gone, according to the Government's figures published in *Employment Gazette*. The industry says that the figure should be almost 165,000, and that more jobs are threatened to go in the next few months.

Construction output is falling rapidly. We have to look back to the first quarter of 1988 to see a time when construction output was so low. We have to go back to the first quarter of 1986 to see such a low figure for construction output per person in the past decade. Regardless of the statistics used, we now find that one of Britain's greatest industries is threatened by a Government who ooze indifference, and who are not interested in investment or in investment in skills.

We really discover the extent of the difficulties facing the industry when we consider training. Between 1989 and 1991, the number of construction trainees enrolled by the CITB fell by 40 per cent., from 14,385 to 8,500. In the same period, the number of apprentices registered with the council fell by 45 per cent., to just 2,710 starts. That 2,710 starts for apprentices must be set against an industry which employs nearly 1·8 million people, half of whom are employees and the other half self-employed. Those starts cannot sustain the skills in the industry in the decades ahead.

Local authority direct labour organisations are the cornerstones of training in construction. According to a recent survey by the Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians and the Association of Direct Labour Organisations, training places have been cut by 27 per cent. for women and by 47 per cent. overall between November 1990 and November 1991. The construction industry has an excellent provision for youth training, unlike many other sectors of British industry, but by 20 November 1991, only 9,562 young people had started on YT, compared with 11,877 by the same date last year. That is a reduction of 2,315, or 19·5 per cent., in just 12 months. The raw statistics show that training faces a crisis for many reasons.

The Government fail to appreciate—although they are prisoners of their own rhetoric and ideology—several important points which others readily grasp and would clearly like to do something about. The cut in the number of trainees has already been identified. It is also obvious that there are fewer apprentices. One of the damaging implications of the recession is that very few employers are now able or willing to offer employment to trainees. Indeed, very few employers are willing to provide work experience instead of full employment. All that has been compounded by the Government's crazy cuts in youth training, including in the construction industry.

The Government laughingly refer to a YT guarantee for every young person. However, it is clear that, throughout Britain and particularly in the construction industry, the YT guarantee for many young people is simply not worth the paper that it is printed on. Because of that, the CITB has had to introduce various schemes using its own investment to tide it over what it believed at the outset would be a short recession, but which has now become a very deep and long recession. If the recession lasts much longer, and with present cuts in Government funding, the board will not have enough money to invest to tide itself over this period in which young people face such difficulties.

The board faces a crisis, and the Government are unable—some people would say unwilling, but I would be more charitable—to assist. However, that behaviour is characteristic of the Government. What can we expect from a Government who are dismantling quality training in the construction industry and whose record on training boards over the past decade has been one of failure? There used to be 23 such boards, but 16 were demolished. Of the seven remaining, five were then demolished and the two that remain are now under threat. What next for the training boards?

Skill centres are a key part of the provision in any sector, but the Government have privatised them. That privatisation was ludicrous. Four of the sectors under the TICC consortium have entered receivership, and £2·1 million of public money has simply disappeared. The Government have reneged on all their commitments to the civil servants who were transferred into the private sector. We have lost capacity, skills and people who had some faith in the Government's processes. They have been sold down the river.

What about the Manpower Services Commission? It was charged with the objective of bringing Britain into the

[Mr. Henry McLeish]

premier league for skills. However, the Government nearly abolished it. Many people deplored that. Clearly, our national focus for training has been removed.

The employment service is disillusioned, demoralised and underfunded. In a sense, it is not required by a Government who preach the market model and who see no long-term future for the service. The treatment of training in the construction industry falls into line with the Government's practices over the past decade. The Government have nothing to be proud of over that period. After all that and the investment of nearly £30 billion in real terms, this nation has nothing to show for 12 years of this Conservative Government.

The order refers to the future of the CITB and the continuation of a levy. The Minister said earlier that that is supported. It is not. The Building Employers Confederation and the trade unions—the key providers—do not want a levy at 0·25 per cent. of payroll. That is far too small. They are arguing for a minimum of 0·5 per cent. of payroll. I am sure that the Government were informed of that, but they did not listen.

The Building Employers Confederation wanted no exemptions, because it must be right that every employer should contribute investment to his employees. The BEC must have told the Government that, but they did not listen. Exemptions have been raised from a base of £10,000 to £45,000. The industry wanted to be able to use the funds that it had generated to invest in youth training.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): The hon. Gentleman will be aware that charities are also exempt. Does he object to that?

Mr. McLeish: Every employer in Britain, including charities, small businesses, medium-sized and large businesses, must contribute to the skills needs of the country. When we talk about exemptions, the Government refer to them simply from a basis of ideology. They do not want a levy: they want everyone to be exempt. That is the essence of voluntarism. The BEC, which is not a strong supporter of the Labour party, has requested no exemptions, because it sees the benefit of every employer being involved, but the Government ignored that plea. The Government also ignored the Confederation's plea to use its finances to support YT when it saw fit. The Government encouraged heating and ventilating and plumbing and electrical to remove themselves from the scope of the CITB.

Why do the Government preach that we should listen to industry when they ignore everything that industry tells them about training in the construction sector? The simple facts speak for themselves. I received a letter written by Mr. Smith, the secretary-director of the CITB, on 28 November. He made a point about the exemptions from the levy and said:

> "The Board and much of industry considers that there should be no exclusion from levy but that the whole of industry should contribute to the cost of training. However, the current legislation and Government policy requires a level to be set and the present level is reluctantly accepted on that basis."

That is the board's view of Government policy—the very same Government policy that the House has been told has been endorsed by all those in the construction industry. I must advise the Minister that that is not what the construction industry is saying to others about the problems that it is facing.

Faced with such a crisis, we need some action. We are facing a loss of jobs, skills and capacity. The prospects for the immediate future are bleak. The Government need to take action on four issues, the first of which is the skills shortage. By instinct and possibly by ideology, the Minister never shows much interest in this subject, but perhaps he should listen to this debate. If we ever climb out of the current recession, the skills shortage in the industry will be a major problem.

Some forecasts suggest that, by the turn of the century, 250,000 skilled people will have been lost to the industry. That is a product of the present lack of interest in the construction industry which the Minister must address, because the skills shortage is of crucial concern not only to those in the industry but to Britain, because we must invest in training in the 1990s if we are to survive.

Secondly, there is a widening trade deficit in building products. Why, in 1989, did we have a £3 billion trade deficit in building products against the background of building firms, building material producers and brick-makers all going to the wall? It does not make sense to squander important resources that the nation can ill afford to lose.

The third issue is our failure to meet the demand for new housing. Is the Minister interested in building homes in Britain not only to tackle the problem of homelessness but to allow peple to move within the private sector? Is he not interested in ensuring that building skills are available and, more importantly, that homes are made available in the right place and at the right time?

The fourth issue is something in which the Minister will not be at all interested—European competition in the 1990s. Whether the Minister likes it or not, we must be prepared to face such competition, because major European contractors are already in Britain, winning contracts and using skilled labour from their own countries in which there is better investment.

Those are some of the important reasons why the Government should be alive to the problems faced by the industry and the challenges that lie ahead. The first thing that Britain needs is a new model for sector skills training. We need to take advantage of the European experience. We need strong sectors and effective organisations that are widely representative of their members. We also need organisations that are free to determine and to organise the most effective way to tackle those needs. We need sectors that will work in partnership with Government.

Secondly, along with the development of the training and enterprise councils, Britain's sectors should be given a key strategic role. We need national coverage in key sectors to provide skills and company-specific training. There should be an interface with the delivery of local training through the TECs, which can provide an intimate local delivery mechanism based on their own activities and local intelligence.

Thirdly, we need a CITB and engineering construction sector from which the heavy hand of conservatism has been removed. If the industry wants a levy, it should have one. If it wants to decide on the level of that levy, that issue should also be left to the sector. If the industry does not want to have any exemptions from the levy, it should be able to undertake such a policy in partnership with Government and the TECs. That is what we mean by

freedom from increasing centralisation and from the Government's highly prescriptive policies. Industry should be allowed to fashion and to shape its own policies based on the needs of the employer group companies.

We need a sector policy that will look closely at the Engineering Training Authority, which was also dismembered by the present Government. The construction industry's authority should remain a statutory body while the Engineering Training Authority should be allowed to take over the functions of the old engineering industry training board. Because of the importance that we attach to their manufacturing activities, we should take an early look at those organisations' progress and performance within their sectors.

That amounts to an important step forward for the sectors. I am sorry that the Minister finds this subject uninteresting. In the past decade, it has never been clear whether the Government have found satisfying their own political philosophy more important than satisfying the training needs of the nation. In the last two or three months before they leave office, they have an excellent opportunity to mend some of their ways and to start to take the construction sector seriously. They should embark on the programme and policy that Labour will certainly pursue when we are in office.

Finally, it has been said that the Department of Trade and Industry bears the mantle of the most unsuccessful Department of State. However, the Department of Employment shows no leadership, no understanding, no commitment and no real interest in training. It contains a "hands off—do nothing" set of Ministers. Time is running out for them, but, fortunately for the sectors involved, we will invest in them when we take office and will start to do the things that are being done in Europe which have made companies there so successful and so much more competitive than ourselves. That is the way forward. That is what we intend to do when we remove the Government from office at the earliest opportunity.

7.45 pm

Sir Michael Neubert (Romford): I must declare a new interest at the outset of my speech in that I have recently become the parliamentary adviser to the Federation of Master Builders.

As the order's reference to the 27th levy period suggests, the motion is not a great parliamentary novelty. The previous 1991 order was discussed at a slightly later time of night, but on the same day of the week nine months ago, since when there has been no significant change in the construction industry's circumstances. Times are still hard, not to say very hard.

Although the order does not propose any great innovations, it is worth making some brief comments on its background. I hope that the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) will understand that I do not intend to follow what he said in his long speech—it was almost the same length as his speech in our previous debate on the subject—or his wide range of criticisms of the Government's policy. This is not because I share his criticisms—quite the opposite—but because, like him, I anticipate and relish the prospect of my hon. Friend the Minister replying to the debate, when I hope that he will give a robust rebuttal of the hon. Gentleman's criticisms.

As far as it goes, the order has the support of the industry, although that support is not unreserved, does not come from all quarters and does not relate to all aspects of the provisions. Like the hon. Member for Fife, Central, I refer to the exemption of small employers with a payroll of less than £45,000. The advantages of exemption can be easily seen, if only as an illustration of the de minimis principle.

However, things can look rather different from the angle of those just above the exemption limit. At the best of times, the industry is very competitive, but this is not the best of times. When price competition is at its keenest, the extra on-cost that is entailed in the payment of a statutory training levy can be unwelcome for a company that is competing with a slightly smaller concern which enjoys the exemption.

The same factor comes into play with value added tax, in which there has been a change as a result of last spring's Budget. Those just below the VAT level can have a clinching advantage over those just above it, but that is the nature of thresholds. Such considerations may appear comparatively unimportant in other industries, but the construction industry contains many small firms, more than 23,000 of which are likely to qualify for the exemption that is provided in the order. However, as I said, the industry broadly goes along with the CITB's proposals and with this order, which embodies them.

The dominant day-to-day concern of the industry is naturally the recession. Technically, it may have come to an end, but recovery will be slow, sluggish and patchy. By tradition, the construction industry is the first to feel a recession and the hardest hit—and this recession is no exception. In his statement on public expenditure—in part, this refutes what the hon. Member for Fife, Central said—my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced increased programmes in a number of Departments which will provide substantial work for the industry. Of course, for the next financial year that is still some dark winter months away.

When the upturn comes, there will be a renewed demand for skills. It has been estimated that the industry may be short of some 50,000 skilled craftsmen in the next two years. That is a round figure subject to the hazards of forecasting, but no one should doubt that, among the quarter of a million people who lost their jobs in the recession, there will be many craftsmen and trainees, who will be permanently lost to the industry. That puts the importance of the order in sharp focus.

Unless training continues, the future of the construction industry will be in jeopardy. Wage inflation and overheating will be in prospect as employers chase scarce skills with higher payments. That underlines the importance of the construction industry training board. The Federation of Master Builders fully supports the board and believes that the special character of the industry justifies its continued role and its statutory powers to collect a levy and pay grants for training. It is difficult to see how the training function could be guaranteed otherwise.

The construction industry is different. In a competitive climate, it has short-term objectives. In good times, the timespan can be as much as three months. In any other times, it can be less than a week. In those circumstances, it is not a realistic option to take the long view which is characteristic of other industries and to invest in benefits that are achievable only years ahead. So a statutory levy makes sense. Without it, the short, cheap cut would almost always be taken.

[Sir Michael Neubert]

It has to be recognised that the construction industry consists of a large number of businesses which are mainly small. They are widely dispersed and are engaged in a wide variety of activities. The workload is cyclical, vulnerable to changes in economic policy and economic performance, and often subject to the late award of contracts. In those circumstances, forecasting of manpower requirements a matter of weeks or months ahead, which might be typical in other industries, is impossible.

Large projects can distort the skills requirement in a locality for short durations. The construction industry is a mobile industry. The site is the working place and the working place is the site—and for short periods at that. Businesses come and go with alarming frequency. Well established firms are relatively few. However, it is all to easy for a person to establish his own business or become self-employed, however inadequately trained or qualified. Yet in one respect, training in the building and construction industry is particularly important. The nature of the work means that the industry has a high risk of accident and injury, so safe working practices are imperative. They can be inculcated only as part of proper training.

My last point is realistic and understandable. No employer will willingly train a craftsman only to see him go down the road to work for another employer who has invested nothing in training. In those circumstances, a central statutory requirement for a training levy is absolutely necessary. Contrary to the assertion of the hon. Member for Fife, Central, the Government have made the judgment that an exemption is warranted. It is clear from my brief remarks that I endorse the Government's judgment. The purpose of the order is of high importance and it deserves the support of the House.

7.53 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I agree with many of the comments of the hon. Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert). He explained why a training levy is important, especially in the construction industry. Plenty of studies, and my own experience of talking to people in the construction industry and especially small businesses, have shown that the fear of poaching is constant. It is the reason why people do not invest as much in training as they should. They feel that the benefit of any investment that they make will be enjoyed by someone else.

The hon. Member for Romford was also perfectly right to point out that, in the construction industry perhaps more than in most industries, health and safety are of considerable importance. Regrettably, the number of deaths and injuries is far too high. The importance of training in health and safety cannot be overestimated.

As the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish) said, it is a disappointment that the number of people engaged in training in the construction industry has steadily declined. The number of youth training trainees on the construction industry training board's programme dropped from 14,385 in 1989 to 11,379 last year—a fall of 20 per cent. A further fall of 20 per cent. to 8,500 is expected in the current year. That is clearly related to the recession, which has hit the construction industry particularly hard.

It has been a severe recession for the construction industry. Whatever the technicalities of coming out of the recession, to those engaged in the industry it does not appear to be over. If there is any upturn, people wonder when it is going to benefit them and whether it can be sustained.

My hon. Friends and I have proposed some measures, which we accept will not slash the unemployment figures but which would be helpful. The receipts from council house sales should be unfrozen to be invested in housing. More should be invested in the fabric of our schools. We should engage in more energy efficiency projects such as draught-proofing and insulation. Such projects are all worth while in their own terms, but they would also bring direct benefits to the construction industry and should be introduced and stimulated.

The chairman of the CITB, Sir Clifford Chetwood, made a statement in July this year in which he announced some of the board's projects to stimulate training. He bemoaned the recession, and said:

"The government does not appear to be aware of the seriousness of the situation, especially with respect to smaller builders who are on short term jobs. Amongst them bankruptcies are up 100 per cent. this year compared with last year. It is now a question of survival. Mere exhortation to train is not enough."

When one criticises the exemption, as some hon. Members have done tonight, one must bear in mind the fact that, for many small businesses, survival is of the essence.

I regret that I do not know at what level the exemption was first introduced. I think that it was originally about £10,000. I cannot recall whether it was a Labour Government who set it at that figure. If it had been index-linked, it would now be about £100,000. At £45,000, only the smallest of businesses are affected. I take the point made by the hon. Member for Romford—that any threshold gives rise to feelings of unfairness. I suspect that it might be administratively difficult to have a sliding scale from £45,000 to £100,000, but a levy of 0·15 per cent. or 0·25 per cent. might be worth considering. The jump would not be as high as is implicit in the order. I understand why the Government have maintained an exemption for small businesses, for which survival is of the essence.

There is another unfairness in the system. I have found that employers who are registered with the CITB feel that it is unfair if other companies which have set up just down the road do not appear to be on the board's records. What steps have been taken by the CITB to ensure a maximum register of employers and that none slips through the net? As all hon. Members who have spoken have said, training is exceptionally important in the construction industry. Another relevant factor is the sense of unfairness and the feeling that some employers seem to get off free. I hope that the Minister will deal with enforcement when he replies.

7.58 pm

Mr. Den Dover (Chorley): I came to the House 12 years ago. In my first few years in Parliament, the building industry experienced a tremendous downturn in its work load and was worried about its future. However, from about 1982 to 1989-90, there was a tremendous increase in building and civil engineering activity in Britain. The industry is comparing the biggest boom it ever had—the peak in 1989-90—with today's admittedly lower level of activity.

In recent months, the industry has been whingeing and moaning. I agree that there has been a drop in investment, but this is a good time to invest in building—whether in property, in house building, for industry, in extensions or in repair work.

I am delighted to be able to say that I have just received notice from the Department of the Environment that Chorley is to be allocated an additional amount for doing up old housing—nearly £0·25 million. That will have a fantastic effect on local housing and the lack of facilities in my constituency. The money will be put to good use, and the work is labour-effective. A great deal of labour is required for repair work and for such fiddly jobs as roofing, installing an extra bathroom, or for mechanical, electrical and plumbing work.

The present recession is a complete about-turn. Normally, the regions and the north-west suffer badly, but at the moment the south is suffering. In my patch, many small builders are doing well and are struggling to find enough labour to keep them going in today's market. However, it is impossible for small builders to take on trainees. They do not have the wherewithal to carry out the administration and paperwork or to watch over them and ensure that they learn on the job and produce an effective piece of craftsmanship. Only the medium and large builders can mount a training campaign and ensure that it is effectively carried through.

I have no interest to declare in the construction industry, but during my first 10 years in that industry I worked for John Laing, then I worked for Wimpey for about eight years, and I was the head of the largest direct labour organisation in the country—the Greater London council—for nearly three years. I speak from hard experience at the workface. Mention has been made of direct labour and of how such organisations have reduced the number of trainees by about 40 per cent. in the past year.

In a downturn, it is inevitable that there will be fewer trainees, but in the boom years of the mid and late 1980s, much good training took place. That is why the industry was able to cope with its highest work load ever in real terms, and did not suffer the labour shortages experienced in the 1960s.

I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert) said that the Federation of Master Builders—it is composed of small builders, and there are a large number of them—fully supports the order. Small builders cannot see their way to take on many trainees. It is right and proper that the medium-sized and larger building firms should carry out proper training. Admittedly, they are training on behalf of some of the smaller firms, but it is in the interests of the industry. Many of those trainees go to smaller firms, perhaps taking over positions of responsibility or even taking over from the owners when they die and thus continuing the industry's good work.

I fully support the order. A levy of some sort is essential, so that the industry plays a major part in all training. I pay tribute to the efforts of the construction industry training board. However, small builders need to be exempted. I am delighted that the value added tax position was eased in the last Budget. That has made an enormous difference, and has replaced a lot of penpushing with bricklaying and planning.

7.8 pm

Mr. Forth: This has been a useful debate on an important subject. The knowledgeable contributions made by hon. Members—certainly those made by Conservative Members—have added greatly to the value of the debate.

I take issue with the hon. Member for Fife, Central (Mr. McLeish). It is all very well for him to pepper a debate with the emotive terms to which he is addicted, such as "crisis" and "collapse", and to describe the board as having "a pistol to its head". That sits oddly with the fact that the board was reconstituted as recently as May 1990 and has been rationalised, streamlined and reinvigorated since that date. To suggest that the board was cowering timorously before the Government is ludicrous and pays no tribute or attention to its good work and to the robust way in which it represents its interests and those of the industry.

I should be surprised if many Conservative Members opposed a review, although Opposition Members seem to be suggesting that reviews are a bad thing. I should have thought that it would be common ground that it is right to review such organisations from time to time to establish whether they are achieving their objectives. If the hon. Member for Fife, Central dislikes the idea of reviews, it suggests that his attitude to public expenditure is less rigorous than I would have expected.

Mr. McLeish: Will the Minister acknowledge that, if the review takes place next year, the construction industry training board may say that it wants to retain a statutory levy, to determine the rate of levy imposed and also wants flexibility on exemptions. Will the Minister respond positively and allow the board to do what it wishes?

Mr. Forth: That is hardly my idea of a review. A review is what it says. I confirm that, when undertaking a review we would consider what the board has done, how it has done it and whether it had achieved its objectives and we would draw the appropriate conclusions. To ask me to give commitments in advance of the review is an outrageous request, and I cannot meet that commitment for the reasons that I have given.

Another criticism was about levels of expenditure. Given the robust level of reserves that the board has enjoyed, and given that about £6·5 million of the reserves is being drawn down by the board to ensure a continuous and constant level of training, I should have thought that the board was exhibiting a responsible approach. Having built up the reserves, it is prepared to use them in difficult times, and that is the right thing to do.

As for the comments made by Opposition Members about the reduction in the number of trainees in the industry, regrettably that has to be explained by the fact that the industry has been going through an especially difficult time and still is. My hon. Friends, from their knowledge and connections with the industry, pointed out that fact.

The fact that the numbers of trainees have been maintained at present levels, despite the difficult times that the industry is experiencing, is a tribute to the continuing commitment in the industry to such levels of training, assisted by the board and the work that it is doing. I should have preferred that to be put in a more positive light than the hon. Member for Fife, Central was able to do.

Several hon. Members referred to the exemption provisions. They drew an interesting distinction between

[Mr. Forth]

the Government and Liberal Democrat approach, and that of the official Opposition. We fully recognise the need for an exemption provision. We believe that the level is about right, although in a sense it always has to be arbitrary.

I confirm to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) that the exemption level was introduced at £15,000 many years ago and was only recently raised to £45,000. That was not indexation but a recognition of the fact that, if an exemption is to be made, it should be at a sensible and workable level. It is worked out at broadly the level of a payroll of three employees. In the circumstances, that is about right.

The fact that the Opposition seemed to find exemption so objectionable was interesting. With my responsibility for small firms, the House will not be surprised that I for one would robustly defend the exemption level and the fact that it helps small firms in the industry. I would applaud that.

Mr. McLeish: The Minister misses one essential point about the changes in the labour market. The construction sector employs under 1 million people at present and there are 800,000 self-employed workers in the industry. The nature of the sector is changing dramatically. If the exemption policy continues, one will probably find that the group of people one wants to bring into training is completely outwith the scope of the board.

In 10 years' time, the balance between the self-employed and employees will have altered significantly and we shall have to think up new methods of bringing the self-employed and the small business sector into training. That is the crucial issue—not the politics of whether or not there are exemptions, but the fact that the labour market is changing and the Government must deal with that as other countries such as France are doing.

Mr. Forth: That is a tortuous argument. Considering the number of small employers—now ably represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Sir M. Neubert), whom I congratulate on his association with that key part of the industry—to play fast and loose with the future of such companies, which are under pressure from the recession and have other difficulties, would be a risky approach, and I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman is taking it.

Mr. Wallace: Will the Minister confirm from his experience that just because certain firms will be exempt from the levy does not mean that they are not training? Some firms to which the exemption might apply will have an apprentice or trainee, and may therefore have training expenditure, albeit they are not paying the levy.

Mr. Forth: Yes. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman made that point, which is obvious but important.

Hon. Members have spoken about the potential loss of skills to the industry and the need to maintain a commitment to training. The board attaches importance to that. The activities that the board is pursuing, and the use of its funds, are in many ways directed to addressing that very problem, compensating for the fact that in times of difficulty and recession, with the sort of pressures being faced by the industry, there is need to compensate for the natural, if regrettable, loss of skills to ensure that the training commitment is continued so that when recovery comes, as it undoubtedly will, the industry can recover quickly.

A similar point was made about the connection between health and safety requirements—which are paramount in an industry whose record in this regard is not of the best—and training. Wearing my health and safety hat, I appreciate that connection. It is essential to maintain a commitment to, and resources for, training so as to give the industry the best possible chance to develop and maintain an acceptable record of health and safety which many, even in the industry, agree is not and has not been the case.

We are debating an important matter. It comes before the House each year and gives us an opportunity to review the activities of the CITB. We are satisfied that the board is in good health, is doing good work and, since its reconstitution and redirection, has achieved a new sense of dynamism and effectiveness. We shall be reviewing it next year, and I look forward to that review in a positive way, as it makes a major contribution to the efforts of the CITB and the support that it gives the industry in these difficult times.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Industrial Training Levy (Construction Board) Order 1992, which was laid before this House on 13th November, be approved.

JUDGES

Resolved,

That the draft Maximum Number of Judges (Scotland) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 14th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

CHILD CARE

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 7845/91, relating to child care; and supports the Government's view that the terms of the Recommendation are welcome in principle, subject to detailed changes to improve the text to ensure adequate recognition of the principle of parental choice and the involvement of the private and voluntary sectors, and to ensure that the wide range of developments in child care services, leave and other arrangements for employed parents are not adversely affected by the imposition of statutory arrangements.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Tobacco Advertising (Children)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

8.13 pm

Miss Joan Lestor (Eccles): I wish at the outset to explain what this debate is not about and I am pleased that we have rather longer to discuss the matter than would have been the case had the previous business run for its full time.

This debate is not about the banning of smoking, whatever my personal feelings may be about that. It is not even about banning tobacco advertising, although I deeply regret the Government's refusal last month to support an EC proposal to that effect. A ban on tobacco advertising should, in my opinion, be matched by a rethink of the enormous sums spent under the common agricultural policy on subsidising tobacco production. That costs about £900 million a year. I would rather some of that were diverted to help the national health service, which currently spends £437 million dealing with tobacco victims.

The debate is specifically about the impact of tobacco advertising on children. Some people more cynical than I say that it is a cold-blooded and calculated effort by the tobacco manufacturers to recruit sufficient under-age smokers to replace the 300 men and women who die every day from smoking-related diseases.

The debate is also about how the voluntary codes of practice which govern tobacco advertising are failing our children. There is now sufficient independent and expert evidence to suggest that tobacco advertising influences under-age smokers and that the current voluntary codes governing tobacco advertising do not work in the best interests of our children. As a matter of urgency, we should be pressing for a strictly enforced, independently monitored, statutory system of advertising control.

Earlier this year, my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds) successfully piloted through the Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) Act 1991 to strengthen the law governing the sale of cigarettes in shops to children. I served on the Committee which dealt with that measure and, like other hon. Members, I was appalled by the concrete evidence laid before us of tobacco companies flouting the voluntary code.

As a result of that measure and pressure from Parliament and the health lobby, many of the offending advertisements were withdrawn or resited, but a recent survey revealed that, some of the offending advertisements are still in place. Should any hon. Member doubt that, I have the details.

Last month, *The Observer* ran a front page story which claimed that in Canada, Imperial Tobacco Ltd., a subsidiary of BAT Industries, was targeting non-smokers as young as 12 as part of its marketing strategy. The article was based on documents laid before a court in Canada during a legal fight over the banning of tobacco advertising. The judge ruled in favour of the tobacco industry on the basis that an advertising ban violated the industry's freedom of commercial speech. That case has now gone to appeal, and the ban remains in force.

The judge discounted thousands of pages of evidence related to health issues, but among the documents were papers which revealed an advertising strategy which acknowledged that children as young as 12 would fall within a targeted range.

I wrote to the chairman of BAT Industries. I wanted him to dissociate himself from the activities of the Canadian subsidiary. I wanted reassurance that such practices as detailed during the Canadian court case had since ceased. I also wanted confirmation from a leading figure in the British tobacco industry that the rules governing the protection of children from harmful tobacco products were both fully understood and fully accepted.

I received two letters in reply. The first was from Helen McDonald of BAT Industries' external affairs department, enclosing a copy of a letter written by Mr. Mercier, chairman and chief executive officer of Imperial Tobacco Ltd., addressed to Donald Trelford, editor of *The Observer*. Miss McDonald drew my attention to this sentence in Mr. Mercier's letter:

"Imperial Tobacco did not and does not advertise to non-smokers or to anyone below the legal age to buy cigarettes."

Those were weasel words. Imperial Tobacco knew the age range of readers of magazines in which it placed cigarette advertisements.

Adam Raphael, in *The Observer*, quoted from Imperial Tobacco's own document:

"If the last 10 years have taught us anything, it is that the industry is dominated by companies which respond most effectively to the needs of non-smokers . . . Young smokers represent the major opportunity group for the cigarette industry."

The second letter which I received from BAT Industries was from David Haywood, the deputy chairman, who wrote:

"BAT believe that smoking is an adult choice . . . Imperial Tobacco did not and does not advertise to non-smokers or to anyone below the legal age to buy cigarettes."

He went on:

"We certainly would not promote cigarettes to non-adults or to any non-smoker."

Again, those are weasel words.

The tobacco industry needs young smokers. Research has shown that, if people are not smoking by the age of 20, they are unlikely to start. As more and more adults either kick the habit or kick the bucket, new smokers must be found to keep up the sales and the industry's profits. The number of adult smokers is falling, and I am glad about that, but in the past decade the decline among teenage smokers has ceased. The latest figures from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys shows that 10 per cent. of 11 to 15-year-olds smoke regularly—*[Interruption.]* I am happy to clear my throat. The smoke in the Tea Room has probably affected it.

I feel extremely strongly about the issue, because my area of Salford has the dubious distinction of having the highest proportion of deaths due to smoking of any district health authority in the UK. Of a total 3,400 deaths a year, more than 20 per cent. are attributed to smoking. The victims are the grandparents, and, sadly, in some cases the parents, of children in my constituency. It is too late to help them, but it is not too late to help their children.

I do not suggest that advertising alone determines whether a child will smoke. A range of factors, including the example of parents and friends and other social pressures influence young people. However, for 25 years Governments and the tobacco industry have accepted that tobacco advertising recruits children as smokers. That is one of the main reasons why cigarette advertisements were

[Miss Joan Lestor]

banned from television in 1965 and why hoardings advertising cigarettes have been prohibited within sight of schools. But the Government have concentrated on protecting children through voluntary agreements with the industry.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that, although tobacco advertising is banned on television, the ban is not effective because cheating goes on the whole time? On many sporting occasions that are attractive to children and young people, placards are shown around the ground and are picked up by television cameras, no matter how careful the television companies are. That amounts to deliberate cheating and it, too, should be prohibited.

Miss Lestor: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend and was about to come to that point.

The Government have concentrated on protecting children through voluntary agreements with the industry, but they do not work. As someone put it recently, the policeman may be around but he is not on duty. Despite a ban on television advertising, cigarettes are heavily advertised in newspapers and magazines, cleverly promoted through sports sponsorship, and widely available in corner shops and supermarkets festooned with bright and eye-catching posters that are attractive to children.

When tobacco advertising was in its infancy, the general trend was towards adverts that presented tobacco smoking as an adult or even sophisticated thing to do. Children who saw those adverts were in no doubt that smoking was an activity primarily for adults. But then came a move toward a more subtle approach. Golden Virginia has run a series of adverts which depict its brand name and logo in attractive and unusual materials such as mosaics, carvings and jigsaw puzzles. Readers of those advertisements are rewarded by cracking the code. They feel clever at guessing the message and advertisers clearly intend that that feel-good sensation should carry the reader on to purchasing their product. The increasing use of imagery associated with childhood blurs the distinction between an adult activity and one that is appropriate to children.

A new advertisement takes that trend to the extreme. Benson and Hedges are currently promoting their cigarettes with full-colour advertisements on hoardings in the street, and in newspapers and magazines featuring a puffin and a book. That is an outrageous theft of a symbol associated specifically with children. There can be no excuse for such advertisements. Puffin Books is a long-established and highly respected publishing house, and it is horrified at being blatantly associated with the promotion of smoking to children. The Publishers Association has also stressed that publishers of educational and children's books take the greatest care to avoid association of their products with practices such as smoking. The voluntary code has clearly been violated by Benson and Hedges' promotional material.

Benson and Hedges are marketed by Gallaher Tobacco Ltd. Ian Shepherd, its public affairs manager, tells me:

> "We have agreed not to seek to encourage people, particularly young people, to start smoking".

I have heard that before. In response to my specific point about the puffin advertisement, which Mr. Shepherd referred to as "Beak", he said:

> "Considerable efforts were made to give it an adult appeal, through the use of text drawn from ornithological reference books depicted on the left hand side of the picture".

In other words, Gallaher was aware of the obvious connection and, to get round the Advertising Standards Authority, looked for a cleverer way to disguise its message.

Mr. Shepherd assures me that Gallaher has had no complaints about the advert. I have news for him. I have a letter from the publishing director of Puffin Books, which describes Benson and Hedges' use of a puffin in cigarette advertising as highly objectionable. Puffin Books has now issued a formal complaint to the Advertising Standards Authority, explaining:

> "We at Puffin Books have been distressed and dismayed to receive calls from several members of the public complaining at a children's publisher associating itself with the promotion of smoking."

I well understand that, yet Mr. Shepherd tells me that he has had no such complaint. I, too, have received complaints, which prompted my interest in the matter.

What a remarkable coincidence that Benson and Hedges chose the puffin for their latest advertisements in the same year as Puffin Books celebrates its 50th anniversary. Bookshop windows throughout the country are emblazoned with the puffin symbol. There are competitions on BBC's "Blue Peter", newspaper features, and events at Alton Towers and at the Edinburgh festival. The main message of Puffin Books' promotional efforts has been that children should get enjoyment from reading Puffin books, as they do. Imagine its upset at having its special year sullied by a cheap trick of that nature.

Tobacco companies will deny the link with under-age smokers. They hide behind the claim that they do not advertise to recruit non-smokers, especially children. They say that they advertise to improve their market share and make existing smokers more brand aware—an absurd claim. Advertising not only reinforces the habit of those who already smoke but recruits new smokers, the majority of whom are under age. Research carried out by the advertising research unit at Strathclyde university shows that cigarette advertising reinforces under-age smoking. Another study among 10 to 12-year-olds revealed that those who notice and take a favourable view of cigarette adverts are twice as likely to start smoking within a year as those who do not.

There is increasing evidence that children are receptive to cigarette advertising. That is all the more disquieting when set against the need of tobacco companies to replenish their stock of customers. Substantial sums of money are paid by the industry to have its brands placed in children's films, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South might also have referred. For example, Marlboro appeared in "Superman" and Lucky Strikes appeared in "Beverley Hills Cop" and "Who Framed Roger Rabbit?" That is advertising directed toward a young market, because mainly youngsters watch those films.

Even the Tobacco Advisory Council's own spokesman, Brendan Brady, admitted in a television interview:

> "Every industry has to recruit new customers. We recruit new customers once they are over the age of 16. Of course they see the advertising before that age; of course, they see people

smoking before that age. They make up their decisions before that age. But we are not interested in that market under the age of 16."

But the industry is there to recruit and influence those young people. That market is worth some £90 million to the tobacco industry, so I shall let hon. Members draw their own conclusions.

In this country, tobacco advertising is governed by voluntary agreements negotiated between the Department of Health and the tobacco industry or, in the case of sports sponsorship, by the Minister of Sport and the industry. Independent observers representing health interests are not allowed at those meetings and the industry refuses to allow publication of the research commissioned by the monitoring commission. That information should be made available.

The very existence of these voluntary agreements, especially when they relate to young people, is proof that the industry and the Government accept the substantial health threat to youngsters posed by tobacco and the need to protect them from harmful information. They accept that it is wrong to position posters within full view of schools. Why is it not wrong to position the same posters near bus stops used by school children, or in magazines or newspapers that are read by them? Who is monitoring the content of those advertisements with a view to child protection?

It is clear that as long as the industry can claim, hand on heart, that its advertisements are legal, decent and honest the question of their appeal to children directly or indirectly will not be addressed by anyone in authority. Tobacco advertising is everywhere. It swamps health advertising and undermines its effectiveness. It influences children to smoke. A study of 18 countries carried out by the New Zealand Toxic Substances Board shows that countries with a ban on tobacco advertising saw a decrease in the number of children smoking. Of course, tobacco advertising is subject to inadequate controls.

I raise this topic now and have raised it in other ways over the years because we have a duty to protect our children. We cannot always expect adults to behave in a healthy fashion. That choice is theirs. We can warn them about the dangers, but when advertisements such as those that I have shown—and I could show others—are directly aimed at attracting children by using a symbol that is meant for children, the voluntary code has been exploded. I urge the Minister to make suggestions that will provide for children real protection from the effects of unscrupulous cigarette advertising.

8.31 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I hope that the Minister will agree that the Department of Health should look at what it costs this country to deal with the effects of smoking-related diseases. Although the evidence has been available for many years, it is extraordinary that the House still does not give sufficient weight to the impact of those costs on the national health service. One of the saddest and most frightening statistics of the past decade has been the increase in the deaths of women from smoking and smoking-related diseases.

Without wishing in any way to add to the guilt of any of the women concerned, I can tell the House that in many homes smoking has once again become part of the acceptable face of family life. That adds to the enormous pressures on children at every level.

Advertising does not assume that its sole role is educational. It seeks, and has always sought, to present products in a way that makes them attractive. Therefore, advertising that is specifically aimed at children does not seek to fulfil a pure information role. It does not say to those who are at or leaving school, "You should think about this but remember that it has implications." Advertising is meant to do something rather different. It aims to sell a product. There would not be anything wrong with that if society as a whole had not considered the impact of smoking on the young, but we know what happens. We know that, if smokers are caught young, they will be customers for many tens of years.

When I was a small child—which was not very long ago—it was customary for working-class children to smoke because it was regarded as a sign of growing up. As a naturally perverse child, I was the only one in my class who did not smoke, because it was an easy way to stand out. People were encouraged to feel that smoking marked the divide between the small child or the teenager and the adult.

For a while, because of the voluntary code of conduct and the acceptance by the industry of the need to understand that cigarettes were a health hazard, society started to come round to the idea that there should be direct controls on advertising and that we should do nothing to encourage the young. Unfortunately, that has undoubtedly changed. The techniques used by advertisers are far more sophisticated than before, and that is the real hazard.

It is no longer a question of simply having a glowing picture of a cowboy on a horse. Advertisers now make specific and cynical use of detailed marketing techniques. Companies pay educational psychologists and those with knowledge of marketing techniques to work out how goods can be presented most attractively to the young. Therefore, such advertising is no accident. The companies know that they are targeting specific buying groups who will have access to money, will be hooked on the product and will produce large numbers of future buyers.

The House has a specific duty. When we originally debated the code of conduct, we were told that the industry not only accepted the difficulties but was prepared to comply with a voluntary code because it knew that that was the way in which it could best fulfil its duty. We were told, and many hon. Members genuinely believed, that the industry accepted that its advertising campaigns had an impact on the health of the nation. I never believed that. I never accepted that such a large, expensively maintained and profitable industry would lightly give up an advertising habit of a lifetime without continuing to look at the customer as the ultimate and most important object.

What is happening now is outrageous. Quite small children are being encouraged at every level to regard smoking as an activity that is almost automatically tied in with specific health promotions which are important to them. Why does the tobacco industry spend so much money on the promotion of sports events? It is because the young, almost automatically, go to those events. They are excited by what they see and become followers of a sport or a team. Automatically they begin to see within the ambiance of that sport the constant advertising of certain goods. Almost without thinking, they accept that that is somehow or other part of the sport. Football is the classic one, but such sponsorship now appears everywhere.

[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]

Motor racing is just one of the sports which for many years has been promoted in connection with certain famous tobacco company names.

Despite all that, the industry is still prepared to suggest to the House that the voluntary code is working. Not only is it not working; it is being exploited in the most cynical, almost depraved way. If we were asked to give to every teenage or pre-teen child in our constituencies a noxious substance in a mild form to which they would become addicted and because of which they would face possible death and certain illness, the House would react violently. It would say that there was no conceivable way in which hon. Members could be asked to pass or support laws that would somehow or other put children at risk. But by not insisting on very deliberate controls and by ignoring what is happening in the tobacco industry, that is what we are doing, week after week, month after month.

For about 30 years I have watched developments in the health service and have seen the rising graph of deaths from carcinoma, coronary heart disease and smoking-related diseases. In my active time in the House of Commons, I have done everything that I can to promote the need for controls on the tobacco industry, but it is still necessary for my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) to make her plea tonight. She and I call one another "sister grandmothers" because we have been here for some time and our concern for our families and grandchildren makes us feel strongly that the House of Commons has a duty to protect those who are most at risk.

Enough of the cynicism, and of the abandonment of common sense to the promotion of commercial which that are dangerous substances. Enough of a House of Commons which no longer regards health promotion as something that requires equal commitment in terms of money and support to that which is expended by the industry in promoting its goods to the young. Enough of a House of Commons no longer fulfilling its proper watchdog functions and allowing noxious substances to be sold to our children. If we do not understand the implications, the deaths, illnesses and long-term unhappiness of many families will be on the consciences of every elected Member of Parliament.

8.40 pm

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) on securing an Adjournment debate on the important topic of targeting children in advertising tobacco. It links with the activities of my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East (Mr. Faulds), who promoted what has become the Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) Act 1991 to curb advertising at point of sale in retail shops.

I shall deal with two areas—a regulated one, television, and a non-regulated one, which is now covered by my hon. Friend's Act. The Independent Broadcasting Authority was replaced by the Independent Television Commission under the provisions of the Broadcasting Act 1987, under which the most recent auction of franchises took place. Hon. Members felt that the IBA was a toothless watchdog and we expected the newly constituted commission to do better. The House took a long time debating the broadcasting Bill. I served on the Committee that spent many hours in diligent examination of it.

I have already mentioned my particular concern in an intervention in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor). It is the way in which—at sporting events in particular, but all outside broadcasting events—the names of tobacco products are visible for all to see in the background. I am not much in favour of sponsorship, particularly that by the tobacco industry, and I think that one can divide sponsorship between that done by those who are genuinely seeking to assist an organisation and that by those who wish to exploit it. There is no question in my mind—this was reinforced by the evidence produced by my hon. Friend—that the tobacco industry falls in the latter category. Furthermore, it seeks to exploit the young.

Outside broadcasts of test matches, soccer matches, rugby league and rugby union matches and track activities at athletic events are keenly watched by a significant proportion of our young people, as they should be. Watching such events helps to stimulate young people to take part in sports, but in the background there is always advertising of tobacco products. On the whole, it is advertising of cigarettes, although sometimes it is of pipe tobacco, which is less of an offence.

Club owners and sports event organisers fix up events so that tobacco advertisements are given prominence. For an outside broadcast with a big audience, they can ensure that the advertising space commands a premium, particularly for those displays that are near where the main events in an athletics competition are to be held or within the camera range at an important cricket match or test match. Therefore, it is important that the Government, through the ITC, make it clear that broadcasting of cigarette advertisements on television is a breach of the 1965 ban.

Ms. Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): Is my hon. Friend aware that, some time ago, researchers for the Esther Rantzen programme "That's Life" were preparing a television programme about children and tobacco, which unfortunately was never broadcast? As an experiment, they sent children to tobacconists in my constituency, together with an adult who kept out of sight. All those children were able to buy cigarettes.

Does my hon. Friend agree that, first, parents must be encouraged not to send their children round the corner to buy a packet of cigarettes and that, secondly, tobacconists must be asked not to sell to children who say that they are buying for their parents, but who nine times out of 10 are not? They are doing so for themselves, because they have been encouraged by the advertising to which my hon. Friend referred. I should like to see anti-smoking advertisements at sporting events saying that every cigarette is a coffin nail. Rather than linking tobacco with healthy sports, we should be linking it with death.

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend is right. The link between cigarette advertising and sporting events is mischievous. These events are about healthy exercise and can sometimes be very glamorous. They involve strenuous physical effort and sometimes shrewd mental processes and selective judgment. By associating that with cigarettes, the advertisers give a false image to cigarettes. As my hon. Friend said, if cigarettes are mentioned at all at sporting

activities, people should be told that they are a drug which produces an addiction and which can lead to death if smoked for long enough, as we know.

A week ago, the Tobacco Advisory Council held a reception in the House of Commons for small retailers who were concerned about the reduction in their turnover that would result if taxes on cigarettes were increased. Ironically, that was the same day as the publication of yet another report setting out the dangers of tobacco smoking and the enormous consequences for the rest of us because NHS facilities must be used to cater for those who are endangering their bodies and losing their lives as a result of their addiction to cigarette smoking.

The ITC has the power to do something about this advertising, but it does not. Year after year, there has been deliberate, organised cheating by the ITC and its predecessor body to allow tobacco advertising despite the ban. It is time for the Government to say that they want an end to all placards advertising cigarettes on outside broadcasts from both the BBC and the ITV. I hope that the Minister, when he responds to this useful debate, will make a clear statement on that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eccles spoke about the disgraceful use of tobacco products, and cigarettes in particular, in feature films. Feature films are well enough financed, including those mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles—"Superman" and "Who Killed Roger Rabbit?", which were financed by American money—and they should not use advertising in a dishonest way. That is when advertising in concealed within a story that is presented by the film without an explicit reference to the fact that money is being paid to promote a particular product.

That is something that we do not allow on television. We do not allow invisible advertising. The last "invisible" programme that was allowed was shown in the 1960s. The programme was a weekly trip to a consumer magazine, which went through various products, and it was paid for by the promoters of the products shown in the programme. That abuse was stopped. It is unfortunate that we do not have an organisation to examine hidden advertising in feature films.

I am concerned because I consider the feature film industry to be important and I believe that we should have one in the United Kingdom. The criticism that there is hidden advertising cannot be attributed to British producers, but it can rightly be directed towards American producers. It should be made clear that, if such advertising is incorporated in a feature film, the practice can be taken into account when the censorship certificate is being awarded.

The censorship system is essentially trade organised, but I think that the Government should make it clear that they deplore the sort of advertising that I have described, which is a form of cheating. The advertising is not made clear and specific on television. Instead, it is part of the background. The same could be said of any feature films that promoted cigarettes in a hidden and dishonest way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bow and Poplar (Ms. Gordon) intervened to talk about advertising at retail outlets. It has been stopped specifically by the private Member's Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East. It was a simple measure that passed through the House because of the good will of hon. Members on both sides and their wish to ensure that such advertising at retail outlets was curtailed. That advertising is attractive to children, and very often the small retail street corner shop—I accept that their number has diminished and that this form of retail advertising applies to all shops—is used by children. Their parents ask them to go for small items such as milk, loaves of bread and tins of food. If they see the advertising, they find it a temptation.

When the Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Warley, East was passing through the House, many examples were quoted of shopkeepers who were prepared to split packets and to sell single cigarettes to children. The Bill merely enhanced existing legislation by providing facilities for local authorities to institute prosecutions against shopkeepers who adopted that practice. When the Bill was being considered, I recall asking the Government to provide financial resources to local authorities to ensure that environmental health officers could put the relevant legislation into operation and to make it clear to all shopkeepers that, if they were found to be selling cigarettes to children, they would be pursued, prosecuted where evidence was available and fined heavily in the courts.

It is no good the Government taking action on advertising that helps to lure children if, when lured, they can buy cigarettes easily in the street corner shop or in the local supermarket. It must be made clear—I hope that it will be by the Minister—that the Government will take action.

What is the Government's position? They stood idly by while supermarkets opened their doors on Sunday in town after town and city after city. The supermarkets traded with impunity, unfortunately. The Attorney-General told us last week that he could not do anything. The Prime Minister said on Tuesday that he could not do anything either because, as he claimed, the law was confused. In this instance the law is not confused. If the resources are available, local authorities will take action against the scavengers who are selling the poisoned weed to schoolchildren who are often younger than 16.

We must be careful in this place about the effects of the tobacco industry's lobbying efforts. It has been said that, when the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young) was a Minister at the Department of Health and Social Security—he is now the Minister for Housing and Planning—he said that he was determined to introduce much more widespread curbs on advertising. It has been reported in books about the advertising industry which have been written by practitioners that the hon. Gentleman became a victim of lobbying.

I warn the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Loughborough (Mr. Dorrell), that if he is determined, as he should be, to improve the health of the nation by completely curbing tobacco advertising, especially that which is highly accessible to children, he should be aware of the influence of the lobbyists. They will pad round this place with a view to sidling up to his superior Minister, the deputy Prime Minister or the Prime Minister, and saying, "Self-regulation is better. The young Minister is going beyond his brief. He is trying to do something that will harm the tobacco industry." They will not say that the intention is to save children's lives or to save them years of miserable existence as they cough out their last few years.

I say that as someone who has never smoked cigarettes. My father died of a heart attack when he was 78. I think that a number of years would have been left to him if he

[Mr. Cryer]

had not smoked Capstan full strength for so long, until his doctor advised him to stop doing so because his smoking was causing his health to deteriorate.

My father started smoking as a young lad when he volunteered to serve in the first world war. It was a period of great stress, deprivation and difficulty. Many people smoked and they did not think much about it. After all, the next cigarette might be their last. The thought of living until their 70s and 80s, or perhaps beyond, by avoiding tobacco did not occur to them.

My father became addicted to Capstan full strength, which were probably the most poisonous of all the attractively packaged poisons that were available in the form of cigarettes. I am certain that his life was made more miserable as a result. He coughed heavily every morning of his later life and was afflicted with a heart condition in his final years. The tobacco industry is powerful and certainly wealthy enough to employ parliamentary lobbyists. If it is true that their influence displaced a Health Minister who was determined to achieve something important and useful—curbing tobacco advertising—I hope that such a thing will never happen again.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles for allowing me to contribute to her Adjournment debate. I am glad that she initiated it, but unfortunately I think that we will have to agitate much more forcefully before we will be satisfied with the Government's action in this and similar areas.

8.59 pm

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): I share the delight of my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) in being able to participate in tonight's debate, and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) on initiating it.

The debate reminds me of the Jesuit dictum—"Give me a boy when he is seven, and I will give you the man." That is how the tobacco industry looks upon our young people —"Give them to us young, and we will keep them throughout their adult life."

Research—not least by Strathclyde university's advertising unit, which is part of its marketing department—for the report "From the Billboard to the Playground", which was published a few months ago, show that almost all smokers start as children. I did the same. I started smoking at 14 years of age because I thought that it was the right thing to do, just as my classroom friends did. It was also one up on the teacher.

At lunchtime, my friends and I would go to buy singles —or on days when we were well off, five Players. Our English teacher, who was a particularly nasty little character, was even nastier than ourselves. He knew which of us smoked, took our cigarettes—calling us "smoky beasts" in the process—and then kept them for himself and his pals. I did not think that that was particularly fair.

I was hooked on smoking from 14 years of age, and I did not give it up for 11 or 12 years, until I was about 25 —despite making six or seven attempts to do so. I stopped because my father made me. He died of an arterial disease, and had both his legs off because he was a heavy smoker. After I reached the age of 20, I had a litany from him every day, exhorting me to give up cigarettes for my own good. I did not listen to him then—but later I tried again to stop smoking, and eventually, at 25 years of age, I succeeded.

Those who start smoking at an early age can take it from me that it is very hard to get off the weed if one starts on it at an early age. The tobacco industry knows that very well. Why else does it spend £160 million a year trying to convince people that smoking is good? It spends that money because it receives its rewards—but those rewards are to the detriment of the country, and particularly the national health service, to which the cost of smoking-related diseases is £437 million a year. As my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles said, every hour 12 people die from smoking-related diseases—nearly 300 per day.

My late father spent many years receiving hospital treatment. I often accompanied him on his hospital visits, and the consultant challenged me to find one patient suffering from vascular problems who was not a smoker. It is true to say that not one non-smoker was to be found in those wards. That empirical evidence, burnished in my mind, is enough for me to know that smoking damages health.

As a former schoolteacher, I was dismayed to learn that the incidence of smoking among the young has not diminished. Although the number of adult smokers is falling, research shows that 30 per cent. of 19-year-olds smoke regularly, and in the past nine years, the decline in teenage smoking has been arrested. Latest figures from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys show that 10 per cent. of 11 to 15-year-olds smoke regularly. What are the Government doing about that? They are fighting the European Commission because they do not want the Commission to impose a ban on cigarette advertising. The Government have succeeded in obtaining a six-month stay of execution. They should be ashamed of themselves.

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend is right when he says that the Government are behaving disgracefully, but does he accept that the Commission has double standards? It is spending about £20 million a year on a tobacco mountain. It has bought tobacco at a fixed price. The wine lake, the cereal mountain and all the other mountains have now been joined by a tobacco mountain. The Commission ought not to subsidise tobacco growers.

Mr. McFall: I did not think that it would be possible to mention the European Commission without my hon. Friend jumping to his feet, but I take his point. Yes, the Commission is hypocritical in a number of respects, but we should join it in fighting to have this directive implemented.

Cigarette smoking harms young people, but it harms women and young girls even more. Medical research shows that pregnant women who smoke have underweight babies. The tobacco industry focuses its advertising campaign on young girls. Strathclyde university's report, "From the Billboard to the Playground", shows that the tobacco industry's advertising campaign is directed specifically at young people. The report was commissioned by the Cancer Research Campaign and demolished the argument that the tobacco industry advertises only in an effort to attract smokers to particular brands. That is not so.

The position was summed up by the chairman of McCann Erickson, an advertising company, who said that the primary purpose of tobacco advertising was to create

"a positive climate of social acceptability for smoking, which encourages new smokers to join the market."

Reference has already been made to cigarette advertising in cinemas and sports grounds. Advertising by Marlboro, and all the other cigarette companies, is designed to make people feel good. They show cowboys on horses riding the prairies, beautiful clear streams and wonderful weather; then somebody sits down and takes out a cigarette. Why? Because it is another world that advertisers are trying to show to young people. They are faced not with reality but with a dreamlike world. Young people are falling for it. It is an acceptable alternative to everyday reality.

The Minister and the Government know that the voluntary code does not work. Why otherwise does the tobacco industry spend £160 million on advertising? That question must be answered. By their inactivity, the Government are condemning people to a slow and painful death. They are also condemning those who work in the national health service to looking after them. It makes no sense. Only the interests of big business are being served. The sooner the interests of big business and the tobacco industry are subordinated to the health of all adults and young people, the better.

Mr. Cryer: I have not received the details of Labour party research that may have been carried out this month into any contributions that the tobacco industry makes to the Conservative party. If, however, the industry has made any such contributions, it would behove the Government to send them back so that they can be seen to be completely free from any tobacco company influence. They ought also to send back the money that Asil Nadir and the other crooks have contributed to Conservative party funds.

Mr. McFall: I could not have put it better.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Does my hon. Friend agree that there should be some equivalence between the amount spent on advertising and the additional expenditure occasioned to the national health service by its consequences? That would happen if, instead of donating to the Conservative party, tobacco companies donated to the NHS the sums that it has to spend because of smoking.

Mr. McFall: As I said, advertising by the tobacco industry costs £160 million per year, whereas the cost to the NHS of tobacco smoking is £437 million a year—a 3:1 ratio. I agree with my hon. Friend that the Government should do something about inversing that ratio.

I am sure that the Under-Secretary will give a dismal response, because the Government are not willing to take on the tobacco giants and to preserve the health of young people. A dismal message is being sent to young people —they can continue smoking and damaging their health, but the Government are not interested, because there are a few bucks coming in the front door, and perhaps a few coming in the back door, too.

Strathclyde university's research has shown that the subliminal message which gets across to young people, in advertisements for the John Player and Marlboro brands, is that smoking is associated with excitement and fast cars. It was found that children as young as six were aware of that excitement. The message that it is nice to smoke cigarettes because it brings excitement and another world is getting through to young people.

Brand stretching has been mentioned. Cigarette advertisements are displayed around football grounds. On the one hand, Ministers want health education councils to make life for young people more pleasant and varied, but on the other they are encouraging young people to smoke, thereby negating all the assistance given to health education councils. That is massive hypocrisy, and the sooner it is eliminated the better.

As long ago as 1979, a British American Tobacco memorandum stated:

"Opportunities should be explored by all companies so as to find non-tobacco products and other services which can be used to communicate the brand or house name, together with their essential visual identifiers."

Strathclyde university's research showed that that strategy works well with children. An example was given of an advertisement for John Player Special grand prix holidays which did not mention cigarettes or carry a Government health warning, but 91 per cent. of 12 to 16-year-olds said that it advertised cigarettes. What a triumph for the advertisers. They got their message across easily, and the Government by their inactivity are condoning that strategy.

If the Under-Secretary of State does not have anything positive to say to us tonight, he should be ashamed of himself. He should think of the young people who are dying, and of those who will die in the future. He should also think about the national health service. If it is supposed to be safe in the Government's hands, it should be made safer for the people who use it. That is the message to get across. We want action from the Government, not total inactivity. The facts have been spelt out. The nation's health is at stake. The Under-Secretary of State should do something for a change.

9.14 pm

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): I fully endorse the plea by my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) for the Under-Secretary to do something. I suspect that my hon. Friend will be disappointed, because short shrift was made of the last Minister who tried to do something about this matter—the hon. Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young); he was sent——

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): My hon. Friend was promoted to housing.

Mr. Wilson: The Minister said that the hon. Gentleman was promoted to housing, but it was by a somewhat circuitous route. He was sent sliding down the greasy pole, was a poll tax rebel for a while and was then brought back to housing. He has certainly not uttered another word about smoking and health. I suspect that any Minister who has been in such a position will have learnt the lesson that to speak out as a matter of principle about the tobacco industry and its influence is not likely to lead to promotion within the Conservative party.

Mr. McFall: The hon. Gentleman was very honourable in his actions but when the tobacco industry got word of what he was doing they had a word with Downing street. According to one policial pundit, the Prime Minister at the time—the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher)—asked, "What is he—is he clever or not so clever?" Someone said, "He is clever," so she said, "Well, he's got to get the bag."

Mr. Wilson: The one episode of "Yes, Minister" that rang true was that in which the wheezing advocate of the tobacco industry ended up as Minister for Sport in the Conservative Government.

However, the subject should not be treated with levity. It has interested me for a long time, both politically and personally. My father was a heavy smoker and a non-drinker who died after a massive heart attack at the age of 59. I am sure that he was one of the triumphs of the tobacco industry's activities in the past few decades.

There is something peculiarly obnoxious about an industry that knows that in order to guarantee its continued profits far into the next century it now has to hook young people—the most vulnerable in our communities—on a habit which is unanimously agreed to be addictive. People who have not yet reached the age of reason, who are not responsible and who have their whole lives ahead of them are caught at an early age by the industry in the cynical knowledge that once they are caught as kids, the industry will probably have them for the rest of their lives.

The fact that those lives are truncated—often markedly—and blighted by the cost of the exercise is as nothing to the tobacco industry or its handmaiden, the advertising industry, which promotes its wares. Those facts are irrelevant to the industry as long as it can keep churning out the profits for its shareholders—that is the extent of its interest. It is in every sense of the word a dirty business and it is a pretty grubby Government who defend the industry's activities and who live as closely with it as the present Government do.

I have been interested in the issue for some time and I am grateful to my hon. Friends who quoted what I have written about it recently. I was struck by the absurdity and degradation of the fact that above all else in the European debate the Government are desperate for flags to raise as witnesses to their success in defending British interests against the wiles of Johnny foreigner in Europe. However, the best they can come up with is that they are "leading the Opposition" to an EC-inspired attempt to ban tobacco advertising.

What a proud activity for our Government to be engaged in. We are supposed to be proud that they can carry on flogging their wares and promoting cancer and the sale of cigarettes to youngsters. That is possible on every front with the massive budgets to which my hon. Friends referred because in order to display their proud anti-Europeanism, the Government have successfully opposed a ban on advertising in the European Community.

It was timely that, as the debate was getting under way, we had news from Canada through *The Observer*—as my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) said—that some documents have emerged. I do not believe that they differ from the existing documents in every tobacco multi-national in the world. They reveal that the strategies make it perfectly clear that all the verbosity and apologia for what advertising is supposed to do is so much padding. The fact is that the whole marketing strategy is to aim at children from the age of 12 upwards, especially girls of that age. In the industry's own terms, it is a great triumph. Every piece of research shows that the strongest client market for new smokers is that category, especially young women from the lower social and economic background.

Millions of vulnerable, poor people are targeted. For the industry to be sustained, it has to get them into the addictive habit between the ages of 12 and 18. How can any Government, even of the calibre and stamp of this one, defend that as a legitimate commercial activity? How can they refuse to take the modest step that my hon. Friends have proposed? To their honour, some Conservative Members support that step, and they would have been here if they had known that there would be an elongated debate. The issue crosses the House, because it is a question of basic morality. How can anyone accept that an industry should be allowed to go on flogging its wares in that way?

This may be a convenient point at which to get the libertarian argument out of the road. If people make a decision to smoke of their free will, that is their business. If they are in possession of the facts and decide to smoke, it is a decision freely made. I may quibble with their right to smoke in places where there are non-smokers, and there is a whole debate about secondary smoking, but, if they make the decision when of mature age and with the information available from many sources, I cannot quibble with it.

However, I quibble deeply with the idea that smokers should be deprived of that free will and that the argument should be so weighted towards those who have a vested interest in abrogating free will by pushing their wares through the most subtle techniques of advertising, marketing and sponsorship specifically directed at the people in society who are known to be the most vulnerable.

Other hon. Members referred to the report "From the Billboard to the Playground", commissioned by the Cancer Research Campaign, which is an extension of the Cancer Research Organisation. It is a timely report, because it considers precisely the issue of the impact of tobacco advertising on youngsters. It considered first the familiar self-justification which everyone in the House and in the country knows is rubbish. The industry says that all it is trying to do is to switch customers between competing brands. Nobody believes that, and I hope that it will not form part of the Minister's defence tonight.

If tobacco companies were only promoting brand switching, the industry would have an ever-diminishing number of smokers among whom to share out the various brands. The Minister says that there are a diminishing number of smokers. That is true in spite of the best efforts of the tobacco and advertising industries, but it is not a sharply diminishing number. To prevent it from becoming a sharply diminishing number, the industry has to have new recruits. Everybody knows that advertising is targeted primarily at achieving those recruits.

Mr. Morgan: The Minister will probably claim that the decline in the number of smokers is greater in this country than it is in Italy and in France. However, the decline is smaller than the decline in the United States, where smoking among the middle class and among college students is virtually unknown. It would be great if we could achieve that level of non-smoking among school and college students. The banning of tobacco advertising would be a great contribution to achieving what the United States has already achieved.

Mr. Wilson: Everyone recognises that the banning of tobacco advertising does not achieve all those ends on its own—that it has to be part of wider strategy. It is obviously highly desirable that middle-class youngsters and students drop out of smoking—even in this country,

they do so in relatively high numbers—but that concentrates with an even stronger focus the efforts of the tobacco and advertising industries on youngsters who do not come from such categories.

A huge gulf exists. I do not have the statistics to hand, but they show how the number of smokers differs between socio-economic groups. In a group of 20 or 30 youngsters from the background described by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Mr. Morgan) it would be considered odd for someone to be puffing away and spreading filth in the direction of others in that group. However, in a group of 20 or 30 youngsters from the least successful socio-economic background, who have the least going for them and the smallest incomes, the chances are that there will be a greater number of smokers. The corollary of that is that a higher proportion of their income is spent on tobacco products.

The attitude that smoking is anti-social is gaining currency among the more articulate, better educated and more aware groups in society, but the vicious corollary is that the tobacco and advertising industries must get their recruits from the lower end of the socio-economic scale.

I attended two meetings in my constituency yesterday. The first comprised people with advanced educational qualifications. To some extent, it was a self-selecting group. There were no smokers in the room. However, there was a much wider range of society at my second meeting. There were more people from lower socio-economic groups. I emerged from that meeting, like everyone else, covered in the smell and stains of tobacco smoke because 60 or 70 per cent. of the people had been smoking at the meeting.

It would be desirable if we could reduce the number of smokers to the level found in the higher socio-economic groups. As an interim step, we must try to wean from smoking the people in society who are most vulnerable to the habit.

The Strathclyde university report stated:

"The idea of a mature tobacco market"—

that means a market which cannot expand any further—

"cannot be supported . . . the key group for the tobacco industry is young smokers. They have to be recruited and retained for the industry to flourish. In no sense can this market be said to be mature."

The report examined research from the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia, and concluded that cigarette advertising is getting through to children and encouraging them to smoke and to carry on smoking. That will doubtless be satisfactory news in Canada, and probably in the United Kingdom, where we know, from incontrovertible evidence, that that is the precise name of the tobacco industry's game.

I want to refer to the relationship between tobacco and sport, and particularly the role of sponsorship. Recently, I was astounded to receive a document in my post entitled "British International Sports Relay." It is difficult to establish who published that document. Where one would normally expect to find those details, there is the logo of the Sports Council, and the statement:

"Additional copies of Relay available from Sports Council International Affairs Unit."

Under the heading "Tobacco Sponsorship" is a debate in which David Pollock, the director of Action for Smoking and Health, argues against tobacco sponsorship in sport under the accurate heading, "A cancerous growth on sport". However, to my bewilderment, I found that the argument in favour of tobacco sponsorship was not put by some fruitcake from the tobacco industry's front organisations, but by the general secretary of the Central Council of Physical Recreation, Mr. Peter Lawson.

If the Minister for Sport was on the Treasury Bench, I would ask him—instead, I ask all hon. Members and the country—what is going on when the general secretary of the Central Council of Physical Recreation puts his name and that of his organisation to a positive argument in favour of tobacco sponsorship in sport?

His words read like an ultra-right libertarian tract rather than the reasoned utterances of a representative of a body that has been entrusted by the Government with the responsibility for sport and physical recreation. He begins:

"Sport in Britain is strapped for cash."

We all know that. The article continues:

"Sports bodies are denied resources by government, which takes more from sport than it ever gives back. The gap between government parsimony and the needs of sport is filled by commercial sponsorship. Without it, sport would wither."

That may be a wee indictment of the Government, but so far the argument is reasonably incontestable. However, Mr. Lawson then continues by making no distinction whatsoever between tobacco sponsorship and any other form of sponsorship.

I very much regret that it is impossible to have a sports event, club or team these days without having a commercial sponsor. We could have an interesting separate debate about the role of sponsorship, but we accept that, if any sport in this country is to get off the ground, such sponsorship is a mandatory part of the scene. Surely, however, there are lines to be drawn, and it is not only remarkable, but worrying, to find that someone in such a responsible position can argue that the tobacco industry provides a neutral form of sponsorship.

Mr. Lawson continued:

"The tobacco industry is frequently and unfortunately vilified for its association with sport. Such criticism is, in my view, totally misguided. The governing bodies of sport are not naive, nor are they irresponsible. Sponsorship decisions that they face and must take because of their impecunity are based on a careful assessment of their impact upon their participants and their supporters. Sponsorship of sport by the tobacco industry is controlled by voluntary agreement and is carefully monitored to ensure that young people are not recipients of a pro-smoking message."

With respect, that is so much tosh. Mr. Lawson knows it, the tobacco industry knows it and the Government know it. Indeed, I would be deeply concerned to think that the people who preside over the Central Council of Physical Recreation do not know it. It is extraordinary that an employee of that body is allowed to write publicly in such terms. It is even more odd that the Sports Council should publish his words.

We know that the controls over tobacco sponsorship of sport do not have the affect that Mr. Lawson attributes to them, because all the academic research shows that the tobacco industry's sponsorship of sport is aimed at a younger market. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) has said, the sponsorship is aimed at a market that identifies sport with glamour and, by extension, with tobacco. That is not only the market at which the advertising is aimed—it is the market that it hits. It is appalling for the general secretary of the Central Council of Physical Recreation to argue otherwise.

However, Mr. Lawson continued:

"The often repeated suggestion that sports bodies are free to select sponsors as and when they wish is nonsense."

[Mr. Wilson]

I shall stop quoting Mr. Lawson there because, until that point, he has used the argument of impecunity. The Government must address that argument directly.

I am not interested in scoring cheap points in this debate about the underfunding of sport, but if sport is using underfunding as an excuse or justification for taking large amounts of money from the tobacco industry, the Government must address the question whether they should put more money into sport so that sport does not have to use that excuse.

Mr. Lawson moves on to what I regard as even more dangerous territory. He writes:

"At base, there is a larger issue than that of finance. Fundamentally, it is a question of freedom. Are sportsmen and sportswomen to be at liberty to negotiate in the interests of their sport or are they to be browbeaten by the lobby of latter-day puritans?"

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. The hon. Gentleman is going wide of the subject before the House. He should return to the targeting of tobacco advertising on young people.

Mr. Wilson: I am grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but sponsorship is a form of advertising. Every sponsorship is accompanied by advertising. There is manifold evidence which I could——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is talking about the financing of sport.

Mr. Wilson: I have left that subject, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As Mr. Lawson writes:

"At base, there is a larger issue than that of finance."

So we are off finance altogether. He continues:

"Fundamentally, it is a question of freedom. Are sportsmen and sportswomen to be at liberty to negotiate in the interests of their sport or are they to be browbeaten by the lobby of latter-day puritans?"

Mr. Lawson applies that description to people like me, who believe that tobacco advertising and sponsorship of sport are immoral and have precisely the effect that they are intended to have, which is to recruit young people into smoking.

Mr. Morgan: Surely the critical issue is that of role models. Sporting heroes are naturally role models for young people. The deviousness and deceitfulness of tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship activities which are directed at children lie in the fact that they tell them that one must be healthy and have lung function of 120 per cent. to do well at sport, while it is practised by people wearing jerseys and caps carrying insignia and logos which bear a message about a product which will reduce one's lung function to 80 per cent., 50 per cent. and eventually zero per cent.

Mr. Wilson: My hon. Friend is right. There is a link between the the words "advertising" and "sponsorship". The tobacco industry plans a long time ahead. It sees the writing on the wall for its advertising. It knows that, whatever the Government say, eventually European law or the law of a more enlightened British Government will say, "You just cannot do it."

Tobacco advertising on television was banned in 1965. The industry has had 26 years grace for other forms of advertising. That will not go on much longer. Now the tobacco industry is going for the slightly more subtle form of advertising which is sponsorship. It is aimed at the same target, which is the young and vulnerable people in society whom the industry needs to recruit.

I am aware that other hon. Members wish to speak. The points are obvious and clear. The only question is whether the Government have the will to do anything about them. Let us confront the matter. It is a moral question at root. We talk in many different contexts about the need to protect young people from various vices in society. The fact that something happens to be legal as a matter of tradition going far back into history does not mean that it is not a vice in society.

I suspect that, if someone now discovered a substance as addictive and harmful as tobacco, even this Government would be highly unlikely to license it to get it off the ground as a marketable product. We experienced a similar event in Scotland, when Skol Bandits started to be manufactured in East Kilbride. They were a relatively new product. Eventually, the Government intervened to prevent the manufacture of that product in Britain.

We all inherit a tradition from a different age when tobacco was acceptable. As I said earlier, one cannot switch off the tap and ban tobacco. That is not the proposition, but the fact that one does not ban it does not mean that, with the knowledge that we now possess, we do not regard it as a debilitating and dangerous influence on society, and especially young people. The question is whether we protect those young people from the recognition of the information that we have accumulated in the past two or three decades. That is a moral choice.

I have no wish to attribute motives, but clearly finance intervenes. Every advertisement on behalf of the tobacco industry delivers millions in tobacco tax to the Treasury. If that is the wages of sin, to what extent are the Government prepared to maintain them? If the price of doing that is leading another generation into that habit——

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): The subject of the debate is the targeting of young people. Surely all hon. Members would argue that it is wrong for the industry to be able to target young people. However, does my hon. Friend agree that the Government have the worst of both worlds? They seem to be allowing the targeting of young people through advertising, but, because of the tax regime that they have introduced in the past few years, they seem to be exporting jobs in the tobacco industry. We seem to have the worst of both worlds. We still seem to have cigarettes, but jobs are going overseas, yet we allow the targeting of young people. Both parts of that equation seem to be crazy.

Mr. Wilson: It is tricky to agree with that argument. I am not that interested in where the jobs that make the product are located, but I have sympathy with tobacco workers. Like everyone else, they were taken into whatever jobs were available for them. If a social and political decision is taken against tobacco products and cigarettes, clearly there is a social and political responsibility to find other forms of employment for those people. In parts of Glasgow, the tobacco industry is very important. One cannot shut up shop and say, "We wipe our hands of those people." There is a responsibility to create other employment, and that would be the view of any responsible Government.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) that it is doubly absurd to destroy jobs in the British tobacco industry—as has been done on a large scale—if that leads not to a reduction in tobacco consumption but to the substitution of imported brands of cigarette.

Mr. Michael: There is a large tobacco factory in my constituency. I have made it clear to the people who work there and to the management that I am against the encouragement of tobacco addiction and in favour of measures which will prevent the use of tobacco in public places. However, when the company was considering the service and repair of machinery and was thinking of sending it abroad to Scandanavia, it was willing to listen and to ensure that the work was carried out in this country.

The Government, through their tax regimes, do not seem to be interested in that. Tobacco consumption will be a fact of life in this country for some time. During that period, we want to do all we can to reduce it, especially among young people, and we want to avoid targeting them in advertising. However, we must do what we can to ensure that that does not have a consequent effect on unemployment in this country through a failure to understand that process.

Mr. Wilson: My hon. Friend argues his own case very well. I do not disagree with a word of it.

I suspect that people who work in the industry are under no illusions. They know the way that the wind is blowing, and would be only too pleased to be redeployed into another trade. The tragedy is that, whatever the direction that market forces blow, when they are left to their own devices, the choice for workers in such industries is not between the status quo and redeployment, but between the status quo and loss of their jobs. In those circumstances, it is natural that those who work in the tobacco industry should be as anxious as anyone to defend their jobs.

I conclude with a plea to the Minister. We are faced with a moral choice: do we allow our youngsters to be exploited? Do we allow people from the age of 12 to be induced into a habit which is addictive and will undermine, and in many cases destroy, their lives? How many smokers who were hooked when 12, 13, or 14, in their formative years, are grateful for having been subjected to the wiles of the tobacco and advertising industries? The vast majority curse the day they became hooked on the habit. That surely places a responsibility on any Government of any political complexion to trample on the bogus libertarian appeal of the tobacco and advertising industries that they are only offering choice.

9.45 pm

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): I am grateful for the opportunity that we have been afforded by my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) to debate an extremely important subject. We are also indebted to the Minister and the Whips for allowing us adequate time in which to adduce our arguments.

The debate is not about banning the advertising of tobacco. It is about the impact of tobacco advertising and the promotion of tobacco on young people. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) pointed out, we in Scotland know that the words of some irresponsible sectors of the tobacco industry during the 1980s turned out to be weasel words.

One thinks of the way in which the industry set up a factory, with considerable Government money, to produce Skoal Bandits, and then blatantly promoted that carcinogenic product, which promotes mouth cancers, to children in nearby schools. That factory turned out to be a short-lived exercise and a gross waste of Government money. It was a symptom or symbol of the 1980s and a lesson for the 1990s of collusion between Government and irresponsible elements who have done much to give the tobacco industry a bad name.

I pay tribute to people who have advised parents and children of the dangers of taking up smoking. Dr. Lynne Michelle, of Edinburgh, has highlighted in her studies on the perception of children of the promotion of cigarettes the grave danger, almost the entrapment of a younger generation by irresponsible elements in the industry and, sadly, the example set by other adults, including parents. Those results were published last year and cited by an all-party group in Westminster Hall. The findings were horrific. I also pay tribute to Alison Hillhouse, of ASH in Scotland, who has done much to highlight the dangers of smoking.

Mr. Michael: While my hon. Friend is paying tribute to several people who have highlighted those issues, will he also pay tribute to a specialist in Wales, with the Celtic name of Dr. Ian Campbell, who has highlighted those issues strongly? In the light of his experience and expertise at Llandough hospital in my constituency, he has alerted people in Wales to the dangers of smoking, the burdens that smoking places on the NHS and the tremendous damage that it does to health. He, too, has sought to publicise and to persuade the public of the need to avoid the activities that are being condemned in this debate.

Mr. Griffiths: I could not pay a more eloquent testimony to the doctor than my hon. Friend has just paid. He, too, will have had a chance to study the fourth report of the Committee for Monitoring Agreements on Tobacco Advertising and Sponsorship, several paragraphs of which deal with the targeting of tobacco advertising at young people.

Before I go into the details of the report's findings and the accompanying and interesting, if depressing, press statement by the Minister on 9 September, I should say that there is not only increasing public awareness of the problems of smoking and its long-term consequences to the health of smokers, but an increasing awareness of the dangers of passive smoking, particularly to children. Lothian Region Transport plc has done much to ensure that smoking is banned from public transport in the Lothian area. As in America, smoking is now increasingly prohibited in public places in Britain, which means that children are less influenced by adults who smoke and whose passive smoking does much to damage young children's health.

I look forward to the day when restaurants, pubs, cafés and public transport undertakings through the United Kingdom take seriously the problems of smoking. If they permit smoking, they should set aside special rooms for those who wish to smoke and for those who do not.

Mr. Morgan: I hope that my hon. Friend agrees that, if, we are to stop young people inhaling smoke unintentionally and passively in public places such as restaurants and railway carriages, the physical segregation between areas where people are allowed to smoke and those where they are not must be far better.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. None of that relates to the targeting of advertising on young children.

Mr. Morgan: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was about to come to that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I think that I will allow the hon. Gentleman to get on with his speech.

Mr. Griffiths: It was not an unhelpful intervention, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because one of the problems in dealing with the targeting of advertising is that advertisements aimed at adults will be less effective than the Minister may wish if they take account of the fact that children may be present. The problem that my hon. Friend rightly highlights of there being no closing doors on trains between smoking and non-smoking areas exposes children to smoking.

Mr. Morgan: The point that my hon. Friend is about to come to is that the advertising directed at young people creates a climate of social acceptability in which children will then not complain about the awful smell of smoke from the other side of a physical barrier——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is nonsense. Mr. Griffiths.

Mr. Griffiths: The fourth report of the Committee on Monitoring Agreements on Tobacco Advertising and Sponsorship was produced this summer and the Minister will have had time to study it in detail.

One of the most disturbing aspects of the report relates to the financing of the committee. The funding for direct mail research was £24,000, the chairman's fees were £2,000 and there was a miscellaneous sum of £331 for telephone, stationery and the like. That is a total of £26,331. An additional sum for certain members and secretaries' expenses was met by the Department and the companies, but the amount is unspecified. That is a derisory total for a committee monitoring agreements on tobacco advertising and sponsorship. It is less than £30,000, compared with the tens or hundreds of millions that are spent on promoting tobacco.

Only four members of the committee represented the Department of Health, but there were seven from the trade, the Tobacco Advisory Council and various tobacco companies. That shows an imbalance. More disturbing is an analysis of the complaints. A fifth of the complaints against companies for advertising in an irresponsible fashion in breach of the code were upheld. That is serious in view of the fact that the committee has been running for more than four years. One would have thought that its very existence would be some sort of deterrent. The fact that one in five of the complaints were held to be breaches of the code shows that the tobacco companies have perhaps been treating the committee and the issue in a cavalier way.

The report shows that the committee devoted some time to analysing a helpful report from the Health Education Authority, "Beating the Ban", which was published in 1990. It grieves me to say that the committee seemed to spend some time trying to denigrate the authority's findings and to vindicate the tobacco industry. It should have spent a little more time looking at the serious work being carried out by the Health Education Authority and less time on carping criticisms of the authority's work.

Sadly, the preface to the report, the covering letter from Mr. John Belloch, chairman of the Committee for Monitoring Agreements on Tobacco Advertising and Sponsorship, shows that the increase in the number of breaches in the past year has risen by 35 per cent. Perhaps that increase reflects a decline in profits, the recession and the drive by tobacco companies to advertise their products even more fiercely. None the less, the rise is worrying.

The committee was set up under the terms of a voluntary agreement. The Minister and I may disagree about whether the emphasis should be on voluntary or statutory agreements. The agreement was concluded with the Government on 1 April 1986. The committee contains leading representatives of the tobacco industry and its task is to monitor the operation of the agreements on advertising and on sponsorship of sports by tobacco companies in the United Kingdom. My hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North spoke about that.

That is a more recent agreement, dating from January 1987. I shall not read out the main provisions of the agreement, because they fall outwith the terms of the Adjournment debate topic, but they are available to the general public, and to hon. Members in the Library. The problems that are highlighted—here is where we question the faith of some of the marketers of tobacco companies—include the limiting of expenditure on cigarette brand poster advertising to 50 per cent. of the level in the year ended 31 March 1980. The problem arises from the fact that——

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Mr. Griffiths: I was saying that the proportion of advertising expenditure given was for that in the two lowest tar groups, which was rather less than the proportion of total sales.

I do not want to carp about the work of the Committee. I welcome the fact that the industry gets together with the Minister's representative and with representatives of other Departments, and I welcome the agreement to cease advertising in cinemas and to support an advertising campaign about illegal sales to children under 16. These measures have the full endorsement of the Labour party, which also welcomes the fact that notices about the law will be made extensively available for display by the retail trade and will be fixed to automatic vending machines by operators.

I know that the industry and the Department of Health are to consider what further action is needed to publicise the law in the light of the Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) Act 1991. I refer to the case outlined in the report of breaches of the code and to the cases behind the figures that I have given.

Mr. Michael: My hon. Friend has mentioned the reports of the Committee, including one on the general aspects of two televised sporting events sponsored by tobacco companies. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is

not the specific element, but the general targeting of young people, which may not be explicit, that causes the most difficulty? All of us who have worked with young people know that, in relation to pop music and sport, the impact of the event and the personality goes way beyond what one would expect. Should this not be taken into account, and does it not appear that it is not taken into account in the voluntary code?

Mr. Griffiths: I endorse that point, which follows on from the one that I have been making. There are volumes of evidence to substantiate what my hon. Friend has said, and I hope to give the House some examples. The *Evening Standard* of 20 May this year published an excellent critique of advertising and the ways in which the tobacco industry had dodged bans on advertising. Anyone who has not read Mr. Eric Clark's excellent article charting how classic adverts, in the past and in the present, have succeeded in linking the cigarette with sophistication, should read it.

As he so rightly says, despite all the increasingly tougher codes, much of what is happening in advertising now does not contravene codes, yet tobacco companies get the message across in the same way. Marlboro, for instance, does not have to show or even mention somebody smoking cigarettes—it just has to show a cowboy. That is an example of what my hon. Friend has in mind.

Mr. Morgan: There was a notorious example, similar to the one that my hon. Friend has given, which no doubt had a great deal of appeal to young people. It was the famous Peter Stuyvesant advertisement which showed passengers on aircraft. No doubt it had a great deal of appeal because it suggested that, if someone could afford air travel, he must be a bit of a swinger and must be with it. That was bound to appeal to young people as well. That was shown about 20 years ago, shortly after the first voluntary code. Instead of the advertiser stating directly that someone is a with-it swinger if he smokes, he implies that to young people by showing them smoking Peter Stuyvesant cigarettes on airliners.

Mr. Griffiths: It could well be that it will take more than the measures that the Government have introduced to strip the glamour from smoking, notwithstanding the 115,000 smoking-related deaths per year in Britain alone. Tragically, as my hon. Friends have said, the image that is portrayed is still one of the smoker being chic or macho. That image is targeted at adults and at children, who are the most impressionable.

Mr. Michael: It seems that my hon. Friend is going to the essence of the argument. For many years before coming to this place, I worked with young children. It strikes me that it is young people who are most at risk and who have most to lose. The children with whom I worked had the least opportunity in terms of personal development and careers, and they were likely to be drawn into a variety of different forms of behaviour, among which the first was often the use of and then addiction to tobacco.

Mr. Griffiths: My hon. Friend makes the point well and pithily.

The article in the *Evening Standard* takes up the issue in the same vein. I am sure that that newspaper lives or dies by its advertising and can claim some expertise on the subject. The article states that we have only to look

> "at the black-and-white magazine shots of Val Kilmer, Jim Morrison in The Doors, with a cigarette. Read about Julia Roberts as she takes 'a deep draw on the cigarette in her right hand'. Or visit the Olivier/SWET '91 award-winning play Dancing at Lughnasa and hear talk of 'Wild Woodbines'."

All these things have an impact on the public. In particular, as the journalist, Mr. Clark states, they have an effect on his daughter, who is 13. She mimes smoking. I am sure that that will be familiar to hon. Members with teenage children. That shows the impact of smoking. It is almost passive advertising and promotion, but I am convinced that it is carefully crafted in many instances by the advertising companies on behalf of the cigarette companies.

The notion that we do not have to have anything to do with those who want to smoke is odious, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West and Penarth (Mr. Michael) has said. The notion also that advertising is designed to persuade people to smoke one company's brand instead of that of another—in other words, to switch—has little validity.

Today's cigarette has 110 years of image-making behind it. Part of the task of the modern tobacco promoter is to make the smoking habit appear clean and healthy, and to imply that it is all right to smoke if we take plenty of exercise. Spurious devices are used to put forward a powerful message.

For young women in particular, the message conveyed is that of elegance, poise, and perhaps a hint of luxury. Such an image can be seductive to people who have not enjoyed so-called rising prosperity—the number who have not done so is increasing—and have fewer pleasures in life. I refer to people who, as I speak, are sitting at home, unable to put on their electric fires. The message that one can gain for just a few pence, by smoking, something that a Liz Taylor or a Julia Roberts with all their millions have can be seductive—and it is being deliberately promoted.

The tobacco industry has done much to sidestep the Secretary of State's restrictions by moving more into other marketing areas, such as sampling, road shows, travel films, clothing, and sponsorship—from Glyndebourne to rock, from angling to snooker. Earlier this year, Philip Morris appointed a London agency to explore news areas of so-called non-conventional advertising.

At the heart of the debate, and of the promotion of cigarettes to young people, is a crisis of confidence in the House and the country over the good will of the tobacco industry. The Government have at least been partly honest in their stand. A few years ago, they went in to Europe with the deliberate aim of sabotaging any tough ban on cigarette advertising, and any insistance on tough medical warnings of the kind that appear today.

Since then, the Government have perceived public opinion and disquiet with their handling of the issue, but still they have not fully learnt the lessons. When the new voluntary agreement on tobacco advertising was concluded, the Secretary of State for Health issued a trumpeting press release stating:

> "The agreement will ensure that the new health warnings such as 'Smoking Kills', which will appear on cigarette packets from 1992, will also appear on advertisements."

Three cheers for that—but they are three cheers three years too late in terms of Government action, the tens of

[Mr. Griffiths]

thousands of people who have died from smoking, and the tens of thousands more who have taken up smoking during that time.

The messages that the Secretary of State trumpets in his press release are "Smoking Kills," "Smoking Causes Cancer," "Smoking Causes Heart Disease," "Smoking Causes Fatal Diseases," "Smoking When Pregnant Harms Your Baby," and "Protect Children: Don't Make Them Breathe Your Smoke." They are all welcome but my right hon. and hon. Friends—together with responsible interests outside the House, such as the British Medical Association and other medical authorities—have pressed for such a policy for some years.

I suspect that the Secretary of State's inability to press that policy on the industry, and the industry's failure to adopt it voluntarily before now, has done much to heighten public awareness of the reticence of the Secretary of State and of the industry to take the issue as seriously as they might.

I believe in tough regulations, not knee-jerk reactions to public opinion—but the industry should be allowed to gear up to them and to plan five or 10 years ahead. If the industry had gone along with the sort of scheme that we were urging three or four years ago, it would be well geared up to meeting the challenge now, instead of being caught short by its friends—who I am sure the industry feels have in some way betrayed it.

In his press release the Secretary of State says:

"Many of the new measures are designed to protect children from being influenced to take up the deadly habit of smoking."

Again, we welcome that, but is it not sad that it comes 12 years after this Government were elected and after not just one but two Secretaries of State since I have been a Member of Parliament have been influenced because of criticism of tobacco advertising and irresponsible elements in the tobacco industry?

The Secretary of State said that he wants to discourage

"children and young people, particularly young women, from taking up smoking"

and that it is

"one of the most important things we can do to protect their future health."

We welcome that statement. In the remaining 15 minutes we look forward to hearing from the Minister what he intends to do to advance that cause further.

10.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): I congratulate the hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor) on securing this debate and on mobilising so much support from her side of the House. Despite the best efforts of one or two of her hon. Friends, I do not believe that the debate has revealed a party political difference on anything other than the very narrow issue of an advertising ban. There is no dispute about the incidence of smoking among young people and among the population as a whole, which must be reduced.

Statistics have already been quoted and they bear repetition. They show that 100,000 unnecessary deaths a year are the result of tobacco consumption. That is a Lockerbie disaster every day of every year. A third of all deaths in the age group 40 to 70 are smoking-related. That is a frightening statistic. A few Opposition Members told us that smoking costs the national health service £437 million a year. I am not sure how accurately that can be measured, but it represents a substantial cost to the NHS, which the hon. Member for Eccles compared, in my view rightly, with the large sums of money that the European Community still commits to subsidising tobacco production, against which we have argued vehemently in Brussels. At the very least there is something contradictory—most people would apply a stronger epithet to it—about an organisation that subsidises tobacco production but seeks to present itself as interested in reducing tobacco consumption.

This Government's record, as well as that of our predecessors who pursued precisely the same policy, shows some success in delivering the objective that both parties have espoused—reduced tobacco consumption. The number of smokers has fallen from 45 per cent. of the population in 1974 to 32 per cent. of the population in 1988, the most recent year for which figures are available.

The Green Paper which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health published this summer, entitled "The Health of the Nation", suggests, as part of the consultation about health targets, that we should adopt as a target a further reduction, within the time span of the White Paper, when it is published, of that proportion of the population who smoke from 33 per cent. in the case of men, as it was in 1988, to 22 per cent. and from 30 per cent. of women down to 21 per cent.—a reduction of more than 30 per cent. on present incidence rates.

There cannot be and there should not be any attempt to open up a party political divide over the importance of further reducing tobacco consumption. Nor is there any serious basis on which it can be argued that there is a party political divide over the particular of reducing tobacco consumption among children.

Clearly, if we want to deliver long-term reductions in tobacco consumption, we need to ensure that the smallest possible number of children—preferably none—take up the tobacco habit. Once again, that is not in dispute.

We have made it clear that we are disappointed at the figures revealed in the latest survey by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys of tobacco consumption by young people. It showed that, in 1990, 10 per cent. of children aged between 11 and 15 still used tobacco. I was horrified by the definition of "regular" users. Those are not children who smoke one or two cigarettes a week to prove to their contemporaries that they are older than they are; if they are boys, they smoke more than 56 cigarettes a week and, if they are girls, more than 49 cigarettes a week. By any definition, that is a substantial level of tobacco consumption by children, to whom it is illegal to sell cigarettes.

Action has been taken, not just in the past few years but consistently by successive Governments since 1904, to inhibit tobacco consumption by children. The sale of cigarettes to children has been illegal since 1904. Successive legislative steps have been taken since then to tighten the restrictions on access to tobacco by young children.

The most recent was the Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) Act 1991, which the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) mentioned. It was passed with the Government's support. The Act makes it an absolute offence for a shopkeeper to sell cigarettes or any other tobacco product to young people. It makes it clear that a shopkeeper who sells cigarettes to young people cannot simply say that he did not know that

he was doing so. To establish his innocence, he must prove that he took all reasonable precautions and exercised all due diligence to avoid the commission of an offence. In other words, if a shopkeeper cannot show that he took every reasonable step to satisfy himself about the age of the person buying cigarettes or any other tobacco product, he has committed an offence.

Action has been taken to deal with one of the issues which undoubtedly is an important contributor to tobacco consumption by young people—their access to tobacco products. The law is tighter than it has ever been, and it has the backing of both sides of the House.

Mr. Morgan: Does the hon. Gentleman really wish to imply that it is difficult for young children to buy cigarettes from a local corner shop? My impression is that the old trick of saying that the cigarettes are for one's mother or older brother still works 99·99 per cent. of the time.

Mr. Dorrell: The House need not rely on the hon. Gentleman's view that it happens 99·99 per cent. of the time. One of the slightly more encouraging findings of the OPCS survey—I emphasise the word "slightly"—was that, in 1988, 8 per cent. of young smokers had been refused cigarettes by the supplier the last time they sought to buy them but that, in 1990, the figure had risen to 15 per cent. Although that meant that 85 per cent. had been able to buy cigarettes illegally without challenge, none the less it was a welcome trend.

The special position of young people has been recognised in the voluntary agreements that the Government have negotiated with the industry and it was explicit in the 1986 voluntary agreement. It has been suggested that the voluntary agreement makes no reference to children and young people, but that is not true. I quote the 1986 agreement under which the industry agreed

"to take special care to ensure that their advertising . . . and promotion does not represent a greater attraction to young people than to the population as a whole."

The agreement binds the industry and is carried forward into the new agreement. It is the basis on which any discriminatory advertising directed at young people can be challenged under the terms of the voluntary agreements between the Government and the industry.

The voluntary agreement published in September this year by my right hon. Friend takes several further steps towards restricting the extent to which advertising is directed—purposefully or otherwise—at young people. The voluntary agreement commits the industry to a 50 per cent. reduction in shop-front advertising starting at the shop fronts closest to schools. It commits the industry to applying the same ban on billboard advertising overlooking playgrounds as already applies to billboard advertising close to schools.

It also commits the industry to a ban on cigarette and other tobacco advertising in magazines specifically aimed at the young women's market. "Specificially aimed" in that context is defined in the agreement as describing any magazine where the age group 15 to 24 comprises more than 25 per cent. of the magazine's readership. This year, we also insisted on a substantial strengthening of the nature of the health warnings put on packets and on any tobacco advertising. To suggest that the Government have taken no action, or have taken no action against the specific problem of advertising directed at children, is a charge that does not stand up.

The hon. Member for Eccles mentioned the case of the Canadian company Imperial Tobacco Ltd. The charges against that company are serious, although the hon. Lady made it clear that there is no suggestion in any of the supporting paperwork that the claims relate to any sales outside Canada and certainly not that they relate to any sales in this country. Indeed, it would be hard for them to do so, because British American Tobacco does not sell tobacco in the United Kingdom.

The hon. Lady also quoted the use of the puffin symbol by Gallaher. That is a good illustration of the strength of the voluntary agreement approach to advertising and of the weakness of seeking to enshrine it in statutory to legal bounds. If the hon. Lady or Puffin Books can show that the use of the puffin symbol contravenes the text that I quoted from the 1986 voluntary agreement, without being bound by court procedures and legal niceties and technicalities, we have a system deliberately designed to be sufficiently flexible to allow action to be taken and new barriers which will not be allowed to be broken. We will not extend the limits of what is acceptable.

I have stressed that there is no disagreement between the Government and the Opposition about the importance of reducing tobacco consumption or of reducing access to tobacco, especially among children, as a contributor to that objective. If the House is to take that objective seriously and then to deliver that objective, we need to consider what influences tobacco consumption among children.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths *rose*——

Mr. Dorrell: I have only two minutes and I want to make some more points. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me.

The evidence suggests overwhelmingly that the biggest single influence on whether children smoke is the parental influence. First, it is a mistake to imagine that access to tobacco for children is an entirely discrete subject. Advertising directed at reducing tobacco consumption by parents has a substantial secondary knock-on effect on children. The second point to bear in in mind when we consider what influences children's consumption is the question of access and the tightening of that access. Hence our support for the Bill last year. The third is to ensure that children understand the health hazards that they run. One of the most encouraging aspects at the moment is that the Health Education Authority recently found that 87 per cent. of schoolchildren between nine and 15 think that smoking can kill. Therefore, the education message is getting through.

Our most important priority is to secure the agreement of the industry to effective voluntary agreements and then to police them robustly. Evidence from the continent and comparison of our record with that of other European countries show that that is the route which delivers a substantial reduction in tobacco smoking.

The motion having been made at Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 3 December 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

KING'S CROSS RAILWAYS BILL

Order for consideration read.

To be considered on Thursday 5 December.

CITY OF EDINBURGH DISTRICT COUNCIL ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

STRATHCLYDE REGIONAL COUNCIL ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

Considered; to be read the Third time tomorrow.

Oral Answers to Questions

HEALTH

NHS Capital Spending

1. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the average annual increase in national health service capital spending since 1978-79; and what was the average increase between 1973-74 and 1978-79.

The Minister for Health (Mrs. Virginia Bottomley): National health service capital spending has increased by an average of 4·3 per cent. a year in real terms since 1978-79, compared with an average real terms fall of 6·7 per cent. a year between 1973-74 and 1978-79.

Mr. Moss: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Will she confirm that that excellent national news is reflected in my constituency, which is served by three separate district health authorities which have invested more than £54 million in new hospital builds since 1979?

Mrs. Bottomley: Not only can I confirm my hon. Friend's figures, I can go further and tell him that an additional £115 million has been invested by the three health authorities that his patients use in Cambridge, Peterborough, and West Norfolk and Wisbech. That is a real and practical example of investing in the health service for the future and of serving patients.

Mr. Hinchliffe: How much of that capital spending was funded from the closure and sale of established hospitals during those periods?

Mrs. Bottomley: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman that figure at the moment, but it is essential that we use NHS buildings as effectively as we can. Investing in capital does not mean preserving units that are no longer needed. There were 30,000 tuberculosis beds in this country before the war, but we do not need TB beds now; we need day surgery and intensive care facilities, such as those that I opened yesterday when I visited a hospital in the constituency of the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman). That shows the side of the health service that the hon. Lady is not so keen to talk about—our investment in the future and our effective use of facilities and resources.

In-patient Waiting Lists

2. **Sir Fergus Montgomery:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many in-patients are waiting for treatment currently; and how many were waiting in March 1979.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. William Waldegrave): There were 752,422 people waiting for in-patient treatment in March 1979 and 692,946 in March 1991—a drop of 8 per cent. However it is the time that patients wait that matters. Latest provisional figures for in-patients and day cases for September 1991 show that in the past six months the number of patients waiting over a year fell by 7 per cent. and the number waiting over two years fell by 16 per cent. This builds on the record reductions achieved last year. Comparisons with 1979 can be made only for in-patients. On that basis the number waiting over 12 months is now 27 per cent. lower than in March 1979. Details have been placed in the Library.

Sir Fergus Montgomery: Does my right hon. Friend agree that those figures clearly show the progress that the Government are making? Will he confirm that in the north-west region the latest figures show a fall of 26 per cent. since last March in the number of patients having to wait more than a year? Are not those figures the best in the whole of England?

Mr. Waldegrave: It gives me pleasure to confirm that my hon. Friend's region has been the winner in the past six months, and that waits of more than one year have been reduced by 26 per cent. while waits of more than two years have been reduced by 37 per cent.

Mr. Gareth Wardell: Will the Secretary of State tell the House how many magnetic resonance imagers are available in England and Wales to provide essential diagnostic information, given that the town of Portland in Oregon has 14?

Mr. Waldegrave: I do not have the figure to hand, although I can assure the hon. Gentleman that it is a great many more than in 1979. I will write to him.

Dame Jill Knight: I thank my right hon. Friend on behalf of the west midlands, which is also high in the league table. The numbers waiting two years have fallen by some 31 per cent. in my area, and we are most grateful for that.

Mr. Waldegrave: I can confirm that my hon. Friend is right—over two-year waits in the west midlands are down by 31 per cent. and over one-year waits are down by 24 per cent. That shows the real progress that is being made on the waiting lists initiative and towards fulfilling our commitment to get rid of all over two-year waits by next year.

Ms. Harman: Can the Secretary of State point to any year in the past 10 in which the September in-patient

waiting list figures have not been higher than for every year under Labour? While he is dealing with waiting list figures, will he tell us more about the figures for day patients? Does he admit that the waiting list for day patients has shot up by 50 per cent? Does he also admit that for the first time in the history of the national health service, waiting lists for day patients and in-patients combined have risen above 900,000 people?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Lady persists—I do not think that it is because she does not understand—in making the bogus comparison between in-patient and out-patient waits now and in 1979. I am proud that we have greatly increased the facilities for day-case treatment. That was right. Therefore, there are increasing numbers of people on the waiting lists for such treatment and they are being treated rapidly. I hope that she will welcome that —if she understands it, which I believe she does.

Patients Charter

3. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from NUPE and COHSE on the patients charter.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): Two representations were received yesterday.

Mr. Brazier: Is not it sad to hear that until yesterday no representations had been made on the patients charter by NUPE and COHSE? Does he agree that it shows that the unions do not represent their ordinary members who, in hospitals such as the Kent and Canterbury hospital in my constituency, strive for every possible improvement in care of the patient?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is to be congratulated. It is perhaps not entirely a coincidence that his question was due to be answered today and the representations from the two trade unions arrived in the Department yesterday. We know something about the views of Mr. Bickerstaffe because he gave a substantial interview to the *New Statesman and Society* recently. He did not mention the patients charter, but he gave us some other insights into his approach to the problems. He was asked:

"What are the likely expectations of your members with Labour in power?"

He answered:

"We hope the national minimum wage—currently £3·40 an hour for 40 hours before stoppages—will rise."

When asked what relationship there was between NUPE and Labour's leadership, Mr. Bickerstaffe said:

"I meet with the leader, with John Smith, Robin Cook, when necessary."

My hon. Friend might like to speculate about who decides when it is necessary.

Mr. Canavan: Will the Minister pay tribute to the distinguished record of COHSE and NUPE in providing excellent standards of patient care over many years? That dates back to long before the Government's so-called patients charter was ever dreamt of. Will the Minister respond positively to COHSE's request for a ministerial meeting to discuss certain aspects of the patients charter?

Mr. Dorrell: I will gladly give credit to the unstinting support that the staff of the national health service give to the principles of the NHS. Without it we could not possibly deliver the high quality of service that we do. However, the role of COHSE, the trade union which sponsors the hon. Gentleman, in delivering that quality of care is, at best, marginal.

Mr. Sayeed: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is regrettable that the same unions that stopped the sick from getting to hospital in 1978 and 1979 are showing the same callous disregard—or at least their leaderships are doing so —for the needs of patients? Does he hope that Labour Members of Parliament who are sponsored by COHSE and NUPE will prevail on those unions to put the patients first?

Mr. Dorrell: Yes, I hope that the Labour party is anxious that reference to patients should be one of the priorities of the unions which claim to represent health service staff. In the same interview from which I quoted, Mr. Bickerstaffe went on to repeat the high priority that NUPE attaches to increasing the minimum wage—a proposal which the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) has already said would cost the NHS between £400 million and £500 million.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Would the Minister work for £80 a week?

Mr. Dorrell: Mr. Bickerstaffe said that he wanted to see that bill increased. He goes on to say:

"We would like to have argued"—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The Minister is a hypocrite.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Even though that remark was made from a sedentary position, the hon. Gentleman must withdraw it.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Nobody in the House would work for £80 a week. I withdraw the remark.

Mr. Dorrell: Mr. Bickerstaffe goes on to repeat:

"We would like to have argued for a higher minimum wage, for example, but the party has said no, there are others —pensioners and so on.

Even in that context, Mr. Bickerstaffe does not mention patients.

Mrs. Heal: The health service unions, like members of the public, are worried that the commitments in the patients charter

"to receive health care on the basis of clinical need, regardless of ability to pay"

are being breached daily. The promises made have already been broken. Do not Conservative Members, the Secretary of State and his health team agree with the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Dame J. Knight), who said in a newspaper article that:

"All in all, it was, and is, wrong to breach the principle that a health check within the NHS should be free"?

The question that the Secretary of State must answer is —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Heal: Conservative Members do not like to be reminded of what is going wrong. The Secretary of State has said that he wants a national health service that is well informed of people's needs and preferences. Does the Minister agree that people need and prefer a free eye test?

Mr. Dorrell: Once again, the Labour Front Bench is raising the red herring of charges. The commitment to deliver a health service on the basis of clinical need and not

of ability to pay is common ground between both sides of the House. Any charge within the NHS requires a statutory authorisation. There are three important bases for such charges, and two of them were introduced by the Labour party.

Air Ambulance Services

4. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many area health authorities now have *(a)* part-time and *(b)* full-time use of helicopters for air ambulance; and what advice his Department gives to area health authorities on the desirability of these services.

Mr. Dorrell: Several ambulance services now use helicopters. It is the view of the regional ambulance officers' group that further development of air ambulances should await the outcome of the current evaluation of helicopter ambulances.

Mr. Coombs: I am sure that the research being undertaken will show that air ambulances are a useful contributor to paramedical facilities within health authorities. However, will my hon. Friend consider the impact on residents in areas close to the landing pads for helicopters providing such services? Will he also consider the difficulties being experienced by some of my constituents in Swindon, who have a helicopter landing pad only 20 yds away from their back fence? That has been provided because it does not require planning permission. No doubt it is to the benefit of patients, but it is by no means to the benefit of residents.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend raises an important matter. The local ambulance service in Wiltshire is to be congratulated on the innovative proposal that it has introduced—sharing the cost of a helicopter ambulance between the health authority and the police service. However, when a helicopter lands it can cause a disturbance to local residents. The health authority has recognised that and has sought an alternative and more convenient landing pad. Unfortunately, it did not get approval from the Civil Aviation Authority. I am sure that that issue is not dead and that the health authority will continue to look for more appropriate landing facilities.

Mr. Kennedy: Is the Minister aware of the broad welcome that has been given to the development of such a service in various parts of the country? Is he further aware of the important contribution that it can make in large and more geographically remote areas, as it allows casualty access to larger regional hospitals in the event of mountaineering or road accident emergencies?

Will the Minister examine how the system is working at the weekends? I gather that in some areas, where facilities are usually available from Monday to Friday, the lack of weekend facilities is causing anxiety. That is especially true for travelling, mountaineering and similar accidents, when weekends may be times of maximum need.

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. The patients charter sets out clearly the entitlement of a patient and the standard we seek to set for ambulance services. The charter does not specify 14 minutes in urban areas and 19 minutes in rural areas during weekdays; it sets that standard for seven days a week, 365 days of the year. It is the responsibility of the regional ambulance officer to deliver that standard to all the people living in his district.

GP Fund Holders

5. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he intends to relax the patient numbers criteria so that smaller general practitioner practices can apply to be fund holders.

Mr. Waldegrave: I know that many general practitioners who are not eligible to join the scheme recognise the benefits of fund holding and wish to take part. I hope to be able to open the scheme to more practices soon. At present, small practices may group together to become fund holders.

Mr. Knapman: My right hon. Friend is aware of the clear advantages to patients of fund-holding practices. That is being increasingly recognised, not only by doctors but by the British Medical Association and, possibly, by some Opposition Members. Does he appreciate the keen desire of many small practices to join these excellent schemes?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is right. There is a growing consensus about the success of the scheme, and that runs right across the general practitioners taking part in it. The hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) is not exactly clear about his policy on these issues. I hope that that unclarity means that he is moving towards us.

Mr. Loyden: Does the Secretary of State agree that there is a danger that the number of patients per doctor might have an effect on the eventual standard of treatment that patients receive? Is he carefully watching the changes that are taking place to ensure that the number of patients per doctor conforms with the ability to supply a good service?

Mr. Waldegrave: Yes, we are assessing the whole fund-holding scheme jointly with the general medical services committee, the relevant committee of the BMA. The hon. Gentleman might recall that one of our successes has been to bring down average list sizes markedly since Labour was in power.

Mr. Wolfson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that general practitioners, whether fund-holders or not, as a result of the new contract—which initially was often bitterly opposed—are now giving patients a much better service than they had in the past?

Mr. Waldegrave: My hon. Friend is right, and that is not just his opinion. A recent independent poll on exactly that matter showed that already, within the first year, a significant number of patients of general practitioners recognised that they were getting better services than a year previously. The level of opposition that existed when my predecessor brought in the contract will be shown by history to have been wildly overstated. It has been a success.

Mr. Rooker: In the context of smaller practices, I wish to raise with the right hon. Gentleman a subsidiary but related issue, that of the single-practice general practitioner. Does he believe that, even with massive commitment and dedication, it will be possible for the

large number of single-practice GPs in this country to measure up to the demands of the community care programme in 1993?

I cite as an example the urban areas of the city which I partially represent—*[Interruption.]* I speak for all of Birmingham when I speak on this issue, and I am trying to raise an important matter in which there may be some common cause. There are 586 GPs in 270 practices, over a third of which are single practices. Even with their dedication and commitment, one must feel concern about their ability to measure up to the infrastructure needed for a viable community care programme.

Mr. Waldegrave: I respect the hon. Gentleman's commitment to those matters, and he is right to point to one of the problems. In recent years there has been a move to much bigger primary care teams, which has generally been welcomed. Many dedicated single-handed practitioners remain, and we must ensure that that option remains so that GPs are free to practise how they wish. One of the strengths of the fund-holding scheme is that general practitioners can group together to use the benefits of the scheme. Therefore, the scheme can provide some of the back-up for single-handed practitioners without their losing the independence that they rightly value.

National Health Service Expenditure

6. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the percentage of gross domestic product spent on the national health service in 1991-92; what it will be in 1992-93; and what it was in 1978-79.

Mr. Waldegrave: An estimated 5·6 per cent. of the United Kingdom's gross domestic product will be spent on the NHS this year, rising to 5·7 per cent. next year. In 1978-79, the NHS share of GDP was a full percentage point lower, at 4·7 per cent.

Mr. Bruce: Does my right hon. Friend agree that not only has the Conservative party demonstrated that it is willing to spend a greater proportion of gross national product, but, by continuing to expand our economy, we have surpassed the Labour party bid at the 1987 election —when it said that it would increase spending on the national health service by 3 per cent.—by about a third?

Mr. Waldegrave: It is important to note that if the pledge that the Labour party made at the last election had been carried through, dramatically less money would have been spent on health, for the reasons that my hon. Friend gave. That achievement represents a larger share of a larger national product and the Conservative party can be extremely proud of it.

Mr. Nellist: Has the Secretary of State seen the item in *The Independent* yesterday about NHS spending on opted-out hospitals? It refers to a paper called "Personnel Policy and Practice", which advises the managers of all opted-out hospitals to sack renegades and subversives. They are defined as all those who do not share the values and goals of opt-outs. At Coventry's Walsgrave hospital, in virtually every ballot that was held, 80 to 90 per cent. of all doctors, nurses and health workers voted against opt-out. If they are all sacked, who will run the health service?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman actually threatened some of the staff in that hospital for carrying out Government policy. He was forced by the Leader of the Opposition to withdraw that threat, so he should be a little careful. He referred to an old paper that is regularly recycled by one of the unions. It is a little out of date. I direct the hon. Gentleman to the leader on the matter in the same newspaper today.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Will my right hon. Friend consider that, although statistics are helpful, the important thing about the health service is the quality of care, and the outcome of the treatments that are given? It is important, especially in my area, to accept that Mersey has achieved dramatic reductions in health service waiting lists, for which Sir Donald Wilson should be given credit in Mersey and Mr. Peter Hayes for the part that he has played in Macclesfield. However, the quality of the service for the amount of money allocated and the outcome of the treatment are critical for the people of this country.

Mr. Waldegrave: I strongly agree with my hon. Friend and I join him in paying tribute to the management of the health service in his part of the country. We are taking on Mr. McKeever from Crewe to help us with new waiting list initiatives in the Mersey region, and we are giving him £2 million to deal with some of the longer lists. We should be most proud that, despite the fact that our health service spends less wastefully than those in some other countries, our figures on, for example, perinatal mortality are better or just as good.

Hospital Ancillary Services

7. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on the contracting out of hospital ancillary services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The Government's further proposals for market testing hospital ancillary services are set out in the White Paper "Competing for Quality", and take account of representations received.

Mr. Salmond: Can the Minister confirm that health boards have been issued with new instructions, both written and by meetings, to be responsive to the needs of private contractors? Is there any chance of the Government issuing similar instructions to ask health boards to be responsive to the needs of health service workers? How can a Government who claim to defend the national health service pursue that claim when the hidden agenda behind so many of the changes is to break the morale, commitment and solidarity of people who work in the health service? How can a Government at war with health service workers claim to be defending the NHS?

Mr. Dorrell: The hon. Gentleman does not need to rely on my words to rebut every word that he has just said; he need only read the latest edition of the in-house magazine of the Confederation of Health Service Employees, where it is written:

"The Mid-Glamorgan District Linen Service is efficient because it has no choice. In 1987, the service had to compete for the hospital's laundry contract for the first time and in 1993, it will have to submit another tender."

The article quotes Mr. Jeff Chard, a former COHSE shop steward, as saying:

"At the moment, I have to use hospital staff like engineers to service the machines and do repairs. But eventually I'll be able to go to anyone I like if he's cheaper I'll have to get Dai Jones the carpenter from down the road instead." He went on——

Hon. Members: Boring!

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is in order for Ministers to quote, but I think they should do so briefly.

Mr. Dorrell: Just two more sentences, Mr. Speaker.

The article continues:

"Competitive tendering was forced on to us and it's put a tremendous pressure on everyone. But it has made us more productive and more of a team—we all have to co-operate and pull together just to keep our heads above water."

Mrs. Currie: Is not the key to good service in the health service, good management? Would not the worst thing that could possibly happen for any of our constituents or patients be for the Labour party to come to power and abolish competitive tendering? That would not only cost a great deal of money, but put power once again into the hands of the National Union of Public Employees and the Confederation of Health Service Employees, which could then decide how hospitals were to be run.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is precisely right. The compulsory competitive tendering programme has already saved the health service £630 million in England and £85 million in Scotland—enough to complete 225,000 hip replacements. The repeating saving on an annual basis is £156 million, which is used to increase patient care. It is that figure that the Labour party is committed to cut.

Mr. Robin Cook: Does the Under-Secretary of State ever ask in relation to competitive tendering about the price patients have to pay in poorer food and dirtier hospitals? Does he not know that one in five of private contracts has ended in failure? Is he aware that the National Childbirth Trust recommends that mothers in maternity wards should clean the baths? Is he aware of the concern expressed by the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland about the poor food supplied by a private contractor in my constituency? Does the right to a clean hospital or decent food figure anywhere in his patients charter, or does cutting costs always come first with the Government?

Mr. Dorrell: Perhaps not surprisingly, the hon. Gentleman's question is a straight paraphrase from publications issued by COHSE and NUPE. The hon. Gentleman must answer this question: how can he argue that it is in patients' interests to move away from a system of competitive tendering and use that money to pay trade union members rather than to pay for extra treatment for patients?

Mr. Gregory: Will my hon. Friend confirm that savings in ancillary services such as catering, cleaning and laundry go to benefit patients directly, not to the paymasters of the Labour party, COHSE and NUPE?

Mr. Dorrell: Yes, competitive tendering is based on the simple proposition that health service managers are trained to manage health care institutions, not laundries or cleaning forces. It is surely better to use skilled laundry and cleaning managers to manage those services and to rely on the skills of health care managers to manage the essential core activity of the health service—the provision of health care.

NHS Trusts

8. **Sir Patrick Duffy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received in connection with applications for national health service trust status from within the Sheffield health authority.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Trent regional health authority received a wide variety of responses to the consultation exercise for the Sheffield applications which the Secretary of State took fully into account when making his decisions to grant NHS trust status.

Sir Patrick Duffy: Is the Minister aware that now that clear decisions have been taken on trust status, anxiety in Sheffield relates to the likely impact of the Chancellor's autumn statement on the health authority's financial position next year and in the long term, and particularly the need for greater per capita funding given the number of elderly people and the levels of health inequality and social deprivation in Sheffield, particularly in Attercliffe?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am pleased to hear from the hon. Gentleman that there is no more concern about trust status. There has been most impressive progress in Sheffield. I commend the annual report from the health authority chief executive, which shows that Sheffield is a centre of excellence for health. The hon. Gentleman need not look only to the health authority chief executive; he can ask the patients. A recent survey by Sheffield university showed that 95 per cent. of patients surveyed were either satisfied or very satisfied with the service that they were receiving at the Northern General hospital trust —an impressive result.

The hon. Gentleman particularly asked about weighted capitation. He will know that the health service has an excellent settlement this year, with an additional £2·2 billion for the regions—an increase of 8·9 per cent., or 4·2 per cent. in real terms. Weighted capitation is expected to be a more equitable system of distribution, taking account of the young and the elderly. The precise allocation of resources within the region is a matter for the hon. Gentleman's regional health authority chairman, but I know that he will have confidence in the excellent work taking place in Sheffield, particularly in the light of its new health strategy.

Mr. Roger King: Will my hon. Friend suggest that hospitals in the Sheffield health authority area considering trust status should visit the Walsall trust hospital in the west midlands, where they will discover that in the first three months of this year 1,100 more patients were treated than in the year before—a 13 per cent. increase? Is not that evidence that hospital trusts work?

Mrs. Bottomley: If the citizens of Sheffield needed to go to Walsall, I am sure that they would do so, but they need look only to their own trust to see the remarkable progress already made. It has six more consultants, a new computerised axial tomography scanner, new plastic surgery beds and an additional surgical ward. I am delighted that in Walsall, as in the other trusts around the country, more patients are being treated more effectively and morale is good. The trusts are a great success.

Local Authority Social Services

9. **Mr. Lofthouse:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the provision of local authority social services under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Local authorities provide a range of social services under section 2 of the Act, including assistance in the home, meals, equipment and adaptations, telephones, holidays and recreational facilities.

Mr. Lofthouse: Why are the Government preventing local authorities from providing adequate services for the chronically sick and disabled? Is the Minister aware that if the Wakefield district council social services department had to stick to its standard spending assessment it would have to save a further £3 million this year on services for the chronically sick and disabled? Is she further aware that, like myself, each weekend many hon. Members meet many chronically sick and disabled constituents who are not receiving adequate services to enable them to lead a reasonable and respectable life? What do the Government intend to do about that?

Mrs. Bottomley: I am pleased to be able to report to the hon. Gentleman that we have just had the first results of the monitoring arrangements for the implementation of community care and we are impressed with the practical schemes already being advanced to ensure that the frail and vulnerable, and particularly the chronically sick and disabled, receive the support that they need. The hon. Gentleman will want to know that during the past two years personal social services standard spending will have increased by nearly 33 per cent.—19 per cent. in real terms —which is more than adequate to allow for demography and renewed pressures on local authorities.

Mr. Thurnham: Does my hon. Friend agree that voluntary groups and private providers can efficiently deliver services for the disabled? Will she instruct local authorities not to use all the extra funds for their own union-dominated monopoly services, so beloved by the Opposition?

Mrs. Bottomley: There is little doubt that the work undertaken by the voluntary sector, and often by the independent sector, is of an extremely high quality. It is vital that local authority social services departments do not use the additional resources for a job creation scheme for their own staff. They are required to identify the best way of helping the frail and vulnerable and in many cases that will be by using the voluntary or the independent sector.

Mr. Wigley: Does the Minister accept that those vitally important services that she described depend not only on her own Department, but on the Department of Social Services, on the Department of the Environment in respect of local government, on the Scottish Office and on the Welsh Office? Given the importance of those services from 1993, in the context of care in the community, will the Minister undertake an in-depth review to ensure adequate budgets for those services to ensure that there is no shortfall thereafter?

Mrs. Bottomley: I greatly respect the hon. Gentleman's comments. If the individual is to receive a seamless service, effective co-operation at local level is essential to ensure that the frail and vulnerable receive help from suitable services and health authorities, with the assistance of housing authorities. We in central Government are taking strenuous steps to make sure that we work effectively; similarly, it is vital that local and health authorities, together with general practitioners, make sure that they are ready for April 1993.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does my hon. Friend the Minister agree that while Britain has the highest proportion of health costs funded by the public purse, the British public have shown their confidence in it by the fact that only 13 per cent. of them choose private treatment, compared with 25 per cent. in France, and 28 per cent. in Germany? *[Interruption.]* Will Opposition Members kindly keep quiet?

Mrs. Bottomley: Once again, my hon. Friend identifies a vital point about public confidence in our national health service, which stems from the Government's investment in and support for it. My hon. Friend need ask only one question. If she or any of her friends become unwell anywhere else in the world, what would they do? They would make their way back home as fast as they could to receive the benefits of national health service treatment.

Mr. Alfred Morris: How many disabled people, after being assessed for services under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1979, are now on waiting lists for the help that they need? At the latest date for which the Minister has figures, how many local authorities had reduced or removed services in cases where there was no diminution of need? How does the Minister react to the case, of which I have informed her right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, in which home help provision was withdrawn from an elderly couple, both of whom are severely and progressively disabled?

Mrs. Bottomley: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that there has been a steady and substantial increase in resources for all kinds of community care—be it day places for the mentally ill or for those with learning disabilities, or increased resources for home help. The right hon. Gentleman identified the way in which some home help services have been moving towards home care services. We are looking at that, but to suggest that there has been other than a clear and steady increase in available services would be a travesty of the truth.

NHS Expenditure

10. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health by how much spending on the national health service *(a)* in England and *(b)* in the United Kingdom will increase in 1992-93.

Mr. Waldegrave: Total NHS spending is forecast to increase by £2·2 billion in England and by £2·8 billion in the United Kingdom next year. That means that, throughout the United Kingdom, the national health service will be spending roughly £100 million per day.

Mr. Day: Is my right hon. Friend aware that the shadow Chancellor said recently that to repair what he unjustifiably called the Government's neglect of the national health service would require an extra £2 billion in this year's autumn statement? Given that an extra £2·8

billion was found, has my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State received an apology from the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), or have any of Labour's Front-Bench spokesmen for health offered to withdraw that allegation?

Mr. Waldegrave: I wrote a number of letters to Labour's spokesman on such matters, asking him to clarify Labour's spending pledges. Some months later, he is still working on the reply, but doubtless I shall receive it sooner or later. Labour's spending pledges are in an equal muddle to its policy position, which was described, in two separate *New Statesman and Society* articles last week and this week as being meaningless.

Mr. Eastham: Is the not Secretary of State continuously presenting a distorted view when he tries to convince the House that the Government are spending more on the national health service? Is it not a fact that with 560,000 people reaching the age of 65 this year and the elderly accounting for a larger proportion of the population, national health service provision is proportionately poorer, not better?

Mr. Waldegrave: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. His difficulty is that his party has nothing to tell him about what it would spend if it were returned to power, which it will not be. That lack of leadership makes it difficult for him to do other than cavil at our figures. I sympathise with him.

Competitive Tendering

11. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the latest estimate of the savings from competitive tendering in the national health service.

Mr. Dorrell: Total annual savings from competitive tendering of NHS ancillary services in the United Kingdom now amount to £156 million.

Mr. Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that the abolition of competitive tendering and the introduction of a national minimum wage would rob the NHS of hundreds of millions of pounds and would lead to the closure of hospitals and the cancellation of operations? Would not such a course of action be as successful as the racing tips of the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook)?

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Labour party is not committed to any specific increase in health service expenditure, but it is committed to a specific cut in the proportion of NHS expenditure used for patient care. My hon. Friend correctly identifies that, and the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) will have a difficult task explaining it to patients who would not be treated if his policies were implemented.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 3 December.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Carrington: Is my right hon. Friend aware that in my constituency Labour-controlled Hammersmith and Fulham council keeps many of its council houses and flats empty? Does he agree that the most effective action that could be taken to end homelessness would be if Labour-controlled London councils brought back into use the many thousands of empty homes under their control?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a valid point and I share his concern about homelessness. For that reason, we are spending more than £100 million over the next three years to provide accommodation for young single people. The Government's initiatives on rough sleeping are having a marked effect on the problem in London.

Mr. Hattersley: Is the Prime Minister aware that doctors working in the health service have said today that his promise to cut waiting lists to two years can be achieved only if desperately ill patients sacrifice their beds to less serious cases who have waited longer? Is he prepared to sanction such manipulation of waiting lists?

The Prime Minister: I have not seen that comment by doctors, but I assure the right hon. Gentleman that that is not the situation. Long waiting lists are falling fast. Since March 1990, the number of patients waiting more than two years has come down by 47 per cent.—a substantial reduction—and the number waiting longer than one year has reduced by a quarter.

Mr. Hattersley: During the day, doctors from Nottingham University hospital and Chase Farm hospital Enfield have said that they can meet the target only if seriously ill patients are sacrificed. Is the Prime Minister prepared to abandon the target or the seriously ill patients?

The Prime Minister: There is no question of abandoning the seriously ill patients. For that reason, we have expanded expenditure on the health service, increased the number of medical staff and introduced initiatives to cut waiting lists. All those are practical methods, all of them are working, and all of them are delivering better health care and will deliver faster health care.

Mr. Hattersley: The Prime Minister's wilful refusal to answer a specific question demonstrates the underlying truth of the Government's health service policy: they are interested in public relations, not patient care. No wonder the people of this country know that the health service is not safe in their hands.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is talking nonsense on stilts, and he knows it.

Mr. McAllion: Is the Prime Minister aware of the survey published yesterday by the housing charity, Shelter, which revealed that on every working day in Scotland last year 84 children became homeless because the Government had failed to invest enough in decent, affordable rented housing? Is he not ashamed that so many children have been thrown on to the streets of Scotland while he has been Prime Minister? Will he now do something about it by calling a general election and making way for a Labour Government committed to ridding this country of the Tory scourge of homelessness?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman would do well to recall that the policies of so many Labour

authorities leaving properties empty and voids untreated which significantly adds to the level of homelessness; until those Labour authorities operate properly with their housing resources, they will not make inroads into the housing problem.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I inadvertently called two hon. Members from the same side.

Q2. **Mr. Franks:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 3 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Franks: Will the Prime Minister state clearly and concisely that, irrespective of the place or the audience or the day of the week, he has but one policy for the fourth Trident submarine—to build it, equip it and send it to sea armed for the nation's defence? Will he find time to read recent *Official Reports* of debates and questions in the House where he will find "We will build a boat", "We won't build a boat" and "We will build a boat but it will have no weapons", all of which is official Labour party policy?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to confirm the Government's commitment to Trident, as so frequently set out in this House. As my hon. Friend makes clear, there is no comparable commitment from the Opposition, whose polices on defence vary from day to day.

Q4. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 3 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Cran: Is my right hon. Friend aware that a senior Japanese industrialist has made it clear that if the European Community adopts the social action programme it will be committing industrial suicide? That being so, will my right hon. Friend give the House a commitment that he will not give way on that in the discussions next week? Does he also agree that the European Community should be an evolutionary community, not a revolutionary one?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right to say that we live in an increasingly competitive environment and that much in the social action programme would damage that competitiveness within the European Community—to the interests of the Japanese, the United States and our other competitors. I confirm to my hon. Friend that I am not prepared to see our competitiveness lost in that manner.

Mr. Wallace: I congratulate the Prime Minister on the fact that at long last common sense prevailed and he was prepared to meet the Dalai Lama of Tibet. Can he give any indication of whether at that meeting he expressed the British Government's support for the United Nations human rights sub-commission report in relation to the expressions of concern about the violations of human rights in Tibet, and what proposals did he make to help the many thousands who have been refugees from Tibet in the past 30 years?

The Prime Minister: The substantive part of my discussion with the Dalai Lama was specifically concerned with human rights—most notably, though not exclusively, in Tibet. We discussed the present situation and the representations that we had made to the People's Republic of China, and I reaffirmed the fact that I would continue to make such representations.

Q4. **Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 3 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bottomley: As this is "Youth and Parliament" day, led by the British Youth Council, would my right hon. Friend recognise the importance of investing in the young, overcoming unnecessary disadvantages such as handicap, and giving them the opportunity to contribute fully to a better future for the country?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend. Perhaps the most striking expression of the changed opportunities for young people is the increasing number now going into higher education. In 1979 it was one in eight—today it is one in four, and in the future, under the plans now projected, it will be an even higher percentage.

Mr. Vaz: Will the Prime Minister reflect on the continued hardship and anxiety facing depositors, creditors and former members of staff of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International? Will he join me today in thanking the Sheikh of Abu Dhabi for his recent proposals which form part of the crucial negotiations that are taking place? Will he for the first time publicly endorse those negotiations and wish them well? Will he ensure that his Ministers are actively involved in getting the best possible settlement for those who have suffered and who are the real victims of this awful tragedy?

The Prime Minister: We have repeatedly made it clear that we wish depositors to get back as much of their money as possible. I am pleased with the improvements evident from the negotiations that have taken place. As the hon. Gentleman will know, the recent adjournment is to allow the provisional liquidator to formalise details of the compensation package that he has been negotiating with the Government of Abu Dhabi. That is proceeding and I welcome it. I hope that it will reach a satisfactory conclusion and remove the substantial problem that it has laid over the lives of so many former customers of that bank.

Q5. **Mr. Speller:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 3 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Speller: On our way to the single market, is it not time to give a healthy nudge to the metrication programme so as to enable our manufacturers and exporters to compete more fairly with our continental rivals?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, there will be a similar system by the end of 1994, which I believe will bring substantial advantages for industry.

Mr. Enright: Will the Prime Minister explain what attitude he intends to take at Maastricht to co-operation on development issues, and what practical result that will have?

The Prime Minister: We are content to develop on a co-operative basis a whole range of policies. Where we often have great difficulty with Community proposals is when co-operation is replaced not by agreement but by majority voting on issues of concern to us.

Q6. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 3 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Evennett: Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the Secretary of State for Education and Science on devising tests for seven-year-olds which go back to the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic? Will he further commend the Secretary of State for pushing on with the tests, despite the opposition of the National Union of Teachers, the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats? The parents of this country will welcome those tests most warmly.

The Prime Minister: I believe that my hon. Friend is right. We are concerned primarily about the quality of education and for that reason I very much welcome the tests. Testing is a crucial part of ensuring that we know what quality of education our young people are achieving, so that if a satisfactory level is not reached, appropriate action can be taken.

Mr. James Lamond: Is the Prime Minister fully aware of the importance for many industries in this country, including the textile industry, of a successful outcome of the GATT negotiations? Is he aware that the negotiations have been going on for five years, that we must have a replacement for the multi-fibre arrangement that will enable our textiles to penetrate the markets of countries which do not allow any textiles in and those with tariffs of 200 per cent., and that even the United States has a tariff of 36 per cent. on British wool cloth? Unless those tariffs are diminished our textile industry will have a tough time, and more jobs will be lost.

The Prime Minister: I share the hon. Gentleman's view of the importance of GATT and of all aspects of the negotiations. In recent weeks, I have had the opportunity of discussing the matter not only in the United States but with a number of colleagues in the European Community. It is clear that both sides will have to make concessions to reach a satisfactory GATT conclusion. It is to be hoped that that will happen before the end of the year.

Q7. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 3 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Greenway: Bearing in mind Britain's good marine conservation record, will my right hon. Friend join some of us in the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, with a view to saving thousands of whales and dolphins from drift nets, from so-called scientific whaling and from industrial pollution? I have a form here, it will cost my right hon. Friend £5 or £10 to join, and I invite him to do so.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes me an irresistible offer. I have much sympathy with the aims that he set out. The Government have taken a strong lead in international forums to restrict the use of drift nets and to increase the safeguards for whales.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing: In the context of the Prime Minister's duties in the House, will he advise us whether he will stay to listen to the statement by the Secretary of State for Scotland? Is the Prime Minister aware that the allocation of trust status to hospitals in Scotland is against the general and political will of the people there? Will he therefore spell ou. what he decides is democracy in Scotland? It seems that the Secretary of State for Scotland is to ride roughshod over the views of elected members at district, regional and parliamentary level.

The Prime Minister: I shall not be present for the statement because I have a series of meetings with hon. Members immediately after Question Time.

Q8. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 3 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Bruce: Does my right hon. Friend agree that many people who choose to work more than 48 hours per week, and who thereby earn overtime and give greater security to their families, would be most upset if an edict from Brussels took the right to work such overtime away from them, especially as hon. Members would be excluded from the rules, as would the bureaucrats in Europe and all managers and executives?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. Friend on that point. It goes wider than just the position of individuals, important though that is. It also covers the competitiveness of British industry and commerce, a point to which I referred some moments ago. If we were to have to suffer all the rigours of the directive to which my hon. Friend refers, it would cost employers substantial sums —billions of pounds—in the next year.

NHS Trusts (Scotland)

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang) *rose——*

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I will take points of order afterwards.

Mr. Lang: With permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a statement about NHS trust applications in Scotland.

As the House is aware, applications for NHS trust status in Scotland have been submitted on behalf of the Foresterhill group of hospitals in Aberdeen, the Royal Scottish National hospital at Larbert and the South Ayrshire group of hospitals. Statutory public consultations have been carried out and I am grateful to all those who responded. I have carefully considered all the comments submitted and I have today written to the sponsors of the applications separately, setting out my decisions. Copies of the letters have been placed in the Library.

In all three cases, the responses to the public consultation revealed concern that trusts might not be part of the NHS and that services might be fragmented. Those concerns are misplaced. The position, as the Government have repeatedly made clear, is that trusts will remain part of the national health service. Services will continue as at present to be free at the point of delivery. Trusts will operate in a framework in which health boards will be required to fulfil their statutory obligations to cater for the health needs of all those in their areas. Bearing that in mind, I have closely examined the three proposals and the comments that they have attracted, in accordance with the published criteria which included the likely effect on patient care, the competence of the management teams, including involvement in management of senior professional staff, and the financial viability of the hospitals concerned.

Taking Foresterhill first, a recurring comment in the responses to the trust proposal alluded to the contribution that individuals have made to the development of hospital care in Aberdeen over very many decades. I fully understand that and I recognise the justifiable pride which people in Grampian have in the services provided and in the developments which have taken place in conjunction with the medical school. None of that, for reasons that I have already explained, is put in jeopardy by the trust proposal. Indeed, I am satisfied that the proposed trust, operating from a sound financial basis, with a management team, including clinicians, possessing a proven track record, and with sound proposals for improving facilities, offers a great opportunity to build on the already high reputation for patient care which the hospitals enjoy. I have therefore decided to grant the application.

Hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Lang: I turn to south Ayrshire. The sponsors of the trust proposal see the new Ayr hospital as providing an excellent opportunity for further enhancing the quality of services provided in south Ayrshire. I am sure that they are right. I am satisfied that the proposals for NHS trust status for the south Ayrshire group of hospitals also meet the criteria which I have outlined, and in particular that they will secure benefits for patients and an improved quality of service. Again, therefore, I have decided to grant the application.

Finally, there is the application from the Royal Scottish National hospital at Larbert. The hospital serves people with a mental handicap. It has been suggested during the consultation period that, because of the vulnerability of that group, the hospital would not be an appropriate candidate for trust status. I do not accept that proposition. NHS trust status is about providing a means for improving care. I see no reason why that should be denied to those hospitals serving the mentally ill or people with a mental handicap.

As with Foresterhill and South Ayrshire, I am satisfied not only that the RSNH is financially viable but that significant benefits for improved patient care will flow from trust status. It is also clear to me that, on past performance, the management are well able to take forward the changes in a very difficult area of health care.

However, the proposals arise at a time when we are beginning to put in place the policy of care in the community, as enunciated in our White Paper "Caring for People". Work on the development of joint planning between local authorities and health boards and the preparation of individual care plans has begun. But more activity on those fronts is expected in the coming months. The resources of the RSNH management team may not be sufficient to cope with the additional administrative burden of implementing simultaneously "Caring for People" and the immediate transition to trust status. Consequently, I have decided, in granting the application, that the start-up date will be April 1993.

To sum up, I have concluded that all three applications will lead to improved patient care; that all three will have the required management, including clinician participation, to operate free of health board control and that all three are sufficiently robust financially. I shall therefore be bringing forward shortly the necessary orders to establish trusts at Foresterhill and South Ayrshire in April 1992 and at the Royal Scottish National hospital in April 1993.

The three units face a challenge, but one which offers the promise of improved patient care in their areas. Whatever political differences exist on policy, I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House will wish to offer them every support in that endeavour.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): There is no justification for what the Secretary of State is doing. Foresterhill, the South Ayrshire general hospital and the Royal Scottish National hospital should not be forced out of the main stream of the health service. It is a betrayal —a victory for prejudice over common sense. The Secretary of State has toed his party's line but undermined confidence in the health service. He is once more distancing himself from the people of Scotland.

The Secretary of State claims that opting out is in the best interests of patients. On what does he base that claim? Does he know better than doctors, nurses and the other health service staff whose life work has been delivering the service? Does the Secretary of State remember the response of the Grampian area medical committee, which

expressed concern that the additional resources consumed by the trust will put at risk priority specialties such as psychiatry, geriatric medicine and physical disability?

The Secretary of State claims that the basis of opting out is to make hospitals more responsive to the local community. How can that be so when today's diktat is a contemptuous dismissal of the community's united protest? Did the right hon. Gentleman not canvass in Kincardine and Deeside? How does he reconcile today's announcement with the fact that consultants voted against the opt-out scheme by 87 votes to two in Foresterhill and by 50 to nine in South Ayrshire?

Is it not reducing consultation to the level of farce when the responses to the consultation, together with the polling evidence, show overwhelming opposition? In Ayrshire this July, Systems Three found that four out of five of those polled were strongly opposed to the scheme. In Grampian, 80 per cent. of general practitioners gave it the thumbs down.

Does the right hon. Gentleman recall the promise of Bill Fyfe, chair of the Ayrshire and Arran health board:

"the decision rests and has always rested with the hospital doctors. It cannot be otherwise: self governing will happen only with the doctors' approval and only if they are convinced that patients will benefit."

I do not mourn for Mr. Fyfe, but is he to be branded a dishonest man because of the Government's insensitivity in railroading through these unwanted applications?

Just a fortnight ago, on 14 November, Councillor Mike Hastie, who is the Tory leader on Aberdeen district council, was reported as saying that he could not believe that the Government would now push through the measures. In his view—I quote him precisely—

"it would be an act of sheer folly and I do not believe Mr. Lang is capable of that."

He knows better now.

Does the Minister not recognise the dangers of fragmenting the health service and destroying the planning framework; the cost of ever-increasing bureaucracy; the reduction in choice for the doctor; the fear that this is a road that leads to a two-tier system in which money comes first and the Health Service is relegated to a safety-net, fallback provision?

In detail, will the Minister give the capital debt figure that will have to be shouldered by these three hospitals? What percentage of this, in each case, is public dividend capital and what percentage interest-bearing debt? Will he announce now the external financing limit for each hospital? Is he satisfied that the complications arising from the ownership of a large part of the Foresterhill site by Aberdeen university have been overcome?

It is a disgrace that the Royal Scottish National hospital at Larbert is included in this misbegotten scheme. A hospital dealing with the mentally handicapped is by no stretch of the imagination a candidate for the market mechanism. The postponement to 1993 simply to await the Government's belated funding of community care will overcome none of the difficulties.

Finally, may I make it unambiguously clear that Labour will reverse the decisions on these three hospitals announced today and will do so immediately after the general election? The policy is fundamentally wrong. It commands no support and will damage the Health Service. This is vandalism, all the more wounding because it is authorised by the Secretary of State who is supposed to protect Scotland's interests. The scheme will not survive this Government, and will, indeed, contribute to their downfall.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) has not had the advantage that I have had of studying these applications with very great care, and it is quite clear that he has not addressed the issue in any great substance. He talks about the hospitals being forced out of the main stream of the Health Service. That is precisely the kind of distortions and misleading implications that he and his party have placed upon this exercise throughout the consultation process, which have led to so many people misunderstanding what it is all about.

It is hardly surprising that the national opinion poll carried out in Aberdeen showed that 75 per cent. of the people asked thought that it was about privatisation, and that in Ayrshire a Systems Three poll showed 74 per cent. thought that it was about privatisation or opting out of the health service, because the Labour party was putting about pamphlets saying such things as

"Now the Government is forcing our hospitals to opt out of the NHS."

That is simply not true. We are not forcing them out of the NHS; they will remain in the NHS, and the services will remain free at the point of delivery. Indeed, I am persuaded that the central criteria against which I have had to measure these applications will be met, and that patient care will be advanced very considerably. Greater autonomy and greater local flexibility, greater local ownership and decision making, will be of advantage to the hospitals which are receiving trust status.

The hon. Gentleman asked me about the degree of support from medical staff. In the case of Foresterhill, all the main clinical departments have given their support to the proposal—a proposal that has been drawn up by a multidisciplinary team. In the case of Larbert, there has been support for the application from the Institute of Health Services Management, the Forth Valley college of nursing and midwifery and the National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting. In the case of South Ayrshire, there has been support from a majority of consultants in general surgery, orthopaedics and radiology. As for fragmenting the health service, that is not true. When the hon. Gentleman reflects on the fact that 97 per cent. of the services of the trusts will be purchased by the health boards he will see how self-evident is the nonsense that he talks about fragmentation.

The hon. Gentleman talked about a two-tier system. I have been looking at the Labour party document for health in Scotland, "A Prescription for Change". It says that Labour will

"continue devolution of management to unions within health boards."

It will "devolve budgets"—[HON. MEMBERS: "To units."] Yes, to units. It will

"devolve budgets to units, giving them a significant measure of control over their own finances. The budget will be flexed in order to take account of work done."

If we are contemplating a two-tier service, so is the Labour party. The fact is that we are contemplating not a two-tier health service but a better health service. These proposals will help to achieve it.

Mr. George Younger (Ayr): Is my right hon. Friend aware——

Hon. Members: Is he a Member?

Mr. Speaker: Order. He is a former Secretary of State.

Mr. Younger: Is my right hon. Friend aware that in Ayrshire we are extremely proud of the new hospital which was built from start to finish within five years, a record for anywhere in the country? We expect it to produce even better services in the future. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that his announcement today means that the hospital will be under more local management than it was? Will he confirm also that it will remain entirely within the national health service and that anyone who needs treatment will get it, as now, free of charge?

In contrast to the irresponsible and negative remarks of the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), whose responsibility in his party for destroying the consultation process is well known, will my right hon. Friend confirm that, in future, the objective of the new hospital will be to produce even better services? He can be assured, if that is so, that even those who disagreed with his decision will work together to make it a great success.

Mr. Lang: I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend. I agree entirely with absolutely every point that he has made so effectively. Among the benefits to patients that will be derived from trust status for south Ayrshire, I envisage the improved use of facilities, mainly theatres, enhancing cost-effectiveness, increasing throughput and reducing waiting times, upgrading the facilities at Ballochmyle and Biggart, as well as investment, for example, in a CAT scanner and a short-stay surgical unit, and perhaps in the longer-term investment in phase 2 being brought forward.

Those are some of the improvements that can be looked forward to at South Ayrshire under trust status. I entirely share my right hon. Friend's view that we are concerned about improving health care and benefits to patients, which I believe trust status at South Ayrshire will achieve.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Will the Secretary of State accept that there are those of us who have never made the point that trust status is about opting out of the national health service, but have said that it is about local accountability and the views of local people? Is it not also about turning a caring service into a business? Is not the Secretary of State misrepresenting the consultation process when he denounces the people who have submitted representations? Indeed, all the consultants, doctors, local health councils and general practitioners have expressed their opposition.

Does not the Secretary of State recognise that there is no confidence in the community in the type of managers he proposes to put in control of the trusts? He knows that they are regarded simply as Tory party stooges put there to do a job on behalf of central office rather than to represent the interests of the people. Will he accept that in a democracy, when people say no, they mean no?

Mr. Lang: That was an uncharacteristic and, I have to assume, an unintended attack by the hon. Gentleman on the present management qualities of the Foresterhill group of hospitals. I have a high regard for Foresterhill and what it has achieved in the last few years under this Government. The aims of the trust will be to build on the achievements, to become more responsive, to build a closer local link with the community and closer links with the health councils and with the GPs, to upgrade wards and facilities in the hospital, to upgrade theatres and equipment and to build on the success of recent years. Of course, it is about greater and more local accountability and greater flexibility—we have that in common—and that is what the trust will deliver. I am confident that the quality of the people who will be running it will be excellent.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Is the Secretary of State aware that his scandalous decision will be greeted by outrage not only in Aberdeen and the surrounding area by everyone connected with the medical and caring professions but by everyone right across the political spectrum in the north-east of Scotland, including the hapless Marcus Humphrey? Is he aware that his information is totally wrong and that nothing in the application shows that patient care and services will improve under the trusts? Is he not aware that every specialty at the Foresterhill site, with the exception of laboratory services, voted overwhelmingly to reject the trust? Is it not the case that the right hon. Gentleman's delay in coming to the House to announce his decision is because, when he looked at the facts, he was minded to reject the application but was told by the puppet master sitting next to him that he had to make a political decision?

Mr. Lang: I have taken the decision to approve the trusts. It was my decision. I was required to take it in accordance with the published criteria. When I was considering the applications from Foresterhill and others, I made it clear that I would not approve an application unless I was personally persuaded that the criteria would be met. I regard the most important criterion as an improvement in the delivery of patient care by the hospital in question. After the closest and most detailed scrutiny, I am absolutely persuaded that that will be achieved. I am perfectly happy to be judged on the performance of those trusts in the years ahead—[HON. MEMBERS: "You will be."] Indeed, I intend to remain very close to the development of the trust and to its inception on 1 April to ensure that all that has been promised will be delivered.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the structure of the health service in Scotland is somewhat different from that in England and Wales, and that our area health boards are very much closer to the hospital management than is the case elsewhere? How has my right hon. Friend come to judge the weight of opinion between those who wish to stay but to move forward into an area of ever better care in those hospitals against those who want a move into a future of some uncertainty?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The health boards in Scotland are very close to the hospitals, which is why I set considerable store by the approval that had been granted to the applications by the Grampian health board in the case of Foresterhill and by the Ayrshire and Arran health board in the case of South Ayrshire. Their approval and commendation of the applications has featured in my consideration.

My hon. Friend talked about the future, but we do not need to look into the crystal ball when we can read the book. Some hospitals south of the border already have trust status. In Yeovil, in the constituency of the leader of the Liberal Democratic party, the number of patients waiting for more than 12 months has been reduced by 45 per cent., and the total waiting list is down by 10 per cent.

Since April, that trust has received 53 letters of complaint and 1,344 letters of praise. I look forward to a comparable result for trust-status hospitals in Scotland.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): Does not the Secretary of State understand that the people in the Forth Valley health board area will greet his decision with great dismay, especially the families of the mentally handicapped patients in that hospital, who do not have a vote, could not be consulted and who are now greatly exercised by the prospect of being cast into the free market system? Does not the right hon. Gentleman realise that there will be outrage tonight in my constituency and in that of my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) at his betrayal of the trust that has been placed in that hospital by the people in its care?

Mr. Lang: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is wrong, because the consultants and management were unanimous in their support for trust status for Larbert. The possible developments that the trust could achieve include more emphasis on research, on training and education, on challenging behaviour, and on autism and brain damage. The trust contemplates many benefits for patients, including continuing the systematic assessments and the reductions in institutional accommodation, and has plans to break up the large wards and to increase the staff-patient ratio. Does the hon. Gentleman really want to set his face against the improvements that trust status could deliver?

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): How on earth can the Secretary of State justify his disgraceful decisions, particularly on the Royal Scottish National hospital in my constituency, where the application for trust status was opposed by virtually the entire community, the patients' relatives association and 96 per cent. of the staff? Is the Secretary of State so arrogant that he thinks that he knows better than the people who are actively involved in the care of the mentally handicapped? Is he so politically inept that he virtually signals to the people of Scotland that the only thing which will stop this arrant nonsense is the next general election, when he and his cronies will be swept out of power and the interests of patients will be put before political dogma?

Mr. Lang: If the hon. Gentleman sincerely believed that, he would not show so much artificial outrage. He ignores the views of the managers and consultants in the health service. I can understand why some in the medical profession express anxiety. They understand the status quo and do not like the uncertainty of change. There was a similar reaction when we reformed GP contracts, but now, with experience of the contracts, that anxiety is disappearing. There was anxiety about the terms and conditions of future employment. I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that the terms and conditions of junior doctors will continue to be negotiated nationally.

I see for Larbert the prospect of all the changes that I outlined in answer to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar). If I did not believe that those changes would benefit patients, I would not have approved the application.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his decisions on these hospitals will be remembered by many? As on so many of the decisions taken in the past 12 years, such as the sale of council houses and other matters which the Opposition opposed, they have had to change their tune. They will do so on NHS trusts, with the passage of time. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that he will look equally thoroughly and carefully at any proposals from hospitals in Tayside?

Mr. Lang: Yes, I will. Indeed, other hospitals have expressed interest in growing and developing. I expect further applications to come in during the next year and, with time, a growing number of applications as the benefits are seen to come through.

Mr. George Foulkes Carrick (Cumnock and Doon Valley): Did not Donald MacNeill, the chief executive-designate of the South Ayrshire trust, give the game away last week when he compared trust hospitals with "those remaining within the mainstream NHS"? Is that not the truth? Are not trusts the first step towards privatisation? Will the Secretary of State confirm that there were 226 submissions in Ayrshire, 215 of which were against trust status, including 33 from medical, nursing and professional organisations? Why does he arrogate to himself the claim to know more about patient care than all those professionals? Is he not handing over public assets to a few of his Conservative cronies? That amounts to legalised theft and corruption.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman is characteristically over the top. I do not arrogate to myself a knowledge superior to that of the professionals, but I have had imposed on me the obligation to exercise a quasi-judicial function in assessing applications. I have done that after the most careful scrutiny. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the number of submissions. I have had more submissions than he said about South Ayrshire, but mostly they were tear-out strips from newspapers and from people who had been——

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): That is a lie!

Mr. Speaker: Order. I say to the hon. Gentleman, who is an Opposition Front Bench spokesman, that he must withdraw that comment.

Mr. Wilson: But it is true.

Mr. Speaker: In this Chamber we keep our standards. "Lie" is an unparliamentary word.

Mr. Wilson: The statement of fact is that there were 226 submissions——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am not interested in that. Will the hon. Member withdraw that allegation?

Mr. Wilson: I want the opportunity to state the fact, in which case I will withdraw the statement.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman might have listened to what I said. I said that there had been substantially more submissions than the number he gave. The figure that I have is about 800 submissions, but most of them were tear-out strips from newspapers. I expect that the people who made them were influenced by the Labour party's "Standard No. 17", which was circulated among people in the area. It said:

"What would opting out mean? It would mean our new South Ayrshire hospital leaving the NHS as we know it and would pave the way for a two-tier health service in Ayrshire."

[Mr. Lang]

It is precisely that type of distortion—misleading and alarming people—that has led to the public reaction. The trouble is that too many people in the Labour party are more concerned with scaring than with caring.

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): The people of Ayrshire will be bitterly disappointed by the Secretary of State's announcement from the Dispatch Box. However, they will not be surprised, because they know that, from the beginning, the consultative process has been an absolute rigged farce. It was undemocratic and the Government were not telling the truth when they said that they would look at all the submissions in a fair and honest manner. At least the Under-Secretary of State had the guts to say that at the Dispatch Box.

Putting aside the postcards that were sent to the Secretary of State, how many of the 226 written submissions were of the quality that he desired? Perhaps the five, six or seven which were in favour of trust status. The Labour party will win the next election. The South Ayrshire hospital will revert to its previous status. Managers of trust hospitals will be judged on their ability to manage and not as apparatchiks of a political dogma.

Mr. Lang: It is the ability of the proposed applicants to manage the trusts which has been borne in mind among the criteria that I have had to consider. As I said earlier, we are also able to look at the successes being achieved by other trust status hospitals elsewhere. In Kingston, for example, the list of those waiting more than 12 months has been reduced by 77 per cent. and 1,600 more patients were treated than was planned. In the Northern General hospital NHS trust, six new consultants have been appointed this year and 95 per cent. of patients surveyed are either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the service provided. That is my ambition for trust status hospitals in Scotland, and that is what I believe that we shall achieve.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Does the Secretary of State for Scotland remember that on 16 March, in an interview published in *The Press and Journal (Aberdeen)*, he said that the option for trust status existed if the local will were in favour? How on earth does he now reconcile that statement with the fact that he has ignored submissions from wherever they may have come, be it consultants or pensioners, GPs or the disabled, the elected district or regional councillors or Members of Parliament? Is it the case that he merely dismisses those submissions with which he does not agree and proceeds in an autocratic fashion?

How on earth is it that, in London, where teaching hospitals are so highly regarded, the issue of trust status has been postponed indefinitely, but in Foresterhill a key teaching hospital is being asked to take trust status? How much money has his Department spent in conjunction with the health board on those applications? How much money is being spent on future applications? How many are in the pipeline and how many are on his desk?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Lady will find the answer to her question about expenditure in a written answer which has been published in *Hansard*. She referred to some applications in London with which she is especially preoccupied. I have responsibility for assessing applications in Scotland. I have assessed each application individually on its merits, carefully, against published criteria. It is by comparison with the published criteria and all the information available to me that I have reached a judgment. It would be quite wrong if I were to base my view solely on submissions from members of the public who have been unduly influenced by misleading information from other quarters.

The hon. Lady will know that there is an attractive £60 million new hospital in Elgin—the West Grampian unit—and that may well be among those expressing an interest in trust status in due course. I will give the same careful scrutiny to that application, if it reaches me, as I shall give to applications from Princess Margaret Rose orthopaedic hospital, from Lothian college of nursing, from the Victoria infirmary in Glasgow or from any others which express interest. I am concerned to ensure that we continue to build on our excellent record of improving health care in Scotland.

Mr. Nicol Stephen (Kincardine and Deeside): What view did the Secretary of State take of the outcome of the Kincardine and Deeside by-election in reaching his decision? He will be aware that all five candidates in that by-election were opposed to the Foresterhill opt-out. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that he is creating in Scotland a clear position of elective dictatorship? The situation is opposed by Conservatives in the north-east of Scotland and he is showing contempt for the people of the whole of Scotland. But he is taking one major step forward today, and that is a step towards the cliff of political oblivion for the Conservative party in Scotland.

What is to happen to the land and buildings owned by Aberdeen university on the Foresterhill site? Does the right hon. Gentleman intend to compensate or confiscate?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman raised that final issue as a scare during the by-election campaign—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] The answer is that the ownership will remain the same. The health board's interest will transfer to the trust. No difficulty will arise over that. I must tell the hon. Gentleman that, as a new Member of Parliament, he should be more concerned with the possibility of improving the delivery of health care to his constituents. That is what I am concerned with, and that is how I have measured the application.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the Kincardine and Deeside by-election, in the campaign for which he said in his special health service circular:

> "Opting out is a dangerous first step towards market economics and privatisation of our health service."

I know, and I hope he knows, that that is not true. Indeed, his party leader, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) said;

> "I do not believe that the . . . Government's . . . intention is, or ever has been, to privatise the health service. Indeed, I believe that those who insist on scaremongering have done themselves and the NHS no good by concentrating on the 'privatisation' scare."

If the hon. Gentleman will not listen to me, perhaps he will listen to his party leader.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): Will the Secretary of State now recognise that his unworthy but all too predictable statement that the 226 representations on the south Ayrshire opt-out included newspaper forms was in direct contradiction of veracity? Will he further recognise that his announcement today, while totally predictable—nobody ever believed that a genuine

consultation process was taking place—represents one of the final death knells for the discredited band of brigands who represent the Scottish Conservative party?

Does the right hon. Gentleman appreciate that, in Ayr alone, the Conservative party is already being torn apart? Does he further appreciate that, throughout Ayrshire, people recognise that any additional assets that are poured into the South Ayrshire hospitals to make them work will be at the expense of the national health service in the rest of Ayrshire?

Does the right hon. Gentleman mercifully recognise that none of this will come to pass because, within days of this misguided, ideological order—introduced at the behest of the arch-agent of prejudice sitting beside him, the Minister of State—coming into being, there will be a change of government and none of it will happen? Will he also recognise that I have never believed that there are no Tories in Scotland, for one Tory has spoken for Conservative respectability in Scotland, and he is the hon. Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro)? The further the Government depart from that line, the more their fate is sealed, and the more richly that fate is earned.

Mr. Lang: I give the hon. Gentleman the benefit of the doubt and assume that he did not hear what I said, not once but twice, perhaps because of the noise coming from his hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), seated beside him, who referred to 236 admissions. I said that I had had rather more than that, and I referred to having had about 800, the large majority of which were tear-out newspaper slips, and a large majority of those would have been influenced by the leaflet, the Labour party "Standard", with its misleading, scaremongering, alarmist nonsense.

Surely the hon. Gentleman, as an Ayrshire Member, is interested in a trust that may be able to upgrade the facilities in the hospitals in the trust. Surely he is interested in a trust that is willing to carry out further investment, keen to achieve the further development of a quality programme involving multi-disciplinary, quality action groups. Those are the tangible improvements in health care that can be achieved by trust status. The hon. Gentleman should withhold judgment and hope that I am right, and that we shall succeed in achieving those results.

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that today's statement clearly shows that he is a prisoner of the right wing of his political party, which is responsible for the demise of his party in Scotland? Is he aware that his announcement today is not a triumph for the philosophy of trusts but a blow against democracy, consultation and the will of the people? Does not he realise that, in making his announcement, he has, to some extent, signed his political death warrant?

Mr. Lang: No, I do not, because I believe that the electorate will judge by results and that, even before the trusts are up and running, they will begin to see the benefits that will flow from the trusts. The hon. Gentleman said that my statement was a blow against consultation. There was a three-month thorough consultation period for each specific trust, during which detailed application forms were sent out extensively. In the case of Larbert, they were sent out to every applicant who sought them. I have looked carefully over a period of weeks at those applications, and have reached the view that they deserve to be granted.

I am proud to be a member of a Government who have increased health spending in real terms since 1979 by nearly 40 per cent., treated 900,000 more people in Scotland last year than in the year in which we came into office, increased the number of nurses by more than 9,000 and now pay them 41 per cent. more in real terms than when we came into office. The hon. Gentleman should look back at the Labour party's record in government before he starts to criticise ours.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon South): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on ignoring the scaremongering campaign conducted by Opposition Members? Is he aware that a similar campaign was carried out by the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) against trust hospitals in England, which have now delivered more patient care, cut waiting lists and been innovative in the service that they offer to patients? Is he surprised that the hon. Member for Livingston now spends less time talking about trust hospitals than producing racing tips for the *Glasgow Herald*? Moreover, is not the hon. Gentleman equally bad at both?

Mr. Lang: All I can say on that is that, as regards the delivery of patient care in the areas from which we have received trust applications, we are on to a winner.

My right hon. Friend represents a seat in the south and he will know that the Guy's and Lewisham NHS trust intends to improve the pay of more than 1,200 lower-paid workers by 6 per cent., and that it will treat some 6,000 more patients than planned. There are many other examples of health trusts in England that are already up and running a year ahead of those in Scotland, from whose experience we can benefit. We can draw considerable encouragement from the improved quality of their health care.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): It is interesting that the Secretary of State does not claim that he has a majority of public opinion on his side but merely that the very large majority against trust status was ill informed and listened to Labour propaganda. Can the Minister assure the House that, if a general election goes against his wishes and people cross their ballot papers having been influenced by Labour propaganda, he will accept that result?

Mr. Lang: Of course I will accept an election result, as anyone would. That is rather a silly question on such an important occasion. If Labour Members abandon the trusts, which, from the terminology that I have quoted, are so close to their own policy, would they but acknowledge the fact, it is not the Conservative party that would be the loser but the delivery of patient care in Scotland.

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): Is the Secretary of State aware that his disgraceful announcement will add to the fear in Edinburgh at the suggestion that the Princess Margaret Rose hospital might also be granted trust status? Is he aware that that hospital was threatened with closure because of the Government's underfunding of the service in Lothian and that it now seems to be faced with a choice of closure or opting for trust status? Is it not a measure of the damage that the Government are prepared to inflict on the health service in Lothian that, having closed the internationally famous Longmore hospital, they are now prepared even to close the Princess Margaret Rose?

Mr. Lang: No, the hon. Gentleman is wrong. It is not because the Princess Margaret Rose hospital was threatened with closure. If that were the case, no trust application would be acceptable and none would be considered.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Using his budget, will my right hon. Friend be able to afford to get a bus to take hon. Members down to my constituency in south Dorset to see the results of trust status? Two years ago, I felt exactly the same as my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro) and was worried about the health service policy that we were introducing. It is about time that Scotland saw the results, so that it does not miss the bus on this issue.

Mr. Lang: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend, and I am absolutely sure that we can draw considerable comfort from the experience of hospitals in England. I am also confident that the trust hospitals where applications were approved today will soon be able to demonstrate for themselves the benefits to patients.

Mr. Alistair Darling (Edinburgh, Central): In the light of his announcement this afternoon, will the Secretary of State confirm that any hospital that expresses an interest in opting out will be granted its wish at the end of the day, and it will not matter what the public, doctors, nurses or anyone else thinks? The minute an application is made to opt out, the hospital is as good as opted out. That being the case, will the Secretary of State confirm that the Princess Margaret Rose hospital in Edinburgh will be the next opted-out hospital?

Mr. Lang: No, of course I cannot confirm that, because I have not yet seen an application from that hospital. When I do, I shall first want the view of Lothian health board, which I expect to have investigated the matter thoroughly, and I shall then wish to examine the application myself. I would not wish to deny the people of Edinburgh the benefits of trust status if any application that reached me contained demonstrable advantages.

The hon. Gentleman talks about the lack of medical support. Perhaps he did not hear me state that the heads of all the main clinical departments at Forresterhill hospital have given their support and that, in south Ayrshire, the majority of consultants in general surgery, orthopaedics and radiology have also done so. It is evident from the second wave of applications in England that there is a growing groundswell of support from consultants as they begin to realise the benefits of trust status.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): Does not the Secretary of State realise that his chilling announcement today will send a shiver of fear down the spine of every patient in Scotland and most doctors, nurses and health staff? If he is so confident in the public process, why does he not publish the full business plan, so that we can all see it? Why does he instead take his decisions in the bunker of St. Andrew's house, surrounded by acolytes who do not represent anyone in Scotland?

Mr. Lang: This canard about lack of information has been running throughout the consultation process. Applications have been readily available in great detail, the contracts will be available for public inspection, and the annual accounts of the trusts will be published in the same way as annual accounts of health boards are published. It is nonsense for the hon. Gentleman to claim that he is not getting enough information. The most convincing argument for the hon. Gentleman should lie in the results. I am persuaded that they will improve dramatically and that there will be a continuing flow of good news and benefits for patients from the trust applications.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Will the Secretary of State accept that, whether the decision is right or wrong, there is a strong argument for hastening slowly, so that people can evaluate the optimistic claims that the right hon. Gentleman has made for trusts this afternoon? Therefore, will he give a guarantee that the next wave will be discouraged for at least three to five years, so that the experiments can be properly evaluated?

Mr. Lang: I am sorry about the hon. Gentleman's reluctance to enable the benefits of trust status, if available —as I believe they will be—to flow through to others. The hon. Gentleman can hardly accuse us of moving too fast. First, we are a year behind England; secondly, I am approving two applications for implementation in 1992 and one for implementation in 1993, as compared with 156 or 157 applications that have already been approved in England. That is a sensible pace, which I expect to accelerate. I think that more applications will be submitted as the benefits of trust status become apparent to more people.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): The Secretary of State has told the House that statutory public consultations were carried out in all three of the applications, and that, in three out of three of the consultations, public opinion was totally ignored. On Tayside, local NHS staff and patients, and local people, are totally opposed to a local management proposal to consider allowing Ninewells, Dundee royal infirmary and King's Cross hospitals to opt out of health board control. Since Tayside people now know that their view will be equally ignored by the Government, will the Secretary of State confirm that the only option that remains for Tayside is, at the next general election, to kick out the two remaining Tory Members of Parliament in Tayside who have given him such servile support this afternoon?

Mr. Lang: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is not prepared to consider any possible improvements or changes of any kind to the health service. The reality is that every change that we have introduced in the health service during recent years was attacked or criticised, or caused concern, when it was originally announced. But, step by step, as each of them has been implemented, the benefits have begun to become apparent and are now apparent in increasing numbers, many of which I have already outlined to the House—including the increase in the number of patients treated, shorter waiting lists, more nurses and doctors, better pay and 74 major new hospital developments completed, with 7,500 extra beds, 19 under construction and 18 at the planning stage. That is evidence of our commitment to the health service. Had we not believed that trust status would lead to a genuine advance in patient care, we would not have embarked upon it.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Why does the Secretary of State so flagrantly disregard the principles and good practices of genuine consultation on

matters of this kind? May I remind him that, many months ago, the overwhelming majority of consultants at the Inverclyde royal hospital completely rejected the concept of opting out? Therefore, the right hon. Gentleman's disreputable approach to consultation is not at all welcome on the lower Clyde. If, in the few months left to him, he brings that shabby approach to consultation to the lower Clyde, one result will be the doubling of the majority of my hon. Friend and neighbour the Member for Renfrew, West and Inverclyde (Mr. Graham).

Mr. Lang: What I think is a shabby approach to consultation is to mislead and alarm people with distorting statements printed in party literature, circulated to cause concern, fear and anxiety, and then just to count the number of tear-off slips or pre-printed postcards that have been circulated. Consultation involves weighing as well as counting the advice that is sent in. I have carefully weighed the advice against the published criteria, and I am completely persuaded that the trust applications will improve health care in Scotland. If I had adopted the same closed mind that the Opposition have, the health service, instead of advancing as it has done all these years, would be retreating.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): When the Secretary of State witnessed the stampede of English Tory Members from the Chamber which delayed his statement, was he not embarrassed by the fact that he depends on their votes to ram his policies down the throats of the Scottish people? How can he start a consultation exercise saying that he will abide by the popular will in the north-east of Scotland and end up by ignoring, distorting or rigging the outcome? Does he accept that there is one popular consultation which he will not be able to rig because, long before the damage is done to the hospitals, the political damage to the Secretary of State for Scotland will be terminal?

Mr. Lang: Something that the hon. Gentleman may never learn is that being in government is about taking decisions, making choices and being judged by them. I am willing to be judged by my approval of the applications and by what I believe will be the improved delivery of health care in the north-east of Scotland. I hope that, when that is proved, the hon. Gentleman will be sufficiently embarrassed—to use his word—to come to the House and apologise.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetlands): The Secretary of State did not respond to the request of the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) for the publication of business plans for the various hospitals. Will he secure the publication of the business plan for Foresterhill? Can he confirm the rumours circulating in Grampian and the Isles that some capital sum would be made available to Foresterhill if it opted out? If so, will that money come from other parts of the Scottish health service budget? Does he accept that the court of Aberdeen university has been told that it is not an option for it to carry on as it has done before? Is the right hon. Gentleman deaf to what has been said to him?

Mr. Lang: On the contrary: I have paid great attention and care to what has been said to me. It will be for the trusts to decide what details of their business plans they can publish, but there will understandably be an element of confidentiality.

As to the apportionment of resources, the health board will continue to have the statutory obligation to ensure the delivery of health care in its area. It will enter into a contract with the trust, and I will be responsible for approving the trust's external financing limit. That exercise will be conducted in a responsible and sensible way, to ensure the delivery of improved patient care not only through trust hospitals but in all the other areas for which the health board will remain responsible in Grampian.

Mr. Andrew Faulds (Warley, East) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Was the hon. Gentleman present for the statement?—[HON. MEMBERS: "Yes"] All right—I know.

Mr. Faulds: I am surprised that you, Mr. Speaker, have not heard me in the Chamber.

Mr. Speaker: I have—that is the trouble.

Mr. Faulds: I am most grateful.

Will the Secretary of State attempt to be honest? Will the projected changes have the support of the public in Scotland?

Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Lang: In due course, they will.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. As the hon. and learned Gentleman has listened to the answers, I will call him to put his question.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: Given that I have been branded —within your parliamentary authority, Mr. Speaker—a "brigand" by the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), and as "subservient" by the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion)—which I would not have thought was one of my more obvious characteristics; and having within the authority of the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes)——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. and learned Gentleman surely means within my authority, and I do not want him to be branded with a reputation for being long-winded.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: The hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley suggested that the present bureaucracy was guilty of theft and corruption.

Mr. Foulkes: Correct.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the biggest theft and corruption occurred when bequests to the national health service were spent on things for which they were not bequeathed? Will he tell Opposition Members why he thinks that it is better that money should be spent on the bureaucrats running hospitals and not on those who deserve to receive proper treatment in them?

Mr. Lang: I entirely agree with my hon. and learned Friend's last point. One of the benefits of trust status will be that management will be much closer to the point of delivery and more flexible, and that there will be closer local contact with the community being served. That will reduce bureaucracy and allow more money to go straight to the point of patient care.

Mr. Sam Galbraith (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): The Secretary of State failed to answer several important questions asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), so I will repeat them. What is the originating capital debt of each of the three institutions? What percentage will be interest-bearing debt, and what percentage will be public dividend capital? When will the Secretary of State announce the external financing limits for all three?

The Secretary of State spoke of the promised improvements in opted-out hospitals. Is it not the case that such improvements are available anyway, and are not dependent on a hospital opting out? Is it not the case also that opting-out hospitals simply restrict patient and doctor choice, waste resources in an acute bureaucracy, and create a two-tier health service?

I make it clear once again that the incoming Labour Government will immediately return those hospitals to the people of the country and to their health boards. Health care will once again be about treating patients, not perpetrating outdated dogma, as is the case with Government policy.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman asked a number of financial questions, which will be resolved and to some extent announced as the public expenditure round is completed and the health budget announced. As to general policy, on 13 June the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) was quoted in the *Glasgow Herald* as saying:

"The increased funding to which we are committed will be used to create a reserve at health board level which can be released in the course of the financial year to those hospitals who have out-performed and delivered high activity levels in the priority areas."

That is a dramatic departure from the image that Labour seeks to project. It is the image of a party that is determined to create some kind of two-tier health service. We are committed to delivering a better health service, in which trust status will pay an important part.

am confident that that will be achieved from greater local ownership of the decision-making process and resource allocation and from greater autonomy and flexibility. I have no doubt that residents of the areas to be served by the trusts will be the beneficiaries in the years ahead.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Midlands, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Was the hon. Gentleman seeking to put a question?

Mr. Clarke: A question, yes. I did not seek to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker, because I had not heard the statement, but I was here before the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn).

Mr. Speaker: It is a bit late, but I will call the hon. Gentleman, although it does make life difficult for the Chair.

Mr. Clarke: Given the Secretary of State's quite outrageous answers this afternoon, may I ask two questions? First, among the tragic decisions that he has announced, does he not realise that there will be great sadness, to say the least, about his decision on Larbert, which will affect mentally handicapped people and people who have no advocates? If he accepts that community care will be postponed until 1993, why does he not at least postpone that decision?

Secondly, when the right hon. Gentleman crows about the success of trusts in England, why does he not take on board the evidence that has been given to the Select Committee on Health, on which I have given many hours of membership? Does he not accept that that is a shambles that he should not be seeking to inflict on the people of Scotland?

Mr. Lang: I shall not repeat all the benefits expected for the Larbert trust. As the hon. Gentleman was not present at the beginning of my statement, he will no doubt read them in *Hansard*. He says that there is no support for the application. I listed a number of bodies that support it, and said that all the management and consultants do so. In addition, positive comments have been made by the Greater Glasgow health board and, following the consultation, Forth Valley health board has endorsed the application. They expressed confidence in their professional support, their management teams and their strategic skills.

For the reasons that I gave in my statement, which again the hon. Gentleman will have to read in *Hansard*, the application is being approved, but deferred until April 1993. I am confident that it too will be able to deliver improved benefits. I do not think that it would be right to deny those benefits to those suffering from mental handicap.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

HOUSING (SCOTLAND)

That the Clackmannan District Council (Vesting of Central Regional Council Land) (Scotland) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

Question agreed to.

Points of Order

4.32 pm

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Last Wednesday, the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) rose on a bogus point of order and made certain allegations about the conduct of my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), who had attended a function at which the hon. Member for Amber Valley was not present. The allegation was completely untrue but was widely reported. Subsequently, the hon. Member for Amber Valley went into the Members' Tea Room and was told in no uncertain terms by a number of my hon. Friends how unacceptaable such conduct was. [AN HON. MEMBER: "Are you going to be him up?"] That would not be very difficult, would it?

The following day, certain newspapers carried reports of the second incident in the Tea Room, quoting extensively the hon. Member for Amber Valley and one of his hon. Friends, who I understand was not present for that or for the previous incident.

You, Mr. Speaker, will remember when it was possible for hon. Members to disagree with each other away from the Chamber—occasionally using industrial language—without the more sneaky Conservative Members running to the press.

Mr. Speaker: Order. What is the point of order?

Mr. Snape: Will you, through the usual channels, draw the attention of the more senior, and perhaps responsible, members of the Conservative party to this conduct and warn them that, if it continues, it will provoke widespread retaliation from this side?

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No, I am dealing with one thing at a time. This happened last week. I have drawn the matter to the attention of the usual channels. Time was—not very long ago—when conversations in dining rooms, here and outside, and in tea rooms were not brought into the Chamber. I hope that we can get back to those days. It is not necessary to use such ammunition in arguing our policies.

Sir Hal Miller (Bromsgrove): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker, and for the avoidance of doubt. As the person ultimately responsible for the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders' dinner, may I make it plain that, when it became known to me after the dinner that the hon. Gentleman had left—so little disturbance did his departure cause—I made inquiries about what had taken place. I found out that, because of late changes, the seating plan in the reception room did not correspond——

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): You did not do that with me, Mr. Speaker.

Sir Hal Miller:—with the menu which had been printed earlier. I therefore caused the president to send an apology to the hon. Gentleman the following morning. When I read the erroneous reports in the press, I made a statement about the correct position, which is that the hon. Gentleman had left the dinner making the least fuss possible, even though there had been a place available for him.

Mr. Speaker: I think that that disposes of the matter.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I would not normally go back to something that happened last Wednesday.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This is a new point of order. May I seek your guidance on the application of a convention of the House and, for that matter, may I ask you to look at written question 126, which you will find on page 662 of the Order Paper? The question concerns the future of Craigtoun hospital, which is in my constituency, and it stands in the name of the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker).

If the terms of the question seem familiar to you, Mr. Speaker, it is because I tabled a question in precisely the same terms last week, but it was met with a reply to the effect that a statement would be made shortly. Is it a convention of the House that, when an hon. Member raises an issue about his constituency, it is then appropriate for the Government to plant a question in the name of another hon. Member, who has probably never seen or visited the hospital involved, in order that the Government may have the benefit of introducing into the public domain the necessary information which is of great importance to my constituency?

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

I am not responsible for answers that are given, but, as I understand it, the hon. and learned Gentleman had a holding answer. Therefore, it seems to me that a further question on the same issue should not be on the Order Paper.

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Since the hon. Member for Amber Valley has been mentioned, I shall call him, but then we must end the matter.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): If it is in order, Mr. Speaker, I should like to say that I am prepared to accept that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) left the dinner as quietly as is consistent with his character. However——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That sort of comment is inflammatory. The sadness of present-day politics is the lack of the courtesy that we used to have in this place.

Mr. Oppenheim *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that we can deal with these matters courteously.

Mr. Oppenheim: An attack was made on me by the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape), whose claims about what happened in the Tea Room were completely untrue. I am the one who should receive the apology, because when I went into the Tea Room I said nothing but was attacked by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East who uttered oaths about me and my mother. I did nothing in the Tea Room to provoke him, but it was he reported the conversation to the press, not me.

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is not a prep school. Let us get on.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This is a different point of order, and I am sure that it is one which you will take seriously, as will all members of Opposition parties from Scotland, especially as we have just had to listen to comments about seating arrangements at a dinner table somewhere and about who behaved or did not behave.

You will have noticed, Mr. Speaker, the sense of anger and frustration during the hour allocated to a very serious issue affecting the national health service in Scotland.

We have no opportunity other than such statements to question the Secretary of State on those matters. We have no Select Committee on Scottish affairs, to which such a matter would rightly have been referred. Scottish legislation—for example, the Education (Schools) Bill and the council tax legislation—is being shoehorned into United Kingdom Bills, and Scottish Members are not being allowed the facility to represent effectively the views of their constituents in a Parliament in which Scottish business is increasingly being demoted.

Mr. Speaker: It seems to me that the hon. Lady is criticising some action of the Government. What is the point of order for me in this? I am aware of the strong feeling on the subject—who could be unaware of it?—and that is exactly why I allowed every Member who wished to ask a question to do so, even those who were not present for the statement.

Mrs. Ewing: The point of order for you, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that it is your responsibility to protect the interests and rights of Back Benchers. Scottish Members are being attacked by people such as the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Janman), who did not even listen to the statement but who says that we are constantly whingeing, whining and carping. Yet we are denied the democratic right to express the views of our constituents.

Mr. Speaker: These are not matters of order to me. [AN HON. MEMBER: "She has a grievance."] She may have a grievance, but it is with the Government, not with me.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order for an hon. Member who raises a point of order about the behaviour of other Members not to practise what he preaches? It may be acceptable to some Members of this House that we should have to put up with industrial language in the Tea Room and in the Members' Cloakroom—as the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) said to me last week—but I agree that it is not appropriate for such Members to run to the press. I was prepared to ignore the insults of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) but he went to the press. Is it not a gross discourtesy for an Opposition transport spokesman to make it so clear to me that he disapproves of women drivers?

Mr. Speaker *rose*——

Several hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am on my feet. I think the trouble is that such matters were raised in the Chamber, when they should not have been. If they were not raised in the Chamber, they would not be reported to the press—or, if they were, nobody would take any notice of them.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In relation to the submissions on the South Ayrshire trust, may I help you by pointing out that, although all the Labour Members made submissions, as did every Labour party association in Ayrshire and every prospective Labour candidate, no SNP association or candidate did so? Does that not make the words of the hon. Member for Moray (Mrs. Ewing) ring hollow? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Why don't the two hon. Members go and have a cup of tea?

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: And I must say that I do not want to hear anything more about what happened last Wednesday.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In a ruling a few moments ago, you referred to the tradition of the House that private conversations between Members should not be the subject of tittle-tattle to the press. I seek your guidance on whether the conversations that you have in mind are exchanges less in the nature of conversations than of foul and abusive language. Surely language appropriate to a ship's galley is not appropriate in the precincts of the House of Commons.

Mr. Speaker: I am responsible for language here in the Chamber, not anywhere else.

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. You said earlier that you felt that it was important that courtesy and good manners should govern our behaviour. I accept that absolutely, but does it not seem a little ironic that the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) should speak here on behalf of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), since on Thursday evening, although totally unprovoked, he swore at four of my colleagues?

Mr. Speaker: We have had some bloodletting on this matter. Let us leave it there. I hope that we can deal with one another as men and women of honour—as, indeed, we are—return to the old traditions of the House which are admired all over the world, and keep up our standards here.

Orders of the Day

Prison Security Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Speaker: I have not selected the amendment on the Order Paper.

4.46 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Kenneth Baker): I beg to move, That the Bill be read a Second time.

The Bill forms an important part of our response to the serious disturbances in our prisons in April 1990. Last year we witnessed violence and disorder in Manchester prison on a scale unprecedented in modern times. The disturbance lasted 25 days and the prison was very nearly destroyed. Almost 200 officers and prisoners were injured, and one prisoner received injuries which may have contributed to his death. In that month we witnessed sickening and disgraceful scenes. Those must not be allowed to recur.

The damage caused at Strangeways will cost about £60 million to repair. A series of other disturbances followed —in Glen Parva, Dartmoor, Cardiff, Bristol and Pucklechurch. The cost of the damage in the other prisons and the consequential cost of keeping prisoners in police cells will probably exceed £100 million this year.

Even now, 1,300 cell spaces at Manchester prison have not been brought back into use—I note that the amendment on the subject has not been selected—and the male remand centre at Pucklechurch, which provided 130 places for young offenders, is beyond economic repair. That, coupled with an unexpected rise of about 3,000 in the prison population, is the principal reason why we still have large numbers of prisoners detained in police cells who should be in prison. Today that number stands at more than 1,700.

We have taken a number of measures to address the problem in the short term. Those include, as I have told the House on other occasions, converting Hewell Grange young offenders institution into a prison for adult males, bringing forward the opening of the young offenders institution at Brinsford in the west midlands—that is now in hand—and keeping open the prison at Brockhill, which was due to be closed. In the slightly longer term, the prison building programme should provide an additional 2,700 places by the end of the financial year.

I accept that it is unsatisfactory for prisoners to be held in police cells, but part of the problem with police cells has been the result of industrial action by the Prison Officers Association at a number of establishments. I am glad to be able to report to the House that that action has been suspended, and I am grateful for the positive line and the co-operation shown by the POA. The places lost as a result of that action are gradually being brought back into use —for example, places at Birmingham, Pentonville and Cardiff.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Can the Home Secretary tell me why I and other hon. Members should believe him now, when he and his colleagues have been telling us for the past 18 months that the position in greater Manchester would improve, yet prisoners are still being held in places such as Denton police station? That is unsatisfactory for prisoners, for police officers carrying out their normal duties, and for probation officers, solicitors and others who wish to visit prisoners. When will it come to an end?

Mr. Baker: The hon. Gentleman's comments are correct and I agree with them. The conditions are unsatisfactory. The holding of prisoners in police cells has continued longer than anyone would want because there has been an unexpected and unprecedented rise of about 3,000 in the prison population. The latest forecast is that the increase is likely to abate, but that alone is not sufficient—it may not abate. I cannot tell the House what the prison population is likely to be in the immediate aftermath of Christmas. I have brought forward the opening of an institution and I have kept one prison open for longer than we intended. There will be 2,700 more places by Easter. I hope that that will largely deal with the problem. I mean that. It will depend crucially on what happens to the prison population.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): Is it not just as true that the Greater Manchester police authority is very concerned that it is inadequately compensated for the transfer of responsibilities in this way? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that there is strong feeling throughout Greater Manchester that the police authority is not being properly compensated?

Mr. Baker: I will look into that matter. I had not heard that complaint, because the payments to police authorities for keeping prisoners in police cells are higher per prisoner than for those kept in ordinary prisons.

Earlier this year, I received the report into the disturbances, to which I referred, prepared by Lord Justice Woolf and the recommendations for change which he and Judge Tumim made. I am grateful to them for their work. We have since published the White Paper "Custody, Care and Justice", which contains comprehensive proposals for improvements to both the regimes and the conditions in which prisoners are held, and in security and control. The two are linked. There is never any excuse for behaviour such as we witnessed last year, not even if conditions are not as good as they should be.

Making prisons more decent places to live in will tend to reduce tensions, and will help to prevent a climate in which mutinous behaviour could develop. Prisons that provide proper programmes and fair treatment for prisoners are, as the White Paper acknowledges, more likely to be stable and safe. Staff can work constructively with inmates when they do not have the fear of a breakdown of order.

I shall remind the House of the seven major steps that we are taking as part of our programme of prison reform. First, we are on target to end slopping out by December 1994. Already some 65 per cent. of places now have access to sanitation. I know that the whole House thinks that slopping out is an unnecessary, degrading and humiliating experience that should be no part of our prisons. As the House will know, I have brought forward the ending of that practice from the end of the century—the Woolf recommendation was 1996—to December 1994.

Secondly, we have secured an extra £66 million over the next three years for White Paper-related initiatives. There will be total resources for the prison service of about £1·4

[Mr. Baker]

billion next year. Thirdly, we have awarded a contract to Group 4 Remand Services to take on the management of the Wolds remand prison.

Fourthly, this year we are recruiting 2,500 prison officers. Next year, we plan to recruit 1,600 additional officers. Fifthly, regime activity hours for prisoners rose by 8 per cent. in 1989-90 and by a further 7 per cent. in 1990-91. As the House knows, I believe that the regime should be positive. Prisoners should be kept busy when they are in prison.

Sixthly, a total of 13 new prisons will be delivered between April 1991 and January 1994 at a cost of £900 million. Four are now open and three more will be open by next April. Seventhly, we are developing a code of standards for the prison service and reforming arrangements for dealing with complaints. We will appoint a complaints adjudicator next year.

We are also improving security and control in our prisons to make it harder for a mutiny to begin or develop. We have increased the number of staff trained in advanced techniques of control and restraint for handling disruptive prisoners. By November 1991, the prison service had trained about 5,000 officers in such techniques—an increase of more than 800 over the past year. Those officers have been successfully deployed on several occasions this year.

We plan to spend more than £16 million this year on improving physical security. That will include X-ray machines, perimeter fencing, secure staircases and strengthened ceilings to prevent access to roof spaces. We have just issued a new contingency planning manual and we will issue a new security manual very soon. Those will take account of many of the security proposals in the Woolf report.

In addition to those measures, we have decided to create a new offence of taking part in a prison mutiny, with a maximum sentence of 10 years imprisonment. This short Bill fulfils that intention.

There are, of course, other ways in which to deal with prisoners who engage in calculated disorder such as we saw last year. Those disturbances have resulted in criminal proceedings against a number of prisoners who engage in calculated disorder such as we saw last year. Those disturbances have resulted in criminal proceedings against a number of prisoners. The House may like to know where we stand on that.

The trials resulting from the disturbances at Dartmoor, Cardiff, Bristol and Glen Parva have ended. Sixty-two prisoners were proceeded against for a range of public order offences and 37 either pleaded guilty or were convicted. The first trials arising from the disturbances at Manchester and Pucklechurch will begin next January. In all, 108 defendants will be involved. Some have been charged with murder.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Does the Home Secretary accept that one of the points that causes considerable concern in Manchester is the amount of police time that has been taken up in preparing the charges for those involved in the Strangeways incident? It has meant that those police officers have not been able to be on the beat or to carry out other police activities. They have had to concentrate on bringing the charges arising out of Strangeways. That is one reason why many people in Greater Manchester feel that there is not sufficient money and that there are not sufficient police officers to carry out the duty of protecting the public in Greater Manchester. Will the Home Secretary look carefully at the cost that the police authority has had to bear in bringing forward the documentation for the charges? Will he ensure that Greater Manchester police are compensated in some way?

Mr. Baker: I will consider the hon. Gentleman's point because he follows these matters in a serious and concerned way. The preparation of the cases against the prisoners in Strangeways has taken a long time because it must be done with especially scrupulous fairness on such occasions. That is why it has taken so long to bring the cases to court. I heard what the hon. Gentleman said and I will look into those points.

It is not enough to have the machinery to mount a prosecution under the existing range of offences. Those do not prevent serious disturbances breaking out in the first place. The Bill does not simply deal with those who engage in serious distrubances in our prisons; it will also deter them. The new offence, which may be committed only in a prison and only by two or more prisoners acting in concert, will bring home to prisoners the severe consequences of mutinous behaviour.

At present, a prisoner may be vaguely aware of a range of public order or criminal damage offences—normally the latter—with which he may be charged if he chooses to lend his backing to a serious disturbance. However, the warning signals are not, in my view, clear enough.

All prisoners are given an information pack on their reception into prison. It contains a number of leaflets dealing with visits, complaints, discipline and other matters. The Prison Reform Trust has recently helped us to improve that pack. In future, prisoners will also receive a notice describing the offence of prison mutiny and the penalties available to the courts if a prisoner is convicted of it. This will be drawn specifically to the attention of prisoners. Prisoners must be aware that rioting is not a cost-free option. If prisoners want to make a point about the conditions in which they are held, there are proper procedures for them to follow.

Mr. Robert Mclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): As the measure was not adumbrated in earlier considerations by the right hon. Gentleman on the future of the prisons, will he tell us whether he consulted the Prison Governors Association about the Bill, and if so, whether it considered the Bill to be necessary? My understanding is that the association is opposed to it.

Mr. Baker: There are wide consultations on Bills whenever new offences are created. We and many people in the prison service believe that this extra weapon should be available.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): No.

Mr. Baker: Some governors to whom I have spoken have said that they would welcome the measure because they are also concerned. I know that the right hon. Gentleman believes that the Bill is not necessary. I believe that it is necessary because, as I have said, in future prisoners will receive a notice describing the offence of prison mutiny and the penalties available to the courts if a prisoner is convicted of that offence. It will be drawn specifically to the attention of prisoners. Prisoners must be aware that rioting is not a cost-free option. It would be

helpful from the point of view of a deterrent for prisoners to appreciate the consequences if they engage in disturbance and riot.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Will my right hon. Friend clarify a point? He said that the cost of the damage at Strangeways alone was about £60 million. Has that money had to be found from the prison refurbishment programme or is it additional money? It seems to some Conservative Members in particular that when prisoners riot and cause damage such as occurred in Strangeways, they do not appreciate that it is not cost-free. It must mean that there will be a slowdown in improvements in the prison estate.

Mr. Baker: Money will have to be found from existing resources for existing refurbishment programmes. My hon. Friend makes a very good point. If, as a result of such disturbances, severe damage costs a great deal to repair, no indulgent Chief Secretary to the Treasury—that is almost a contradiction in terms—would ever say, "You may have some more money for that." The work must be done, and that usually means a postponement of refurbishment elsewhere and a postponement of the very improvements that many prisoners would welcome.

Mr. Greenway: Just by way of an interesting anecdote, the current Chief Secretary was the Minister with responsibility for prisons at the time of the Strangeways riot.

Mr. Baker: Because the present Chief Secretary understood the problems of the prisons, I was able to secure from him a favourable settlement for the prison service for next year.

I shall now refer to the specific clauses of the Bill. The new offence of prison mutiny is contained in clause 1. That makes it an offence for two or more prisoners to take part in a prison mutiny. If convicted, such prisoners face a penalty of up to 10 years imprisonment over and above the sentence that they are serving. The case must be tried in the Crown court and only—this is important—with the consent of the Director of Public Prosecutions. A prison mutiny occurs when two or more prisoners engage in conduct intended to further a common purpose of overthrowing lawful authority in the prison. It also occurs when they collectively resist, impede or disobey any exercise of lawful authority in such a way as to make their conduct subversive of order. The test is intentionally quite strict.

As the House will appreciate, the provision is targeted on the most serious disturbances. For lesser offences within a prison, there is available a range of disciplinary measures. The governor may at present award up to 28 days loss of remission for offences such as denying access to any part of the establishment to any officer, disobeying any lawful order, and detaining any person against his will. The new offence is aimed at behaviour that goes some way beyond that. The test in clause 1 will also catch those who instigate a mutiny or co-ordinate the action behind the scenes, but play no active part in it themselves—in effect, those who pull the strings.

Clause 2 deals with the related security issue of assisting escapes. It does several things. First, it widens the scope of the offence in section 39 of the Prison Act 1952 of conveying anything into a prison with intent to facilitate an escape. The clause also increases the maximum penalty for that offence from five to 10 years imprisonment. Secondly, there is also an offence under section 22(2)(b) of the Criminal Justice Act 1961 of harbouring an escaped prisoner. The maximum penalty will rise from two to 10 years. The purpose in increasing penalties in that way is to reinforce society's disapproval of such conduct and to correct an anomaly. The maximum penalty for the related offence under the Criminal Law Act 1967 of impeding the apprehension of a person known or believed to be guilty of an arrestable offence is 10 years imprisonment. We are taking this opportunity to align the penalties and to remove that anomaly. This is a short but important measure.

5.3 pm

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): I fear that the Bill is exactly what we have come to expect from the present Home Office. It is concerned less with solving real problems than with catching headlines. It is intended to create the illusion of activity. By that attempt, it diverts attention from the Government's failure to remedy the crisis in our prisons.

Certainly, the Home Secretary briefly described the crisis in our prisons, but he did not even attempt to relate the Bill to a solution of the problems which he outlined. That may be because he does not quite understand the history of the problem or the nature of the Bill, for during his introductory paragraphs he referred to Lord Justice Woolf's report as comprehensive. Whatever else he thinks of that report, he cannot believe it to be comprehensive, as it did not include the present proposal. I shall refer to that point in a moment, but I want to make absolutely clear our attitude to the Bill and to its contents.

At the time of the debate on the Queen's Speech, we believed that the Bill would be no worse than irrelevant to the needs of the prison service. We said that we would not oppose it. Nor shall we, but, having now seen the text, I must make it clear that in one particular we regard its provisions as wholly unacceptable.

The definition of the new offence, which appears in clause 1, was described by the Home Secretary as "intentionally quite strict". In fact, it is so wide and so amorphous that it may encompass activities which in no way justify the penalties which are stipulated in that clause. The offence of prison mutiny carries a maximum sentence of 10 years' imprisonment, yet clause 1 defines prison mutiny as occurring when

> "two or more prisoners . . . collectively resist, impede or disobey any exercise of lawful authority in the prison in such circumstances as to make their conduct subversive of order in the prison."

We can hypothesise the behaviour that might come under that heading and might in consequence justify a prison sentence of 10 years. It is easy enough to imagine behaviour of the sort which would justify such a sentence. However, it is easy to imagine, too, conduct which, while being generally appropriate to the description in the Bill, would in no way justify so severe a sentence.

Previous proposals for a new offence of prison mutiny have all required the prosecution to prove intention or common purpose to overthrow legitimate authority or to demonstrate that prisoners have used threatening or violent behaviour. In this Bill, all that is required for conviction is proof that a lawful instruction was disobeyed in a way which undermined prison discipline. That definition, if words have any meaning, must include

[Mr. Roy Hattersley]

conduct such as ridicule and dumb insolence. A maximum sentence of 10 years for such conduct is out of all proportion to the nature of the offence.

Between March and June of this year, there were, in English prisons, 58 protests of one sort or another. Twenty-three protests concerned the quality of prison food. A prisoner who, as part of such a protest, refused to leave the dining hall would, technically at least, be guilty of an offence that carried a maximum sentence of 10 years. That is wholly unreasonable.

Clause 1(4) increases the risk of disproportionate punishment for a trival offence. It states:

"Where there is a prison mutiny, a prisoner who has or is given a reasonable opportunity of submitting to lawful authority and fails, without reasonable excuse, to do so shall be regarded for the purposes of this section as taking part in the mutiny."

In short, if a group of prisoners refuse to leave the dining room in protest against the quality of their food, anyone who remains with them will be liable to a prison sentence of 10 years. Few people would believe that even the ringleaders in such a demonstration deserve a decade in prison. The idea that those who sit in mute support should also qualify for such punishment is patently ridiculous.

No doubt the Minister of State will tell us that long sentences will never be imposed in such cases, but some of the conduct encompassed by the clause should not be a criminal offence at all. A prisoner who, for a time, refused to return to his cell has not committed an offence which should be stigmatised as criminal. In any case, the crisis of prison overcrowding is in part caused by thoughtless optimism about sentencing policy. We create maximum sentences in the belief that they will be used only when appropriate. Regrettably, that is not always the case.

In Committee, we shall attempt to relate the maximum penalties of clause 1 more closely to the most serious offences stipulated in clause 1(2), (3) and (4) and to make it explicit that only appropriate offences are criminalised by the Bill. If the Government reject that necessary improvement, we shall vote against the Bill on Third Reading.

Of course, the Home Secretary has implied that the Bill is needed to deal with more serious offences—what I shall call genuine prison mutiny; mutiny of the sort that we saw at Strangeways prison in 1990. Perhaps that ludicrously broad definition, which encompasses sitting at a dining room table and threatening to burn down the prison, was simply a mistake. If so, no doubt the Home Secretary will soon tell us which civil servant is to blame. But, if he simply claims that the Bill is necessary to deter violent mutiny, that is patently absurd. Prisoners involved in violence, wilful damage, threatening behaviour, assault and real disorder can already be charged with a number of serious offences. If the severe penalties already available do not deter rioters, none of the penalties stipulated in this Bill will act as a deterrent. In short, this was so much window dressing.

My noble and learned Friend the Lord Richard made the point exactly in another place:

"the new offence is needed only in the case of a mutineer who is non-violent and does not threaten to be violent. There are plenty of crimes for which he can already be charged if he is violent or if he threatens violence. Furthermore, he must not occasion criminal damage. . . and must act alone, otherwise he can be charged with his co-mutineers with an offence of conspiracy. It is difficult to think of an example of a mutiny for which the offence is needed."—[*Official Report of the House of Lords*, 7 November 1991; Vol. 532, c. 230.]

It is clearly not needed for the preservation of prison discipline. I do not ask the House to accept my judgment on the matter. That is clearly the judgment of Lord Justice Woolf. In his report, "Prison Disturbances", published in April 1990, he made 204 recommendations on the government of our prisons. A new offence of prison mutiny was not included among them. The Woolf report, commissioned by the Government to prescribe a remedy for the crisis in our prisons, never even mentioned the idea. It is bizarre to the point of perversity that the Government should have the Woolf report at their disposal, fail to implement many of its recommendations, but nevertheless introduce an idea which Lord Justice Woolf did not even think worthy of the Home Secretary's consideration.

We certainly believe that the Government are right to introduce a prison Bill in this their last Session, but it should have been devoted to something worth while. The Home Secretary shied away from Lord Justice Woolf's key recommendation—the proposal that no prison establishment should hold more than its certified normal level of prisoners and that Parliament should be informed whenever that number was exceeded.

Yet Lord Justice Woolf was explicit about the major cause of the crisis in our prisons, including the disturbances which erupt from time to time. His report quoted the director-general of the prison service as saying:

"The removal of overcrowding is, in my view, an indispensable pre-condition of sustained and universal improvement in prison conditions."

Lord Justice Woolf "unreservedly" endorsed that

"assessment of the effect of overcrowding and of the importance of resolving the overcrowding problem in the future",

yet today there are 47,443 prisoners in custody in England and Wales. Our prisons are so overcrowded that 1,667 remand prisoners are held in police cells.

If the Home Secretary took urgent action to reduce the prison population, he would reduce not only crime, which overcrowded prisons breed, but also the likelihood of prison riots. New cells will not solve the problem of overcrowding. The only way in which that problem will be solved is by a reduction in the prison population, but the Home Secretary will not face the consequences of encompassing that.

Mr. Baker: That is easier said than done. The hon. Gentleman says that we should reduce the prison population. Is he suggesting that I should exercise executive release or that, if he were Home Secretary, he would exercise executive release?

Mr. Hattersley: I will give three examples, all of which the right hon. Gentleman has rejected in the past. First, there should be a sentencing council, which would bring some consistency to sentencing and prevent people from being sent to prison for unreasonable periods. Secondly, there should be a real assault upon the incompetence and inefficiencies of our courts, which would result in a reduction of the time men and women are held on remand and reduce pressure in that way. Thirdly, some categories of offence should be removed from custodial sentencing. In my view, it is wholly absurd, for instance, that maintenance defaulters should end up in prison, making

sure that, whatever else happens, maintenance is not paid. I could give many other examples, but those are three which the Home Secretary might work on straight away.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Two of my constituents were awarded by the courts compensation for damage that a burglar had done in their house. Instead of paying that compensation, the person concerned served an extra week in prison. Is it not an absolute absurdity that that person should spend an extra week in prison and my elderly pensioner couple should not get compensation for the damage that they suffered as a result of the burglary?

Mr. Hattersley: It is not only an absurdity but an absurdity that victims of crime resent. One of the great arguments for sentencing within the community is the opportunity that it ought to give the offender to make restitution in some way for the damage or hurt that he or she has caused. Whenever I talk about these things anywhere in the country, I find that people who have been burgled or mugged, or have had items stolen from their vehicles would much prefer the young man or woman who committed the crime to do something to compensate or repay them instead of spending a brief time in prison, with all the disadvantages that that involves.

It was the Strangeways riot that resulted in Lord Justice Woolf's inquiry. His report reveals that, at the time of the the disturbance, that prison had certified normal accommodation for 970 prisoners, but held 1,647 prisoners. That, the report concludes,

"would make it difficult to provide a constructive regime which would have helped to alleviate the dehumanising effects of the insanitary and unsatisfactory physical conditions within the prison."

Even at Glen Parva, a modern prison, which rioted shortly after Strangeways, the CNA was 612 and the actual prison population was 778.

All the prisons which, having experienced riots, were examined by Lord Justice Woolf held more prisoners than the certified normal accommodation figure. Yet the Home Secretary does not legislate to deal with the cause of disturbances.

Mr. John Greenway: I am not entirely out of sympathy with what the right hon. Gentleman is saying on this, but I would remind him that we have seen disturbances recently at the prison at Full Sutton, near York, which is not even full; there are still empty cells.

Mr. Hattersley: I am not saying that disturbances always have a single cause. I am saying that Lord Justice Woolf, who produced an authoritative report on prison riots and the improvement of prison conditions—admittedly, a report that does not recommend the one thing that the Home Secretary has chosen to do, but a report which the Home Secretary wrongly described as comprehensive—draws attention time after time to the simple fact that all prisons that rioted in 1990 and were the subject of the inquiry were so overcrowded that many of the proper duties that prisons should perform were not being and could not be performed.

By dealing with the crisis in prisons by a Bill of this sort rather than dealing first and fundamentally with the overcrowding situation, the Home Secretary is attacking the symptoms, not the causes. It is the sort of legislation that comes from a cosmetics salesman. It attempts to paint over the blemishes rather than remove them.

The conclusion that this Bill is a pointless publicity exercise is reinforced by an examination of the way in which previous Home Secretaries—Conservative Home Secretaries, I might say—have dealt with the issue of prison mutiny. In 1985, the Prior committee on prison disciplinary systems recommended that such an offence should be created. However, a year later, the Public Order Act 1986, which applies as much inside prisons as outside, became law. It created a statutory offence of riot—12 or more people using or threatening violence for an unlawful purpose. That offence carries a maximum sentence of 10 years, the same period as appears in this mutiny Bill. It created other offences—violent disorder, affray and threatening behaviour.

The White Paper, "The Prison Disciplinary System", published in the following year, 1986, concluded that, because of the new offence of riot, a prison mutiny Bill was no longer necessary. Indeed, it was explicit in its judgment that the Public Order Act had made a new offence of prison riot unnecessary. A previous Tory Home Secretary wrote in the White Paper:

"Since the Prior committee's report was published, the Government's Public Order Bill has been put before Parliament . . . Given the restructuring of public order offences in the Public Order Bill, the Government's view is that there is no need for a further public offence of prison mutiny."

The Home Secretary has not even tried to explain why the Government have changed their mind or why he has rejected the published judgment of his predecessor. The only possible explanation is that the new Bill is needed as a diversion, an event to divert attention from the real needs of the prison system, needs which the Government do not and will not face.

Clause 2 amends the Prison Act 1952 so as to increase the penalty for sending anything into prison with the intent to facilitate an escape. That is presumably the product of what we now know about the Brixton prison escape. We still do not know the full story of Brixton; therefore, we do not know the truth. Since the Bill relates to that breakout, I take the opportunity to tell the Home Secretary once more that sooner or later he will have to be frank with the House and the country about what occurred at Brixton and about what he knew.

It is now established beyond doubt that special branch officers arranged for a prison officer to discuss escape plans with the two suspects who are still at large. It is also certain that the Home Secretary knew of the special branch involvement by the time he made his statement on Judge Tumim's inquiry. Yet he chose to keep it secret and blamed officers of the prison service for what happened. I understand that another television programme, dealing directly with what the Home Secretary chose not to reveal although it was known to him, is to be broadcast on Thursday. I warn him that the subject will not go away until he is frank with the House and the country.

Our confidence in the Home Secretary and in his ability to handle the crisis in our prisons might be slightly restored if, even at this late stage, he gave the House and the country the full facts about the Brixton breakout. I doubt if he will accept my advice. Instead, he will rely on Bills such as the one we are debating, at best irrelevant, at worst unreasonable——

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks) *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: This is my final sentence; then I shall sit down so that other hon. Members may take part in the debate. *[Interruption.]* I think the Whip wants to say something to me.

Mr. Irvine Patnick (Sheffield, Hallam) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Hattersley: No, the Whip does not want to say something to me. I repeat that the Home Secretary will rely on Bills like this, which are at best irrelevant and at worst unreasonable. The main casualty will be his already damaged reputation.

5.22 pm

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): We have come to expect that the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) will pour scorn on every idea which does not emanate from himself. Her Majesty's Opposition are expected to oppose—that is their constitutional position—but they are not expected to oppose everything whenever, whatever and however it is put forward. I should have thought that good sense would dictate that someone who opposes every measure begins to lose credibility. The right hon. Member, who opposes everything so vehemently, has very little credibility left on this subject.

The right hon. Gentleman said that a reduction in the prison population was the way to improve the position in prisons. I listened with great care to discover how his brilliant mind would explain how in a society so apparently lawless there was a brilliant way of reducing the prison population. All that the right hon. Gentleman could come up with were three proposals.

The first was that fine defaulters should not be sent to prison; but very few are. What sanction does the right hon. Gentleman suggest for those who persistently flout the view of the court that somebody is able to pay but refuses to do so? Secondly, the right hon. Gentleman suggested that there should be a speedier process. We all want a speedier process and therefore fewer remand prisoners. The problem with recent miscarriages of justice has been that the police have not done a thorough enough job. To do a thorough job, the police need more time.

Thirdly, the right hon. Gentleman suggested that in some miraculous way a sentencing council would relieve the pressure on prisons. If a court has sentenced somebody to prison for an excessive length of time, there is already a sentencing council—the Court of Appeal, which can reduce the sentence. If the right hon. Gentleman wants more and more bureaucratic institutions set up to do the work of existing institutions, he had better say so. I was totally unconvinced that he, any more than anyone else, has a solution to the amount of crime and the necessity to send people to prison.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on the Bill, which provides for tougher action against prisoners who wish to carry out their war against society after conviction and sentence from within—or worse, outside—the prison to which they have been sentenced. The public are thoroughly fed up with prisoners smashing up prisones, which then have to be repaired at vast expense to the taxpayer, and with attempted escapes which cause injury to dedicated prison officers. Still more are the public fed up with escapes which succeed, and they will be appalled to hear from my right hon. Friend that the cost of damage to our prisons last year exceeded £100 million.

The Bill is the latest in a long line of measures to protect society from criminals and to improve the penal system. A succession of Conservative Home Secretaries have ensured that we now have the largest prison building programme this century, with nine prisons built and 4,000 places provided, and 12 new prisons on the way. We appointed a superb chief inspector of prisons, Judge Tumim, and set up the Woolf commitee on prison reform, which has produced an excellent report. As a result, we shall end overcrowding by 1995 and slopping out by 1994. We are funding prison security much more excessively than in the past. We have ended some of the petty things like routine censorship of letters, and we have increased family visits.

More to the point, we have considerably improved, by increasing their numbers, the service provided by prison officers. There are 4,700 more prison officers, with 1,600 on the way, and 3,000 fewer prisoners, so the prison population has risen by 7 per cent. while the prison service has increased by 47 per cent. We have a better staff-inmate ratio than France or west Germany, and if we include prison auxiliaries and night patrols, we do not compare all that badly with the Scandinavian countries.

If it becomes obvious that the first private prison at Wolds, which is to be run by Group 4, is a success, I hope that the burden on the prison system will be further lightened by the extension of private prison building and private prison management, certainly for remand prisoners as there can be no sensible objection to treating unconvicted prisoners better than convicted prisoners. I think that we can all applaud my right hon. Friend for the other improvements in prison security about which he has told us.

In all these matters Government prison policy has been positive, constructive and beneficial. We have no need to take lectures from the Opposition, who presided over the slashing of prison building by 29 per cent. while the prison population rose by 14·5 per cent. The Liberal Democrats, starkly represented by the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), seem to concentrate on reducing the use of prison rather than on anything else. Of course, there is still a considerable task ahead for Government in improving the penal system.

It is not much use improving the number and quality of the prison buildings if the prison management does not also improve. There is clearly much room for improvement in a number of management areas, such as the co-ordination of intelligence within prisons and the co-ordination of response. It is no secret that the governor of Brixton prison knew on 4 February 1991 that a breakout from the prison was being actively contemplated by IRA terrorists in the prison, yet they were not split up or moved. It seems that they were not closely watched—and the inevitable happened.

I warn the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook—I hope that he will accept that I do so in the best possible spirit—not to be carried along by media representations of what happened at Brixton. One of my constituents is the prison officer allegedly involved in those activities, and he strongly insists that the portrayal of what happened in Brixton in last week's Thames Television programme is totally wrong. When the inquiry has been completed, we

shall all know what happened, but in the meantime I warn the right hon. Gentleman that all is not as portrayed on the media.

To give the House another example of a fault in the management of the prison service, I remember taking part in a case several years ago involving a prison breakout. Some convicted men went over the wall and the judge, who was born in that very prison, called for an improvement in security at the prison. It was Brixton prison. I do not know how many men have since gone over the same wall, but there have been several even recently. Yet not very much seems to have been done to make that wall unclimbable. That is not the fault of the prison governor; it is the fault of the prison service, for which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and his predecessors have the unavoidable responsibility.

There is something wrong with the management of the prison service when the Prison Officers Association has 70 disputes in 41 prisons. Indeed, there is so much dissatisfaction with that union from within the prison service that another union, the Prison Service Union, is being set up and I understand that it has so far received 1,000 pledges from prospective members.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): It is not recognised.

Mr. Lawrence: Indeed, the question is when my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will recognise it. I hope that the proposed union will receive more support not only from the Government but from the House, because not having a monopoly union in the prison service must be healthy, especially if the monopoly union brings about so many disputes.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): As the hon. and learned Gentleman is asking questions about the management of our prisons, what has he to say about the management of a prison service in which, 12 months after a learned judge advises the Home Secretary to move suspected and convicted terrorists from Brixton prison, they are still there?

Mr. Lawrence: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point, which is not very different from the point that I was making about what the governor of Brixton prison knew several months before those IRA terrorists broke out. I accept that the hon. Gentleman has made a fair point. Perhaps my right hon. Friend the Minister of State will respond by telling the House what she knows when she replies to the debate.

There are other examples of management failures. Old Bailey barristers are being prevented from having conferences with their clients at Brixton prison by prison officers, the prison service, or both. If one wishes to interview a client, one has to give notice about a week in advance, and sometimes interviews are cancelled at the last minute on the diktat of whoever is running Brixton prison. That is outrageous, as judges at the Old Bailey have made clear, but judges have no power over the running of the Prison Service. That again is a management failure, and improvements must be made.

I am therefore pleased that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has recognised the importance of such management failures and that he has appointed Admiral Sir Raymond Lygo to improve management in the prison service. We can only hope that that review will be followed by sensible action. It is worth noting that the Woolf report also drew attention to those management problems, as has the director of the prison service, Mr. Joe Pilling. Management is at fault and we must clean it up. I know that my right hon. Friend takes this matter seriously.

With regard to the Bill, after 30 years at the criminal Bar and 35 years in politics, I have been driven reluctantly to the conclusion that fear is a more effective motivator of human behaviour than anything else, especially when dealing with people of ill will. I have seen too many offenders laughing at the courts for their weaknesses, too many malcontents exploiting the absence or inadequacy of the law, and too many criminals making the cool assessment that the risk of detection is well worth taking. As a result, I share the preponderant view that shorter sentences are often worse than longer sentences. It would be better for law and order if criminals were deterred by the possibility of receiving a longer sentence.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): I entirely support my hon. and learned Friend's view that people should be afraid of the law and of being caught, but does he agree that boredom has played an important role in prison riots? I hope that our reforms will make it possible for prisoners to do some useful form of work in prison. That trend is growing in America. It enables prisoners to pay off their debts to society by working hard and banking the money.

Mr. Lawrence: My hon. Friend is a charming relative newcomer to this place and we are delighted that she is here, but if she had been here as long as I have—getting on for 18 years now—she would have heard me banging on about exactly that point. I am pleased to have her support. It is necessary to turn our prisons into workplaces in which the inmates do not receive parole but can work their way out of prison by dedicated activity, which should be properly paid so that they can compensate those whom they have wronged and pay something back into the system. I am pleased that the idea that we should turn our prisons into workplaces is slowly beginning to take hold. The Woolf report gave some articulation to it. Apart from anything else, if prisons were places where criminals had to work, fewer of them would want to go to prison.

Harsher sentences are necessary to make fear a dominant element in deterrence. It might not be a wholly popular view among pundits, but I am sure that it will be wholly popular among the people that the Bill should provide the power to impose deterrent sentences. Of course, not every would-be escaper would be deterred by the fear of a harsher sentence, but even now some prisoners refuse to go along with escape or mutiny plans due to fear of the consequences. The Bill will ensure that many more prisoners will refuse to join or support others' plans to forgo the consequences of their offending. Only the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook could describe that as a pointless publicity exercise. I hope that the provisions will reach the statute book quickly.

5.38 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): The hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) persisted in talking about the new harsher penalties that would be available under the Bill. I believe that he was misleading the House and the country by those assertions, because the burden of the case of those of us who think that the Bill is completely irrelevant to the problems of our

[Mr. Robert Maclennan]

prisons which it purports to tackle is that the penalties already exist in the Public Order Act 1986, for which the Government can legitimately take credit.

The Bill does nothing to increase the powers of the courts if order should break down inside a prison, although it touches in a new way on some of the matters relating to aiding and abetting an escape outside a prison. But that was not the burden of the case made by the hon. and learned Member for Burton, any more than it was the Home Secretary's case when he spoke in commendation of the Bill. It was notable that, in his introductory speech, the Home Secretary devoted very little time to the content of the Bill and scarcely sought to justify it.

Mr. Lawrence: It is a short Bill.

Mr. Maclennan: That does not diminish the need to explain and justify the complete volte face by the Home Office.

Mr. Lawrence: It is not a volte face.

Mr. Maclennan: Yes, it is.

In 1986, the Home Office, under a previous Home Secretary, published a White Paper in which it explicitly rejected the proposal to introduce a new crime of prison mutiny. I cannot understand why the hon. and learned Gentleman says that it is not so. It is there in black and white. It was recommended initially by the Prior committee that an offence such as we are considering tonight should be created. The Government rejected it for precisely the reasons that I mentioned. The instruments for punishing prison rioters were already available and the offence was unnecessary.

Like the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), I thought hard and long about why the Government had reversed their decision. What change of circumstances had come about which made them take an entirely different view? One recoils from the obvious answer, which is that the Home Secretary wants yet again to produce a cheap headline in the popular press such as "Crackdown on crime", by producing, as the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook said, a modest and short Bill. The Home Secretary is receiving a disproportionate amount of attention from the press for the action that he has taken. There might have been some other more rational explanation, but it was not furnished to the House by the Secretary of State. I will deal with what he said in a moment.

The Secretary of State did not tell us that there had been a change in circumstances since the Government rejected the Prior report. The change is in the procedures proposed for adjudication on offences in prisons by boards of visitors. It may be argued that, in 1986, the Government rejected the idea of abandoning the adjudicatory role of the prison visitors board, which was part of the Prior recommendations, so, as they had gone some way to changing the internal discipline regime, they might reasonably look again at Prior. But we had none of that from the Secretary of State tonight.

Instead, we had the bizarre suggestion that prison order was likely to be more easily maintained if, on entering a prison, prisoners were given a little package telling them the consequences of their actions if they stepped out of line. An Act of Parliament is not necessary to do that. I am not averse to packs of information on what happens when someone goes into prison. It seems to be part of the Woolf proposal for compacts and for, making prisoners fully aware of what is happening in prisons and what the plans are. The provision of such packs of information is concomitant with that proposal. However, if prisoners are at risk of sentence under the Public Order Act 1986, the pack of information can explain that just as easily as it can explain the contents of this miserable and irrelevant little Bill.

Once again, the Home Secretary has recognised that there is a problem. He feels that he must do something about it. He must persuade the public that he is doing something quickly, never mind the effectiveness of what he is doing. When there were tragic cases of dangerous dogs assaulting young children, the Home Secretary had to produce a Bill overnight. It was then withdrawn and another Bill was introduced, just so that we could have a crackdown on dangerous dogs. So, when there are riots and problems in prisons, we have to have a speedy and instantaneous responses from the Home Secretary, which is presented as the solution to the problem. Candidly, that will not wash.

The Bill is scarcely worth opposing. I wholly agree with the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook that it would be inappropriate to oppose the Bill on Second Reading, but, like the right hon. Gentleman, I intend to look closely at what happens to it during its passage through the House. It will have damaging consequences which willl flow from it not being targeted tightly on violent offences, as the Home Secretary suggested that it was. Violent offences gave rise to the need in the Home Secretary's mind to introduce the Bill.

The word "violent" does not appear in the Bill. If a prisoner disobeys an instruction to place his laundry in a certain basket, he will be at some risk of being found guilty of mutiny under the Bill.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mrs. Angela Rumbold) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Maclennan: The Minister of State shakes her head. It may be that, if the matter went to the Director of Public Prosecutions, he would take the view that the matter was not sufficiently serious to prosecute, but that is not the point. The point is that the definition of the offence in clause 1(1)(b) is so wide that any stepping out of line could constitute prison mutiny. As Lord Richard said most eloquently and correctly in another place, the only new element of the offence is that it is non-violent and is almost certainly conducted without conspiracy or the involvement or others.

In an intervention during the Home Secretary's speech, I asked whether he had consulted or heard from the Prison Governors Association about the Bill. Perhaps the Minister of State will be kind enough to inform the House who was consulted before the Government introduced the Bill, and who approves of it. We had some anecdotal evidence from the Home Secretary that one or two prison governors whom he happened to run into in recent weeks said that the Bill might not be a bad thing.

The Prison Governors Association has told me clearly that it opposes the Bill on the grounds that the measures that it contains are "too draconian"—I use its exact words. No one is more anxious that the penalties should be apt for the crime than those most immediately affected by prison

disorder. The prison governors have said that it is too draconian, and the Prison Officers Association has expressed the view that it is an unnecessary knee-jerk reaction to a deeply serious problem. However, I recognise that the Prison Officers Association does not carry much weight with the Government at present.

Notwithstanding the scope of Lord Justice Woolf's inquiry, he did not recommend that the new crime of prison mutiny should be introduced. I have not at any point heard Judge Tumim suggest that such a crime is appropriate. I can only assume that, as the matter was extensively discussed earlier, they thought that the issue was dead and that there was no point in discussing it, because the arguments had been so effectively canvassed and dismissed that the Government would not contemplate introducing such an offence.

The extensive and widely approved report from Lord Justice Woolf said nothing about introducing an offence of prison mutiny. The Government appear to be flying in the face of that report.

If the Government have received no recommendations that an offence of prison mutiny is necessary or desirable from anyone involved in the management of prisons, from what other organisations have they had such recommendations? Have the Government considered the experience in Northern Ireland or Scotland? Both countries have suffered prison violence, disorder and breakouts. Indeed, in Scotland, the power of a governor to limit remission is about half the power of a governor in England.

Nevertheless, as far as I am aware, there is no pressure to align the law in Scotland with the Government's proposal. The Secretary of State for Scotland has not introduced a measure of this type. I wonder why. I wonder whether the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland was consulted about his experiences. The situation in the three separate parts of the United Kingdom is not so radically different that it is appropriate to establish different crimes as part of the panoply of the law for dealing with offences in prisons.

Mr. Lawrence: Is the hon. Gentleman in favour of reducing the age of consent in homosexual offences to 16? If so, Scotland has a different approach to such matters from that of the rest of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maclennan: That has nothing to do with the matter under debate. I do not propose to get involved in what is clearly a diversionary tack. That is a Conservative tactic: when faced with a difficult question, they invariably try to divert attention by mentioning another issue.

In the Bill, the Home Secretary has sought to divert the public's attention from the powerful recommendations in the Woolf report. He has failed to give a timetable for the implementation of those proposals, to set out a schedule which would carry weight and to tackle the problems at base. Instead, he has produced a little Bill which has no friends and which the House will not find—

Mr. Steve Norris (Epping Forest): That is why no one is going to vote against it tonight.

Mr. Maclennan: As I explained to the normally silent Parliamentary Private Secretary, it is not appropriate to vote against a Bill of this sort at this stage.

Mr. Lawrence: The hon. Member seems to agree with it.

Mr. Maclennan: I think that my comments will be taken by a fair commentator as fairly hostile to the Bill. I certainly hope that is the message that got through.

Clause 1(2)(b) is the part of the Bill which runs the greatest risk of causing mischief. It is far too widely drafted. If the Home Secretary does not want the Bill to do serious damage to internal discipline in prisons, resulting in matters that should be dealt with by internal disciplinary procedures going to court and taking up the time of the criminal justice system—making it far more difficult for prison governors to run their prisons—he had better look again at that clause and amend it. He must tighten that clause and accept the argument that he claimed to be attempting to grasp, which is to target the offence on violent offenders.

The Bill will win few friends. We shall wait to see what happens in Committee before deciding what our attitude to it should be.

5.52 pm

Sir John Farr (Harborough): I give a general welcome to the Bill. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary telescoped his remarks. I had hoped to intervene to ask him about the extent of the Bill, but he sat down very rapidly at the end of his speech.

An important issue in terms of the application of the Bill is contained in clause 3(3), which says:

"This Act extends to England and Wales only."

Apart from the general belief of many constitutionalists that all Acts of Parliament should apply to the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland, that is a real mistake. Some parts of the Bill are relevant to an attempted escape. A trainer containing a weapon was sent from Northern Ireland to assist an escape quite recently. The person receiving the parcel in prison could be prosecuted under the Bill, but the dispatcher could not be dealt with because the Bill does not apply to Northern Ireland.

This is a fairly modest and harmless little Bill. We must get to the cause of the mutinies that have occurred, especially the mutiny at Strangeways, which was probably the most recent, and the savage mutiny at Gartree in my constituency not so long ago. As the Home Secretary said, the Bill touches on one of the chief causes of the mutiny at Strangeways—shocking overcrowding. There were 1,647 inmates in a prison designed for 970. We must have more prisons, more staff, and better conditions for both staff and prisoners. It must be Government policy to give the lifer some dignity.

Hon. Members have already discussed the Bill briefly, but I must mention clause 1(2)(a) again. As has already been said, prisoners frequently

"engage in conduct which is intended to further common purpose of overthrowing lawful authority in that prison".

There is a sound reason for rewording that clause, because that is too frequent an occurrence in day-to-day life in prison.

Clause 1(2) states that there is a mutiny

"where two or more prisoners while on the premises of any prison"

engage in certain conduct. Two is the obvious number, but in certain circumstances a case could be made for one prisoner or three prisoners.

The Woolf report referred to overcrowding, the need for more staff and, above all, the need for meaningful, educational training and a constructive programme of jobs

[Sir John Farr]

for prisoners. That is absolutely essential. The security of any prison hinges on the attitude and conduct of prisoners. If they are held in overcrowded conditions, unfit for a dog to live in, and have no meaningful occupation—I do not mean soulless, non-productive work—they have no alternative but to fall into mischief and cause trouble.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) referred to the need to give prisoners some work. I agree, but it must be meaningful work. The trouble is that that is not easily obtained. It is all very well for us to say that we must ensure that prisoners are properly employed, but when the unemployment figures increase every month in the east midlands, there is resentment and resistance to prison inmates engaging in meaningful work as such work would probably take away jobs outside the prison. We must get around that conflict.

The work must be meaningful, and it must satisfy the prisoners. As my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton said that the work should ideally enable prisoners to earn a remission on part of their sentence, or it could earn money to pay compensation to victims.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton also referred to the need to maintain what he described as the quality of managers in prisons, and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has also spoken about that. I have in my constituency the prison at Gartree and the young offenders centre at Glen Parva. It has been noted at Gartree that the better the governor, the more quickly he goes. If, as I understand, that is Home Office policy, an explanation is needed. I speak from experience, having met many Gartree governors. Some have been brilliant, others not so brilliant, but the more successful they are, the more quickly they seem to go, often within a year.

The Home Office may think it necessary on security grounds to make regular changes, perhaps believing that it would be undesirable for the routines of governors to be known to the general public. Even so, the present policy seems to prevent our getting the best from some of the good male and female governors we have. Need they be rotated so rapidly?

In 1987 there was an escape from Gartree. Clause 2 recommends that the maximum penalty for assisting a prisoner to escape should be increased from five to 10 years' imprisonment. I share the doubt that has been expressed about that change. Some of those involved in the helicopter escape from Gartree would not have been deterred by life imprisonment. Adding another five years to any possible sentence seems pointless, especially as some of those involved may already be serving that length of time. The proposal seems no more than a window dressing exercise.

We learned some lessons from the escape at Gartree. At the time, there was much unease in my constituency because, although Gartree is reasonably isolated, it is only two or three miles from the centre of Market Harborough, with its population of more than 15,000 people. There was terror in the neighbourhood for a long time afterwards. That made me realise how much we depend on the prison officers and the fantastic security systems that have been built up. We depend on them and, by and large, they do their jobs brilliantly.

Even so, it seems that some of the lessons which should have been learnt from that escape have not been applied, at least not so fully as they should have been. A confidential report that I have—it is not public and I have no intention of revealing its contents—referred to an Exercise Rogue Elephant which should have been put into practice regularly by police and prison officers. It should have been carried out prior to the escape, to put into practice action needed in such an event.

Perhaps I can be told, either today or in correspondence, whether Exercise Rogue Elephant is still carried out in midlands prisons. Are practice escapes still carried out? The report, by the deputy director-general of the prison service following the escape on 10 December 1987, revealed in connection with lessons that should have been learnt from the escape that effective co-operation between the police and the prison service appeared to be slow to get into action.

Although the escape was, in part, aborted—because of fog and the fact that the escapers had to land their helicopter at a spot where they had not intended to land, after which they terrorised a number of local people—they still got clear away. One would have hoped that by now the procedure would have been polished and tightened up to prevent such a breakout recurring or to ensure that a more effective response would be forthcoming in the event of a breakout from such a top security prison.

Gartree is a category A prison. In 1988, after the escape, a review was instigated into category A prisons by the Home Office, with emphasis on what was called the dispersal system. I have a Home Office document of that date detailing the management of category A inmates, with a statement of the Department's intentions. How is that programme proceeding? A letter on the subject from the Home Office at the time said that it was envisaged that a number of changes would be made from category A to category B, including at Gartree, which should go from category A to category B by 1992. Is that changeover still on schedule?

Some of the points that I am raising may sound tedious to hon. Members, but they are important issues for my constituents. For example, what is being done about what are known as SSUs—special secure units—of which at that time there were Leicester, Parkhurst and Full Sutton? Are those three SSUs still operating? A report on the subject dated April 1989 said:

> "The future of the SSUs at Leicester and Parkhurst will be reviewed when the new accommodation is available."

Those issues are so tied up with prison security that I would have been at fault had I not raised them in the debate.

However heinous the crime, a prisoner is entitled to dignity and an aim and purpose in life. Conservative Members expect the Home Secretary continually to struggle to try to improve the lot of prison officers and prisoners. I have often been to Gartree prison and seen life prisoners who have committed the most fearful crimes, but they can all see the light at the end of the tunnel. That window of hope makes them better prisoners, more amenable to discipline although they have no prospect of leaving prison for many years.

I have written to my right hon. Friend about a particular prisoner whose name I shall not mention. After 25 years in prison, he is now due for remission. In this case, as in many others, I am unhappy because the remission programme seems to have fallen by the wayside. In fact, I am still awaiting a reply from my right hon. Friend about

this prisoner. However guilty a prisoner may be, when he has done his term, he should come out as pure as the driven snow and be given an opportunity to start life again.

With those few words, I welcome the Bill.

6.11 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): When the Home Secretary introduced the Bill, he referred to the riots and disturbances that occurred recently in several prisons, and said that those scenes must not be allowed to recur. Those scenes led to the commission of several offences and to three people losing their lives. Obviously, one does not want that to recur. The Home Secretary said that the existing legislation was not enough and that consequently he was introducing a new offence of prison mutiny. Like other hon. Members, I am somewhat concerned about the terms of the new offence. Reference has already been made to its considerable width in that it will cover not only violent prison riots like those that occurred recently, but also minor protests, particularly in clause 1(2).

I am equally worried about the drafting of clause 1(3), which says that, for the purposes of defining the offence of prison mutiny,

"The intentions and . . . purpose of prisoners may be inferred from the form and circumstances of their conduct".

The Home Secretary may have had that aspect in mind when he said that the test was intentionally strict, but I find the strictness alarming. However, the use of the word "may" will allow the courts to rescue people from falling within the net of that provision.

The offence is extremely wide. I come from Northern Ireland and must therefore bear in mind the situation in Her Majesty's Crumlin road prison in Belfast. The hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) referred to prisoners carrying on their war against society while in prison, and that has certainly been happening in the Crumlin road prison. It is a war between both major terrorist factions there, partly directed by one faction against the other, but also partly by one faction for the purpose of obtaining what they call segregation within the prison.

I appreciate that this is neither the time not the place to go into detail about the extent of that war, but it has been going on for a considerable period. There have been serious disturbances involving the wrecking of part of the prison and attacks on prisoners, culminating only the other week in a bomb being smuggled into the prison and going off, resulting in the death of two prisoners.

If the Strangeways riots, which resulted in three deaths, justify the Bill, perhaps the continuing warfare within the Crumlin Road prison, which has resulted in two deaths so far, merits consideration. It is unlikely that the explosion in the prison will be the last disturbance, because the atmosphere seems to be deteriorating, and further violence and injury are expected. Indeed, the new visiting arrangements that have been introduced in the prison may backfire, because the warfare may extend among relatives and visitors. Visiting arrangements are now carried out in larger open plan areas, and the authorities seem to be mixing the relatives of the two factions. If that is happening it is extremely curious.

It is strange that the disturbances in England and Wales that led to the Bill have not so far led to the consideration of legislation to apply to other parts of the United Kingdom. The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) asked whether it was contemplated to introduce legislation for Scotland and the same could be asked with regard to Northern Ireland. I may be wrong, but I understand that there is at present no intention to extend the legislation to Northern Ireland. That may be partly because the Government think that other penalties under public order legislation are adequate, but it may also be because, unlike England and Wales, Northern Ireland already has an offence of prison mutiny.

It is not contained in primary legislation but in the prison rules under the Prison (Northern Ireland) Act 1953. Rule 31, "Offences against discipline," states:

"A prisoner shall be guilty of an offence against discipline, —if he (1) mutinies or incites another prisoner to mutiny".

The prison rules contain no definition of mutiny, thus avoiding the criticisms that we have made of the drafting of clause 1.

Mr. Corbett: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that all hon. Members try to understand the special conditions that lead to some of the circumstances that he has described in prisons in Northern Ireland. I hope that we can take that for granted. Does the hon. Gentleman feel that the ability to deal with events that could be labelled as "mutiny" as a disciplinary matter inhibits prison governors in Northern Ireland? I do not wish to hurry the hon. Gentleman, as he may be about to explain that to the House, but would it help us to deal with the special conditions in Northern Ireland if the Bill were extended to Northern Ireland?

Mr. Trimble: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention but, as he anticipated, I should be happier to deal with the point later.

As I was saying, one of the offences against discipline is the offence of mutiny. Hon. Members may be interested to know the current penalties for mutiny in Northern Ireland. Under the prison rules, a governor may—it is at his discretion—refer a charge to the Secretary of State, in which case, the Secretary of State may impose one or more of the following penalties:

"*(a)* caution;
(b) loss of remission for a period not exceeding 180 days;
(c) stoppage of earnings for a period not exceeding 56 days;
(d) stoppage of any or all privileges . . .
(e) exclusion from associated work for a period not exceeding 56 days;
(f) cellular confinement for a period not exceeding 56 days."

Those are the penalties for prison mutiny in Northern Ireland, where the continuing problems clearly fall within the definition of prison mutiny in the Bill. The Government consider that, in England and Wales, the maximum penalty for such an offence should be 10 years. They say that they have no intention of extending the legislation to Northern Ireland, where the present penalty is loss of remission for 180 days or confinement in a cell for 56 days. The penalties seem disproportionate.

The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) described the legislation as a publicity exercise. If we consider it as such, what sort of message will it send to those prisoners in Northern Ireland who are presently creating a disturbance? The might consider that their activities are not regarded as important and are minor offences. Is that the sort of message that the Government intend to send?

I cannot underline enough the fact that the present serious problems in Northern Ireland need to be adressed.

[Mr. Trimble]

I know that there have been inquiries and that Lord Colville has been asked to assist the Government. One hopes that sense and control will be restored in Crumlin road prison, and that the prison authorities will exercise discipline in the interests of the prisoners' safety if no other reason. I wonder why the Government have engaged in this exercise when there are such grave prison problems in Northern Ireland.

The Home Secretary said that one reason for the legislation was that it should act as a deterrent. In its response to the legislation the Prison Officers Association has queried that motive, and suggested that in its experience the majority of prisoners who have been, or are likely to be, involved in serious disturbances in prisons are long-term prisoners who may not be deterred by the legislation. One curious factor about the disturbances in Northern Ireland is that they are taking place not among long-term prisoners, but primarily among remand prisoners. That makes me believe that there might be some validity in the deterrence argument.

If an additional offence were created, it might dissuade remand prisoners from continuing with their actions in the Crumlin road prison. Whatever weight one attaches to that argument—I am not sure how much to give it—I believe that detection, not deterrence is the important factor. We must detect those prisoners causing problems and there should be a proper system of management and control within the prison.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) asked if it would help if the legislation were extended to cover Northern Ireland. I am not sure whether it is best to take the matter out of the prison discipline system and put it into the courts. If that is to be done, I hope that it will be done in a much better way that in the Bill, which is too widely drafted. I entirely endorse the comments of other hon. Members on the Bill's width.

I agree with the hon. Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) that, if we take such action, we should do so on a United Kingdom not a Northern Ireland, basis. If the legislation is introduced in England and Wales to create a new offence that must be handled through the courts, while in Northern Ireland a similar offence will be left to internal prison discipline, with comparatively minor penalties, we shall have the worst of all worlds in Northern Ireland. It seems most likely that we shall be left in that position. I hope that that will not happen, and that the legislation will be significantly amended in Committee.

6.26 pm

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): I apologise to the House because, as soon as I sit down, I shall have to attend a committee and, as I am standing for office, I think that I should be there.

In my view, and I think that of virtually everyone in the House, the public were rightly appalled last year when they saw the unprecedented violence committed on the roof of Strangeways and heard of the threats, often of a sinister nature, to other inmates. They were even more concerned when they learned that all that was likely to happen to the perpetrators was that they would lose some remission.

I served as chairman of the board of visitors at Rarby prison before entering the House, so I know the restrictions on punishment that can be awarded in prison. Therefore, I very much welcome the Bill, which would make it an offence to carry out some of the activities that occurred at Strangeways last year. I appreciate that the case may be sub judice, but the men who perpetrated the acts were clearly evil. They threatened and harmed other prison inmates who were serving their time as best they could. They also threatened the prison officers.

Great credit is due to the prison officers at Strangeways and other establishments where there have been similar occurrences for their courage and dedication to duty. I do not always agree with what the Prison Officers Association says or does, but I pay tribute to it for the job it does, particularly in prisons such as Strangeways.

We could not just pass over the events at Strangeways as if nothing had happened. The rioters clearly encouraged the copy-cat rioting at other prisons—one of the more sinister aspects of what happened at Strangeways. To some extent, prisons are governed by the consent of the inmates. If all the inmates of all the prisons throughout the country rose up as one at a particular time of the day, we could not contain the prison population. Let us consider what that would mean for the other inmates who would suffer the sharp end of the unpleasantness of some of their fellow prisoners. Let us imagine what would happen if some prisoners managed to escape and inflicted injuries on people outside, some of whom live in fear of the inmates coming out.

The consequences of a prison mutiny could be horrific, particularly for citizens outside. If we were to allow them to continue to get away with only what is in effect a slap on the wrist, it would be as though we were saying that prisoners should serve no more time in prison than the judge initially awarded them at their trial.

It follows that, as a result of the actions of those prisoners, taxpayers have to put their hands deep into their pockets. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary referred to the £60 million spent at Strangeways. If I were an Opposition Member, I would probably query such expenditure on one prison, but as I support my right hon. Friend and am here to ease the Bill's passage, I shall refrain from commenting adversely on that figure. However, my right hon. Friend will be happy to have my support as I tell the House that our current prison building programme is more than £1,000 million, a rise of 78 per cent. in real terms, over and above inflation, since the Conservative party took office. A prison building programme does not usually hit the headlines, but it is appropriate to underline the Government's commitment to decent, humane prisons. I hope that that commitment is shared by the Opposition, and I make no political point about it at this stage.

Those who riot and destroy put back the prison building programme. That is the harsh reality of Strangeways. They harm not only their own prisons but the opportunity of more modern and humane conditions of incarceration for those who follow them into the prison system. They place enormous pressure on police cells.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) who will be seeking to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker, tabled an amendment which has not been selected but on which I have no doubt he will speak, stating that, until we do away with holding prisoners on remand in police cells, we should not introduce such a Bill. I understand that point—it is a fair constituency point—but it is a little self-defeating to say that, because the riots in Strangeways have placed enormous pressure on

police cells, we should not provide for future punishment of prison mutiny until those strains have been removed. The Bill seeks to avoid future strains on police cells by deterring future riots.

It is entirely unsatisfactory that we should ever hold large numbers of prisoners in police cells, often at considerable distance from their homes and, even worse, at considerable distance from their remand courts. It is also unsatisfactory for the police, who have to look after and contain them and to transfer them, when—I am not being populist about this—they should be out and about detecting crime. Using police cells for remand purposes prevents them from doing that work. If necessary, if remand prisons are ever severely full or if for any reason they cannot be used, I hope that my right hon. Friend will not hesitate to use temporary camps for the incarceration of remand prisoners. In any event, I hope that the current building programme will make that problem a thing of the past.

The Bill has the advantage of providing for such crimes to be punished by a court of law. Apart from the inadequacies of punishments available to boards of visitors, the present system of adjudication by boards of visitors leaves something to be desired. Proceedings are supposed to be informal, and to some extent they are. An inmate can from time to time have a friend to speak for him, but he cannot have a lawyer. I am not necessarily arguing that he should, because if the inmate has a lawyer, so must the prison officer who is giving evidence and prosecuting in the case, and if there are lawyers on both sides, the proceedings will be turned into a court of law and some of their informality will be removed.

However, I have always been deeply unhappy about adjudication proceedings in prisons. Unless one serves on a board of visitors, one has no experience of such proceedings, but the inmate is marched in—not quite at the double these days—to face three or more members of the board about three or four feet away in a small room. The inmate has an officer on either side of him, with their backs to the adjudication board, inches away from his face. I understand the need for security. No one wants the board of visitors, or the chairman, of whom I was one, being rushed at by an inmate who has been awarded a punishment with which he disagrees. But having two prison officers inches away from the prisoner's face, staring at him while he makes his case—such people are generally not trained advocates, although some are—is rather unfair.

Some of us did our time in the Army and will remember being on a charge. I am sure that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, were never in such a position, but I have to confess that I have been. To be run in at the double and shouted at feet away from the person who is putting the charge, without the opportunity of any relaxation, smacks of injustice and intimidation.

Before I came to the House, I chaired an adjudication board at Ranby prison. The inmate before us was charged with attempting to escape. He had acquired a long length of rope and a few grappling irons and it was clear that he intended to escape, but all that he had done was secrete the rope in another building, where he and the rope had been found. He had made no other attempt to escape, but the authorities expected us to find that chap guilty. We nearly always found inmates guilty, but I directed my fellow members of the board that merely acquiring kit for the purpose of an escape was not an attempt to escape.

I do not tell that story in order to show what a good, sensible fellow I am; I tell it because, as soon as we found that man not guilty, there was outrage throughout the prison. I can tell the House this because it happened at least 10 years ago, and no one will be harmed by my doing so. The prison officers felt that the purpose of the adjudication was to nip the matter in the bud and to give the appropriate punishment. I hope that I do not misjudge the people with whom I was working, but there was outrage at the fact that we had let the chap off.

I make that point because the way in which we have punished prisoners who have committed offences in prison over the years has left something to be desired. Making serious cases triable before the courts will remove them from the adjudication procedures which are often conducted within days of the event, when passions are running high and when the inmate is in some jeopardy.

This is a reform that I warmly welcome, and I give it my full support.

6.38 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate. I was not surprised that Mr. Speaker did not select my amendment. I did not intend to seek to divide the House on it, but it served its purpose because the Home Secretary referred to the problems of Strangeways. I was pleased that he said that he would consider the problems and costs of Greater Manchester police in collecting all the evidence resulting from the incidents at Stangeways and the problems that will exist from January onwards while all those involved in the Strangeways incidents are brought before the court. That will involve many costs for Greater Manchester, and I welcome the fact that the Home Secretary has agreed to consider that problem.

I was also glad to hear the Home Secretary acknowledge that the police cell situation in Greater Manchester is appalling. What do the Government intend to do about that? Ministers have admitted to that situation for 12 months. I received promises that next week, or the week after, the situation would improve, but it did not. The Government say that the Greater Manchester police will cope, and they will, but it is unfair to expect them to do so, rather than producing a solution.

There is a major question mark over the competence of the Home Secretary and the Home Office team. It seems that their only response to a crisis is to produce a Bill, have it enacted, and then assume that the problem has gone away. We saw that happen in respect of dangerous dogs, when the Government had to backtrack on several sections of that legislation—which has not, anyway, provided a solution. We are now confronted by the problem of joyriding and car stealing, and a measure is to be rushed through the House next Monday, but I doubt whether it will solve those problems.

The Prison Security Bill is supposed to deal with the crisis in our prisons—and in Greater Manchester in particular, because Strangeways is not available. The Government want newspaper headlines giving the impression that they are taking action, but in truth they are not achieving anything.

The Government should review the size of the prison population and devise a strategy to reduce it. We must tackle the avalanche of crime in this country by convincing people that if they commit a crime, they will be caught and

[Mr. Andrew F. Bennett]

punished. Sadly, too many crimes go undetected—or if they are detected, those who committed them escape punishment. There must be certainty that law breakers will be detected and properly punished.

The Government must consider also the climate created by modern attitudes. I regret the move more and more into a society of greed, in which the Government encourage the public to measure their worth in material terms. Sunday trading is another indication that the individual is measured by possessions rather than inner quality. I believe that it was William Morris who spoke of a person having an honest face. Society should emphasise that the individual should be honest unto himself and to others. Until that change of attitude occurs, those who fail at almost everything will turn to crime to gain material satisfaction.

Consideration must also be given to effective prison treatment. It is clear that people reoffend because their earlier imprisonment was a total waste of time. I repeat the point made in my earlier intervention, that we are still sending people to prison who do not need to go there. In one appalling case, one of my constituents was awarded restitution by the court, but some months later found that the individual had made no attempt to pay. The person was imprisoned, and that imprisonment crossed out any duty to pay restitution, but it was useless sending the individual to prison for just over a week—it would have been far better if the court had insisted that he paid restitution.

I ask almost facetiously of the Government whether the Bill will apply to those held in police cells. I suspect that it will. At present, more people are held in police cells in Greater Manchester and neighbouring forces, than in some of our prisons. Those on remand are being held in appalling conditions, and are not being cared for by people trained in that work. Although no senior officer in Greater Manchester will confirm that that situation affects the force's operational efficiency, the evidence points that way. Younger police officers no doubt like the overtime that goes with custodial work, but the extra hours must affect their efficiency when on conventional duties.

I am told that no one is allowed to go free in Greater Manchester because of the non-availability of a police cell, but people arrested in some parts of Greater Manchester cannot be taken to the nearest cells, because they are either full or occupied by people on remand who ought to be in prison. The newly arrested individual therefore has to be taken to a different police station, which also has an effect on police efficiency.

Custody officers at police stations are given some training in how to deal with a person who, having just been arrested and placed in a police cell, might attempt to commit suicide. The individual concerned may have been remanded two or three times, and at that stage might represent a potential suicide. I understand that such prisoners can be given paper suits to wear, but great skill —of the kind that prison warders are trained to develop —is required on the part of the police officer in dealing with someone who is suicidal. I understand that there have been 52 attempted suicides in police cells since the Strangeways incident. That is not a situation with which police officers should have to deal.

Escapes—there was one important escape in Greater Manchester—and even the risk of escapes place a great strain on police officers in their attempts to contain a large number of prisoners in police cells.

Greater Manchester solicitors are often required to travel some distance to receive instructions from prisoners on remand, which I understand adds to legal aid costs. The same problem faces probation officers. If someone is remanded in prison, at least he is likely to be found there —but those kept in police cells are often moved from place to place.

I have said before that many of the cells in which people are currently held in Greater Manchester were taken out of use 10 years ago. Those at Denton police station are an example of that. They were closed because they were thought unsuitable for holding people even overnight. I admit that some work has been done on those cells, but they are still very unsatisfactory.

I understand that the Minister of State is to visit Greater Manchester one day next week, when I am sure that she will see for herself the problems that I have described. However, I want the Minister not just to look, but to bring some solutions to Greater Manchester's problems, which are certainly growing worse.

At one point, only 269 prisoners were being held in Greater Manchester police cells, but that number is increasing. Ministers' promises have evaporated in recent months. Ministers come to the Dispatch Box and agree that an appalling situation exists, but nothing happens. As an act of despair, Greater Manchester police authority even considered suing the Home Office. I hope that it does not come to that, but I emphasise that a solution must be found. If necessary, I shall raise the subject again on Report or Third Reading, but I hope that by then the Government will have achieved a solution whereby police cells in Greater Manchester are not used for prisoners who should not be there.

Like so many other Home Office measures, the Bill is irrelevant to the problem. If we had properly run prisons with a reasonable number of prisoners, there would be little chance of mutiny. Overcrowding and all the other problems that Woolf referred to are causing the difficulties. The Government should address Woolf's recommendations rather than creating the irrelevant offence of prison mutiny, which will not solve the problem but is merely an attempt at window dressing.

6.50 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): I have much sympathy with the comments of the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) on the use of police cells for prisoners. It should be of the gravest concern to the House that about 1,700 prisoners are still in police cells. Perhaps this is not the occasion to debate that in detail, except to say that I was heartened to hear my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary say that the Prison Officers Association had decided to call off its industrial action, which to me and many others seemed to lie at the heart of many of the problems. That action is not the only reason why police cells have been used, but it has been a substantial reason. At any one time, about half of the 78 police cells in north Yorkshire are full of prisoners. That is a shocking way of trying to police north Yorkshire, where crime is increasing. The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish has done the House a service by raising that matter.

It used to be thought that the great train robbery was the crime of the century. It was certainly very daring, but if I remember correctly the train robbers stole about £2 million and one railway employee was seriously injured. Set against that serious and heinous crime, events at Strangeways last year better qualify for the title of crime of the century. A total of 147 members of prison staff were injured, some seriously, 47 prisoners were hurt and one died. The extent to which the riot contributed to that is conjecture, but as we heard again this afternoon, it will cost at least £60 million to put right the damage.

I was one of four members of the Select Committee on Home Affairs who had the unforgettable experience of visiting Strangeways a few days after the riot. I choose the words "unforgettable experience" very carefully. It was harrowing, daunting and deeply shocking. The sickening squalor that we saw and the stench of fire damage, urine, excrement and rotting food remained in my nostrils for days afterwards.

We saw the wanton destruction of so much of the prison building, including the newly installed toilets and washing facilities. Stairways, gangways, doors and windows were ripped out, areas of the roof were demolished and slates and scaffolding poles were strewn over a large area. Many slates were well outside the perimeter walls of the prison. The prison chapel, where the initial disturbance began, did not escape the sordid damage. We saw horrible grafitti and, perhaps the most horrible sight of all, bibles and hymn books rotting on the floor, having been damaged when the fire was put out.

Seeing all that damage left me in no doubt about two things—first, that the men who had had to face the violent scenes that we witnessed on television deserve the highest praise, and secondly, that such a riot should never happen again. It is the duty of the House and of the Government to ensure that all that needs to be done to prevent similar riots is given priority. Holding those responsible for what happened to account must be part of that process. That is why it is right to consider what can be done to improve discipline in prisons.

It was clear to us that individual prison officers had shown much courage and had performed their duties bravely and skilfully. They deserve the gratitude and admiration of the House and of the country. Sadly, we have not been able to debate this issue in detail previously, so perhaps there has not been an opportunity to pay that tribute.

Some Conservative Members have criticised some of the POA's policies, but when considering disturbances at Strangeway and at other prisons we should acknowledge the fortitude of prison staff in the face of extreme and savage violence. I recall talking to one prison officer—this graphically shows the difficulty that they faced—who, despite wearing a helmet and mask, virtually had the front of his face sliced open by a slate that was thrown from the roof. Although I did not see that, having seen the damage I could easily imagine that that had happened.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Hon. Members have praised prison officers, who were rightly paid a glowing tribute in the Woolf report and many of whom suffered psychological and physical trauma. I met officers who were terrified of returning to overcrowded prisons and who could not face that trauma again. It is unjust that some Conservative Members—perhaps not the hon. Gentleman, but many of his colleagues, including some Ministers—have unfairly criticised prison officers, who suffered enormously after Strangeways.

Mr. Greenway: Again, I am not without sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's comments, but there is a difference between comparing the lot of the average prison officer—it is not an attractive job or one that I would like to do, and I make no secret of that—and criticising some of the policies pursued by the Prisoners Officers Association, especially as there are about 1,700 prisoners in police cells, many of them because of the POA's industrial action.

Mr. Sheerman *rose*—

Mr. Greenway: Will the hon. Gentleman allow me to finish my argument?

The prison officers on duty in Strangeways and in one or two other prisons have every right not only to the plaudits of the House, but to the opportunity to recover from their harrowing experiencce. I have no evidence that anything other than that is happening.

Many of the prison officers who have taken industrial action in other prisons were not on duty at Strangeways. As I said to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), there have been problems in the brand new prison at Full Sutton near York, although the accommodation is not full. However, perhaps we can move on.

There is a world of difference between paying a rightful tribute to the bravery of individual officers and, when we do not agree with the POA's policy, making a justifiable criticism of it. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary this afternoon gave us the most important and encouraging news about the prison service for some time. He said—and I had not known this—that the POA is to call off its industrial action, and I sincerely hope that that is the case.

I do not believe that it is in the interests of anyone in the prison service to prolong the disputes. We know that they are about manning levels but, as I shall state later, I believe that the Government are making a genuine attempt to improve our prison regime, a greater attempt than any Government have made for a long time. I hope that the POA will recognise that.

Leaving Strangeways on that day in May last year, my thoughts were filled with direct questions about what needs to be done to ensure that such a disturbaance is prevented as far as is humanly possible. I make no secret of the fact that I do not believe that the Bill alone is the answer. No one in the Government is suggesting that we can solve all the problems and disturbances merely by creating the crime of prison mutiny. Listening to some of the speeches from the Opposition, one would think that that is precisely what they are accusing the Government of doing. Nothing could be further from the truth—the Bill is merely part of a package of necessary measures on which the Government have embarked.

However, before we even embark on that, we must consider the lessons to be learned from Strangeways. That is why the House should perhaps have had the opportunity to spend more time in the past few months debating the brilliant Woolf report. It was suggested earlier that we might need to make rather lengthy speeches this evening. One has only to pick up the Woolf report to know that it contains plenty of material to occupy the House for a long time.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): Read it out.

Mr. Greenway: I shall not rise to the hon. Gentleman's suggestion to read it out, but I shall refer to one or two relevant points.

The Woolf report cites three requirements for a stable prison—security, control and justice. Security is necessary to prevent escapes; control to prevent prisoners being disruptive; and justice to treat prisoners with humanity and fairness and to prepare them for their return to society in a way that will make reoffending less likely. That must be the fundamental aim of our prison service. The crime rate is rising and the number of prisoners—particularly young people—who come out, reoffend and go back to prison is also increasing. In view of that, we must do more with such people when they are in custody, and the improvement of the regime is crucial in that respect.

To answer the three aims of security, control and justice in turn demands substantial improvements in three key areas. We must improve the prison estate, the management and the prison regime. Strangeways could not have been better designed to facilitate a riot if that had been the intention. Again, my experience of going to the prison brought that home to me. The Government are doing much—more than any other Government in modern times—to improve our prison-building programme, but I shall deal with that issue in a moment.

Management failings at a number of levels is the crucial issue to be considered tonight. Management failings were identified by Woolf as being at the heart of the problem at Strangeways. For the benefit of the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), I shall refer to one or two of the report's conclusions. Paragraph 432 of section 3 states:

"The reason why the disturbance developed so rapidly was in particular because of the lack of preparedness of the prison staff and management and the inept handling of the early stages of the disturbance. This was largely attributable to totally inadequate training of the prison management and staff as to how to handle an incident of this sort."

Woolf went on to say:

"Headquarters and the North Regional Office bear a substantial responsibility for the extent to which the management and staff of the prison were unprepared for the disturbance. Security and contingency planning was given too low a priority by both bodies . . . The prison should also give higher priority to security and control. The way security records were kept was unsatisfactory."

The report contains a third major criticism of management. It refers to the fact

"that relatively junior governors on duty, who had not received any training in the handling of a major disturbance, contributed to the riot spreading to the whole prison."

It must be clear from that that the Government are right to try to give more priority to improving the management of the prison service.

The third issue which must be considered in improving the prison regime involves giving prisoners something worth while to do. It is undoubtedly true that there are too many prisoners who do not have enough to do and who suffer acute boredom. There is too much movement of prisoners because of the numbers on remand, and there are too many remand prisoners in prisons in which there are prisoners whom we want to reform.

It is a problem but, as my right hon. Friend the Minister of State knows, I have a high regard for a training prison in my area—Thorp Arch—which is to continue in its current role. I am grateful for that. I visited the prison last summer and saw the work being done with some long-stay prisoners—some of whom are serving sentences of 12 or 15 years—who are within two years of their release. The work is to help to prepare them for the world outside, and that is the key to what must be done in many of our prisons.

Leaving that prison, I was aware of the contrast between the squalor that I had seen in Strangeways and the constructive work that I had seen at Thorp Arch. Without a shadow of doubt, one could guarantee that there would not be the sort of disturbance at Thorp Arch that happened at Strangeways.

Mr. Sheerman: I am delighted to hear the hon. Gentleman mention the good work at Thorp Arch. Sadly, it is not typical. He mentioned the preparation for release and for training and employment on release. We should like much more effort put into that, because the statistics show, as he is aware, that the chance of a prisoner reoffending if he has a job to go to and some back-up in the community is less.

One of the interesting facts about employment prospects for prisoners that came out of the Select Committee on Employment was how disastrous has been the Government's withdrawal over the past few years of the Department of Employment counselling for prisoners both before and after release. It is a sad comment on the Government that that counselling service has been abolished.

Mr. Greenway: That is another matter, which the hon. Gentleman may wish to take up later.

My argument is simple. A regime that is not disrupted by too many remand prisoners being moved backwards and forwards—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman might do me the courtesy of listening to my reply to his question. There can be too many movements of prisoners and too many staff engaged in supervising them. That is why I strongly supported the measure in the Criminal Justice Act 1991 to bring in the private sector to deal with escort duties. Prison officers could then get on with the job for which they are trained and at which they are best—trying to reform some of the prisoners.

Another problem is that most prisoners are in prison for a relatively short time—three months or six months, and then they are out again. The work at Thorp Arch is done with those who are serving long sentences, but we can learn lessons from it, in that where there is worthwhile activity in prisons I do not believe that riot and disturbance are likely.

Disciplinary arrangements have a crucial part to play in achieving the aim of an improved prison regime. That is what the Bill is about. The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook tried to say that all that the Government were doing to prevent another Strangeways was to introduce the Bill, That does a grave disservice to the tremendous work of my right hon. Friends the Home Secretary and the Minister of State, to whom I pay tribute. Had the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook listened to the Home Secretary's speech and taken the notes that I did, he would have discovered that the Bill was only one of nine measures that the Government are introducing.

Slopping out will end by 1994. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has been under the cosh in the past few days—at any rate, he has had one or two difficulties. However, I believe that his tenure as Home Secretary will be recalled—*[Interruption.]*—for the fact that he had the courage and secured the resources to end the degrading

process of slopping out, which has besmirched the prison service for a long time. The hon. Member for Leicester, East is barracking.

Mr. Vaz: I am not.

Mr. Greenway: I remind the hon. Gentleman that when the Minister then responsible for prisons—now my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury—gave evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee after the Strangeways riot——

Mr. Vaz: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I object to being accused of barracking. I merely let out a very small laugh when the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) said that the Home Secretary would be remembered for great things. I was not barracking.

Mr. Corbett *rose*——

Mr. Greenway: May I continue? I have been speaking for rather a long time. I remind the hon. Member for Leicester, East that, when my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary was the Minister responsible for prisons, in May last year he told the Home Affairs Select Committee that the Government were still on course to end slopping out by the end of 1998. A year later, as a response to the Woolf report, we are talking about advancing that target by four years. That is a considerable achievement.

Secondly, we are putting record resources into the prison service. Some £1·4 billion is the annual cost of running the prison regime and there is £66 million to be spent next year on matters related to improvements suggested in the White Paper. Those in turn were a response to the Woolf report.

The exciting project at Wolds remand prison is a factor to which we can look forward. It will bring about an overall long-term improvement in the prison regime. There will be extra staff, too. I note that we intend to recruit 4,100 more prison officers over the next two years—my right hon. Friend the Minister of State is nodding. That is a substantial commitment.

There will also be 13 new prisons. The decision to build them was taken a long time ago, and they will open over the next two and a half years. For the first time, a code of standards is being introduced in our prisons, and that is long overdue. There is also the welcome commitment on the complaints adjudicator.

More staff will have been trained in control and restraint procedures. Security in our prisons will be improved. I was especially interested to hear my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary say that the strengthening of ceilings to prevent access to the roof space was being given priority.

The final measure is the Bill. As I said, it is part of the overall package. There has been an attempt to suggest that it will make no real difference, and to rubbish its provisions. It is justifiable to ask the question: will it work? Opinions are divided, but the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) made an interesting and helpful speech about the experience in Northern Ireland, from which the rest of the United Kingdom could learn a great deal. The hon. Gentleman put his finger on the truth when he said that the measure might discourage some shorter-stay prisoners from getting involved in riots and disturbances created by some of the longer-stay prisoners.

There is support for that idea in the first paragraph of Lord Justice Woolf's "Conclusions Specific to the Manchester Disturbance":

> "The disturbance which took place in the Chapel had been planned. That is clear from the evidence given formally and informally to the Inquiry".

Lord Justice Woolf says that the disturbance was "known beforehand" as likely

> "to take place, and . . . there were some inmates at the Chapel with weapons and masks. However, the number of inmates who attended the service with the intention of creating a disturbance was probably no more than 12 and possibly a smaller number than that. The remainder of those involved took advantage of the situation which developed to give vent to their own frustration".

I have no qualms in saying that the penal affairs brief from the Prison Officers Association, which I suspect has been sent to every hon. Member, is generally critical of the Bill. However, even that critical brief says:

> "It is conceded, however, that prisoners on shorter sentences may be influenced by such provisions from joining a disturbance which is already underway".

The Bill is not, in itself, the answer that will prevent a disturbance such as that at Strangeways from recurring. It is just one measure in a large package, but it is worth while.

Clause 2 rightly aims to strengthen the law on people outside assisting escapes. With the increase in the number of escapes from prison, that is an important point.

The Bill is a valuable addition to our law on prison discipline. I am pleased to note that, despite what it has said, the Labour party does not intend to divide the House.

7.19 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I am grateful for the opportunity to make some brief comments on the Bill. As the Minister is aware, there are two prisons in my constituency, and I was pleased to welcome her on a visit to both of them recently. I have known New Hall women's prison for some time, and I used to visit it many years ago when it was a detention centre. It was the place where the Government undertook one of their most spectacular failures in penal experiments—the short, sharp shock regime, which involved marching youths up and down. It was a miserable failure, and further failures are likely with policies such as those in the Bill. They are half-hearted measures which do not address the issues that cause concern in the prison system.

I have been proud to see the change at New Hall. I mentioned to the Minister when she visited that the management of the prison service deserve credit for the smooth way in which they have engineered the change from an all-male establishment to an all-female establishment producing some progressive policies which have an impact, I hope, on the lives of the women who are unfortunate enough to spend time there. I commend the prison governor who initiated the change and the present governor for their work, as I commend the staff who have supported them.

I have had considerable involvement with Wakefield prison since I was elected as Member of Parliament for Wakefield in 1987. I receive many letters from prisoners, and I visit the prison regularly. The work load, as hon. Members who have prisons in their constituencies are aware, is heavy. I hear about grievances on various issues from prisoners almost daily.

What concerns me more than the many grievances of the inmates at Wakefield prison has been the almost

[Mr. David Hinchliffe]

constant grievances about which I have been told by members of staff. As the Minister is aware, since the last general election there has been a state of industrial dispute at Love lane because of "fresh start". The Prison Officers Association and individual staff at the prison have constantly expressed their concern about the way in which the management of the prison service have failed to honour their side of the agreement reached some years ago on the change under "fresh start".

Hon. Members will be aware of the national figures. Since 1987, the prison officers' hours have been cut from 56 to 41 per week, which is the equivalent of 6,300 fewer staff. There is a proposal for a further two-hour reduction to 39 hours next April, which will be the equivalent of about 1,000 fewer staff. That has a strong impact on prisons such as Wakefield. There has been a constant dialogue between the POA and the prison governor about the difficulties there.

Apart from meeting the POA several times, I have also met the prison governor, and I know that he has sometimes been frustrated. He has made comments which I have previously reported to the House about his concerns about possible future problems at Wakefield prison because of the inability of the prison service to deliver the staffing levels required in that establishment.

I am sorry to say that the Government are paranoid about the POA. The people I meet at both local and national level are eminently reasonable. I put on record the fact that I believe that the POA as an organisation has changed recently. I can recall being in a licensed establishment in Wakefield some years ago when people coming off duty at Wakefield prison came in. I talked to one or two of them, and when I got home that night, I found a number of British National party leaflets in my pocket. At that time, the chairman of the Labour party in Wakefield gave clear evidence at a party meeting that the core of the British National party in Wakefield was in the prison. I used to be concerned about the POA because some of its policies were akin to those of organisations of the extreme right.

However, the POA has recently transformed itself into a responsible and decent organisation. It is true that it stands up for the interests of its members but, from what I have seen in Wakefield, it also stands up for the prison service. It stands up for issues of concern to my constituents, such as the security of prisons and the staffing level in Wakefield prison.

The Government's resolution of the dispute at Wakefield has caused me grave concern. I recently met representatives of the POA at Wakefield. It seems to me that the dispute has been ended on the basis of the POA being bullied into submission by being told that, if it did not end industrial action, the full powers of the state, to quote the governor, would be brought in to deal with the situation. That is not a healthy way in which to resolve conflicts that could be resolved amicably, possibly by arbitration. Those issues should be studied and talked about, but they are not addressed in the Bill.

The central issue which must be addressed by the Government is that they are criminogenic. The nature of Government policy causes crime. The Government have set up a "look after number one" society. They encourage people to look after themselves and to ignore the plight of others. They are anti-collective and pro-individual. If one encourages such motives in society, one gets a society such as the Conservatives have achieved in the past decade, with the worst crime figures in history, and with prisons crammed with people who have offended.

I do not say that the people in Wakefield who are there for serious offences relate to that issue, but I believe that many people are forced into crime because of the way in which they have been treated as a result of Government policies. We must accept that the central theme of the Government since 1979 has been selfishness and personal greed. That actively encourages people at the bottom of the pile to commit crimes, and the Government must address that issue when working out why people end up in prison. The Government's policies have resulted in huge pressures on the prison system.

The question of "fresh start" is not addressed in the Bill. Many industrial disputes rumble on. We must be fair and say that there are reasonable grounds for the POA to have grievances about the prison system. People who work in prisons see that the agreements that they thought they had reached at the outset of "fresh start" have been breached by the Government. Until there is a resolution, prisoners will continue to have grievances.

I have talked to the prisoners at Wakefield. They recognise the reasonableness and legitimacy of the POA's position on "fresh start". The prisoners understand and sympathise with some of the actions that the association has been forced to take, although those actions have sometimes meant that they themselves have suffered.

The Bill does not address the root causes of the prison crisis. It is a half-hearted measure—

Mr. Vaz: Half-baked.

Mr. Hinchliffe: As my hon. Friend says, the measure is half-baked. It scratches the surface of the symptoms, but it fails to address the root causes of the present prison crisis.

7.28 pm

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe). I do not agree with his analysis about the Government looking after number one and therefore encouraging people to commit crime. I do not believe, first, that there was any less crime under a Labour Government—in fact crime increased under every Labour Government I can remember—or, secondly, that encouraging people to better themselves, to make decisions for their lives and to improve their economic position has anything whatever to do with dishonest methods of doing just that. Although such a view is typical of some Opposition attitudes, it will never be accepted by Conservative Members.

I wish to continue in that uncontroversial strain by referring to one or two opening comments by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), who described the Bill as being produced merely to catch headlines and as an illusion of activity. If the previous Labour Government in which he served had only caught a few more headlines and been as active in prison improvements and new prison building as all Conservative Governments since 1979 have been, his comments could be taken more seriously. I remind the right hon. Gentleman that, under Labour in the 1970s, the prison population grew by about 15 per cent., while capital

spending was cut by 20 per cent., a fact to which my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) referred earlier.

Mr. John Greenway: Hear, hear.

Mr. Martin: As my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), who makes encouraging noises, has also said—and it is worth repeating—spending on prison buildings has risen by leaps and bounds, with many new establishments being opened, providing extra places, while fewer prisoners now share cells, and slopping out is being phased out earlier than anyone thought possible. Those are facts, not just headlines or illusions.

Of course, the running of prisons and their security and good order rely crucially on the staff working in them. It is self-evident that, without manpower of sufficient quality and in sufficient numbers, it does not matter how many technological advances or improvements there are. The prison officer using his eyes and ears is the first security patrol. I have been most impressed by the strength of this basic common sense at Her Majesty's prison in Kingston, which is in my constituency. It is a category B prison. It holds 150 prisoners, all serving life sentences. It is a case of each to his own cell with no slopping out. That has been the case for lifers since 1970.

There are particular challenges in running a prison which has only those serving life sentences in it, yet it was not until earlier this year that any escape from that prison took place. It involved one prisoner who was recaptured soon afterwards. From the outset, that prison has been well governed. The first woman governor, Miss Muriel Allen, retired a little while ago and has been succeeded by Mr. Roy Merricks. That prison has been well governed by both governors while I have been Member of Parliament for Portsmouth, South.

It has also been a tenet of good security that prisoners should spend the maximum time outside their cells being kept busy working. Of course that makes sense, as hon. Members have said. Plotting, planning and trouble-making are far less likely to take place under such a regime.

Many people contribute positively to the right atmosphere at Kingston. Without their dedicated service, the prison would not be run so well as it is. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton referred to the 1,000 members of the Prison Service Union, which is seeking recognition from the Home Office. I understand that the figure is now nearer 1,500, with more than 30 members at Kingston. In the past two years, I have been in touch with my right hon. Friend the Minister of State and her predecessors on the recognition point. I urge her to recognise that union without further delay.

It will not please members of the Prison Officers Association, who have kept me well informed over the years. I do not dissent from much of what the hon. Member for Wakefield said about members of the Prison Officers Association. Always on my visits to Kingston I am treated with courtesy and consideration. As a result, I have always reported concerns to the various Ministers ultimately responsible for the prison and have obtained responses. I refer not only to issues about manpower and conditions arising out of the implementation of "fresh start" but to the clear opposition to privatisation of prison services, prisons or remand centres, on which I do not agree. In my view, there is scope for such development. I agree with my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton and my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale on that point.

Those policies will be pursued by a Government who have proved beyond doubt to those working in the prisons their commitment to prison expansion and improvement as well as necessary increases and efficient practices in manpower. That must be contrasted with what occurred under Labour, and no doubt will occur again should we ever be unfortunate enough to have another Labour Government. Labour Governments are always constrained by cost considerations and by the financial disasters brought on by all the spending commitments that they claim are priorities and then have to jettison one by one. Prisons would come well down the list of priorities should Labour ever be in government, and those working in the prisons would soon discover that, too.

Good industrial relations are in the interests of everybody working in prisons. Without them, as the White Paper "Custody, Care and Justice" says,

"there can be no assurance that resources"—

which means money, and I wish that people would say "money" rather than "resources"—

"devoted to the prison service will be used effectively and efficiently in a way which fulfils the obligations of the prison service."

Finally, in the interests of security, I welcome the Government's action as set out in the Bill. Of course the Bill will not sort out all the problems—it does not pretend to do that—but I wish it well in its passage through the House.

7.35 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I do not believe that the Government would have introduced the Bill had a Woolf not been at the door. Of course we welcome the Woolf report and its careful examination of what happened during the Strangeways riot. Like the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), I am a member of the Home Affairs Select Committee. I was not able to join the hon. Gentleman on his visit to Strangeways, but the Committee decided to initiate an inquiry and report into precisely what happened at Strangeways. We were aware that, because of the Woolf inquiry, it was not possible to go into great detail into what happpened at Strangeways.

Like the hon. Gentleman, my impressions of what I saw are the recollections of a person who was shocked by the wanton destruction that occurred during the riot. I visited the chapel at Strangeways prison to see the great destruction that had occurred, and I wondered whether human beings could have been responsible for it.

I was escorted around the prison by members of the Prison Officers Association. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), I pay tribute to the work of the Prison Officers Association. I deplore the recent attacks by Ministers and others on the association and what it is doing. It is putting forward the best possible case for the prison service. Of course its members gain because they work in the service, but they put forward their views because they want to make sure that the service does not collapse under the strain and we do not have a repetition of the destruction that we saw at Strangeways.

[Mr. Keith Vaz]

I pay tribute also to the work of the newly appointed governor of Leicester's prison on Welford road, Gerry Ross. I visited the prison four weeks ago, and I met him and members of the association. I also spoke to prisoners.

Like many prisons in this country, Leicester prison is overcrowded. The message that I received from the governor and from the hard-working members of the association who work at Welford road is that there is a need for more resources to be put into the prison service.

I look forward to the Home Secretary telling the Home Affairs Select Committee what he proposes to do with the prison service. I put him on notice that we shall ask him what he has done to provide extra resources to the prison service. We will ask him to justify the fact that so many prisons remain overcrowded. We will want to know what he is doing to address the POA's concerns about the operation of "fresh start".

The right hon. Gentleman is smiling in anticipation of his forthcoming visit to the Committee. However, I give him notice that these are some of the questions that we shall be asking him, because they are very important indeed. Although the legislation before us will provide some elements and go some way towards meeting the criticisms of Government policy outlined in the Woolf report, it is important to realise that there is still a great deal that needs to be done.

I look forward to seeing the amendments that will be tabled by my right hon. Friend for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) and others when they look in a measured way at the Bill and seek to amend it to provide the support for the prison service that is so desperately needed.

I want also and in particular to draw attention to the grave concern that I and others feel about the number of young people being held in prisons. If there is a need for legislation in areas of prison policy, surely this is one area that ought to be considered very quickly by the Government.

I refer the Home Secretary and the Minister to the article that appeared in *The Guardian* on Wednesday, 20 November, which gave the comments of the governor of the young offenders centre at Feltham in Middlesex. Reacting to the death of a young man in custody, he said:

"I personally wish to say how abhorrent it is to have to deal with children, because that is what Geoffrey was—a child in a penal setting—and under the conditions in which I have to run Feltham, for want of staff."

That is what the governor of that offenders centre had to say, and I should be very interested to know what the Minister of State has done since she read that report in the newspaper. The governor referred to a system that was bankrupt of compassion. Why that is so extraordinary is that governors of institutions of that kind tend not to want to give interviews to the press; they keep their views very much to themselves. They may speak to Members of Parliament and Ministers on a confidential basis, but it is very unusual to come out in terms of that kind and say that sort of thing.

I hope that the Minister of State will provide information tonight that will assure the House that something positive will be done. I am sure that hon. Members need no convincing by me that teenagers must be removed from the penal system. The Home Secretary told me in an answer to a written question recently that he has no plans to remove young people from the penal system. I think we are entitled to be told why. What tragedies must occur before he and the Minister of State will change their minds?

I welcome the new Criminal Justice Act 1991, which provides for the ending of prison remand for 15 and 16-year-olds. However, it is clear that sufficient places in secure accommodation do not exist to meet the need created by that change in the law. In fact, there has been talk of it taking up to four years to give effect to this, during which time who knows how many young people will die, while the Home Office and the Home Secretary drag their feet? I should be glad if the Minister would comment on the suggestions that have been made that there is wrangling with other Government Departments over who has to pay for these places.

While accepting that this lethal practice of placing 15 and 16-year-olds in prison must end for those on remand, the Home Secretary refuses to consider removing those serving sentences from the prison system. Does the fact that they are serving sentences made their lives less valuable? Apparently, 15 and 16-year-olds have to remain in prison while the Home Office argues with the Department of Health over what is to happen to them. The Department of Health wants to place more of them in community care, while the Home Office wants to place more of them in secure accommodation.

Will the Minister of State confirm that young people will be placed in secure accommodation only when they represent a real danger to the public? Will she also confirm that secure accommodation will also be available where local authority homes are not able to provide such accommodation because of lack of funds? I hope that the Minister will address her comments to these important matters.

The Minister also told me in a written reply about the education and social opportunities that were available to young offenders. Is she aware that the Feltham visitors' report, which I am sure she has had a chance to read, said that there were only 24 workshop training places for 256 young people? Is she also aware that, for 500 unconvicted young people, there are no organised activities or education whatsoever?

These are very serious matters and I am glad to see that the civil servants are leaving the Box to find the answers. I would expect the right hon. Lady to give us the answers, because she still has time to absorb what her civil servants have to tell her.

Today I have had a reply to a parliamentary question to the Minister, which tells me the latest figures of young people currently in young offender institutions. Of 14 and 15-year-olds, there are 67 in such institutions; of 16 to 19-year-olds, there are 3,110; and of 14 to 19-year-olds, there are 3,177. These are figures that the House is not prepared to tolerate. We expect some firm proposals from the Minister tonight, or at least when we debate this matter in Committee, that will assure the House that something will be done about this very dangerous situation.

Finally, I pay tribute to the police service in Leicestershire. I refer to figures published by the Minister on 12 November, in which she sets out the number of prisoners currently held in police cells. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook gave a figure, but I wish to top it. The figures given to me show that there are 1,719 prisoners held in police cells. Of these, 227 are in

Greater Manchester, 36 in Leicestershire, 17 in Lincolnshire and 42 in Nottinghamshire—all east midlands constabularies.

These figures cannot be tolerated or justified, either in cost terms or in terms of the most efficient use of police resources. The Minister will know that I and other Leicestershire Members from all parts of the House have continually asked for more officers to be allocated to Leicestershire. I pay tribute to Michael Hurst, the chief constable, and his senior and other officers for the work that they are doing.

However, the plea continually made to us by senior police officers and members of the Police Federation and other organisations representing the police is that they do not have sufficient people. It is no wonder, when so many police officers appear to be doing the duties which prison officers should be doing and so many prisoners are placed in police cells. This means that police person power is being used on an issue and in an area where it really is not necessary.

What does the Minister intend to do about the 1,719 prisoners who are being held in police cells? I do not want to know what she intends doing in a year's time or in 10 years' time, because she will not be in government then. What will she do now, when it is her responsibility as Minister of State and the responsibility of the Home Secretary to do something about it?

Mr. Corbett: My hon. Friend protested when he was accused of barracking by the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway). I sought to interrupt to confess that I was responsible. There has been talk of a commitment to do away with slopping out by 1994. What I wanted to get at was that we have had such commitments before. Three successive Home Secretaries have stood at the Dispatch Box and pledged to do away with holding prisoners in police cells. That is why I objected to the assurance with which the hon. Member for Ryedale was arguing that this would happen. There is a wide difference between promise and performance.

Mr. Vaz: My hon. Friend is right. We have had commitments from Home Secretaries and Ministers of State at the Dispatch Box, in Committee and in the Select Committee on Home Affairs, when they have promised to do various things, but they still have not done them. They pick a year in the future when they know that there will have been a general election and that they will probably not be in the same job as when they gave the commitment. The Minister of State will be under no time constraint this evening, and she will have plenty of time to tell us precisely what she will do about this serious subject.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield wondered why we had so many people in prison and in police cells. The reason is that crime has increased dramatically under the Government. The Minister of State turns away, but she and the Home Secretary have presided over the worst crime figures that the country has ever known.

When my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook was Home Secretary, he used to draft for us what he described as a crime clock. He divided the number of crimes by the number of minutes in an hour to show how many crimes were committed in a certain time. We do not have a crime clock any more; the clock broke because the figures were so devastating. It is impossible to get sensible statistics from it.

It is no use the Home Secretary saying that the high crime rate is due to other factors. The high level of crime and the resultant number of people in prison are due directly to the policies of the Government, which have created people who are greedy and selfish, a society where people are supposed to be on their own, a society which destroys the morale and the will of people who happen to be on benefits and on the poverty line. If the Minister of State wants to see what that is like, she should go into the City tonight and look at the number of people who are sleeping in the cold because there is no accommodation for them.

It is no wonder that there are so many young offenders. They have no future because of the policies of the Government. Therefore, although we welcome legislation that deals with the serious issues, and although we have promised to consider it carefully in Committee, we cannot do anything about the crime figures. Only the Minister of State and the Home Secretary can do something about them. The Minister of State needs to address some important points. She has probably written her speech already, but I hope that she will include these points in her reply.

First, the police must have additional resources to deal with the high level of crime; secondly, and more important, the Government have to change their policy, or there will be more people in prison. We are told that their slogan is the power to choose and the right to own; however, it has become the power to take and the right to steal. We want positive policies, and we want them now.

7.54 pm

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), I have a prison in my constituency; indeed, it almost had two. I am not as familiar with Walton prison as my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields), but I have visited the prison and I have seen the conditions under which prisoners and staff have to labour.

I mentioned that we almost had two prisons in Walton. What happened is instructive about the attitude of the Government. They proposed to locate a second prison in Walton, barely a mile and a half from Walton prison. It was to be a category B prison and it would have been the length of a cricket pitch away from the neurosurgical unit in Fazackerley hospital. Hon. Members can imagine how inept the Government must be to believe that overlooking a prison yard, floodlit day and night, would be conducive to the recuperation of neurosurgical patients. Because of local opposition and the intervention of my predecessor, Eric Heffer, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), the Home Office was persuaded that it would not be wise to go ahead with that prison.

I was dismayed when I heard the Home Secretary's statement. I had the pleasure of spending some years in Queensland, Australia. During that time I had the misfortune to visit the infamous Boggo road gaol; I stress that I was a visitor. I saw at first hand what a regressive prison regime does to prisoners. They were completely intimidated—but even under that very strict regime there was nothing to compare with the suggestion that if two or more people refused to get up from the dining table they might be liable to a 10-year prison sentence.

[Mr. Peter Kilfoyle]

Like many hon. Members, I am receiving increasing amounts of mail from prisoners about simple matters—the right to exercise, the right to decent food and the implementation of the prison rules as they stand. We all know that, because of a lack of resources, a lack of foresight and a lack of a coherent strategy for dealing with the prison population, those matters are not being dealt with.

Reference has been made to commitments about ending slopping out. I recall a commitment not so long ago to reduce the number or prisoners, yet the Home Secretary told us that there was an unexpected increase of 3,000 in the prison population. What effect does that have on prisoners? They become disaffected. I am talking about prisoners who do not want problems in serving their sentence; they want to serve it in a civilised fashion, where that is possible in any prison regime.

Prison officers are equally prisoners of the system. The prison service does not have the staff or the resources to provide the rehabilitation that prisoners need and which many prison officers misguidedly joined the service to provide.

My constituents who are in prison—I hope not for too long—are becoming increasingly disaffected. Unless there is drastic action based on the Woolf report, rather than the sort of band-aid solution that we have heard about today, I fear that there will be an increase in disturbances, especially if there is yet another unexpected surge in the prison population.

Mr. Vaz: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend, but does he agree that we require a firm commitment from the Government that more resources will be provided for the prison service? Instead of attacking the Prison Officers Association, the Government should spend more time ensuring that the money and resources are available that will enable the prison service to work; otherwise, the result will be the wanton destruction that occurred atStrangeways.

Mr. Kilfoyle: That is absolutely right. We need more resources, but they must be properly targeted. I do not believe simply in throwing money at the prison service for the sake of it. Building new prisons, for example, is not necessarily the answer. We must have properly trained staff and we must provide some incentive for the prisoners themselves.

I recently received a letter from a prisoner who was seeking my help. He was in Long Lartin prison when he wrote to me, but by the time that I was able to make contact with him, he had been transferred to Winson Green prison. I telephoned that prison only to learn that he had been transferred to Risley. When I telephoned Risley, I was told that the prisoner had been returned to Winson Green. My office rang that prison today and was told that the prisoner has now been transferred to Walton prison.

Is that a useful deployment of resources? The man has two months of his sentence left to serve. A properly organised Department would have ensured that that man could be transferred immediately to his home prison for release. Such tales are legion—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I apologise to the hon. Gentleman. I had just taken over the Chair and I thought that he was making an intervention. I hope that I have not put him off.

Mr. Kilfoyle: You will have to forgive me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I have now lost my thread.

Another prisoner wrote to me recently, and I am now seeking to get him transferred to a prison nearer his home in Liverpool. That man was being transferred from Dartmoor to the Isle of Wight. The problem was that I could not get a response from anybody in the Department. I seemed to go round in circles, and I am sure that that has happened to many hon. Members.

Mr. Vaz: My hon. Friend has raised an important point about the ability of prisoners relatives to travel around the country. Does he share my concern about some prisoners being put in prisons that are so far away from their families that it is a difficult and expensive business for the wives and chilldren—especially if there are young children—to travel half way round the country to see their fathers or relatives? It seems to be the families that are being punished for what has happened.

Mr. Kilfoyle: Again, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. Prisoners are often transferred so far away from their homes that the social problems become immense and the difficulties are exacerbated rather than diminished. It is the local authorities that must pick up the bill for those problems.

Prisoner after prisoner has complained about the arbitrary way in which the prison regulations are enforced. It is not just a question of prison visits and of people being shifted far away from their homes, because telephone calls can also be a problem. A prisoner wrote to me stating that, although he was worried about his father's health, he was not allowed a telephone call. He was told that, if he behaved himself in the segregation block where he was being held, he would be allowed to make a call to his father who was seriously ill. Telephone calls are being held out as bait for good behaviour. That incident led to the man absconding from the prison just weeks before his sentence was due to end. That is no way to run a prison service.

On the subject of Walton prison and the conditions there, I must pay credit to all its staff who work extremely hard. However, two of my constituents entered the prison service with the idea of working eventually in Walton prison, but they have ended up working in London. The families are now split up. The prison officers cannot afford accommodation in both places—in fact, they cannot afford accommodation in either—and they are contemplating leaving the prison service for what will probably be a life on the dole. That is happening simply because the prison service has been so badly mismanaged that the staff are disaffected.

I regret that we hear continual attacks on members of the Prison Officers Association. As far as I am concerned, it is the only body that represents the prison officers, who work under great dufess. We must recognise that they are getting a raw deal and are being victimised by the Government. The prison officers have been seen as one of the major reasons for, not one of the victims of, the mismanagement of the prison service.

I sincerely hope that we shall have a change of Government in the not-too-distant future, and that my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparbrook will be able

to rectify the wrongs that have been so obviously perpetrated by the Government on the prison service during the past 12 years.

8.4 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): When I reply to debates, it is my custom to have heard all the speeches that have been made, so it is unfortunate that pressing circumstances outside the House have led me this evening to commit the grave discourtesy of not being in my place to hear as many speeches as I should have liked. I apologise to the House.

The Opposition have grave reservations about the Bill. Our concerns go far beyond those that we anticipated in our debates on the Gracious Speech, which took place before we had sight of the text of the Bill although even at that stage we had our fears about its final form. At that time, our views were expressed eloquently by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparbrook (Mr. Hattersley). At that point, we believed that the Bill would be an irrelevance and unnecessary given that prisoners can already be charged with a wide range of criminal offences, including offences under the Public Order Act 1986. We believed that the Bill would be totally inefectual in terms of deterring rioters.

That was our opinion before we had read the Bill. Now that we have seen the text, our suspicions and fears are confirmed. I shall turn later to my perception of what the Home Secretary said earlier, and what some of his hon. Friends have said in his defence and aid. Much of what has been said by Conservative Members today seems to be a rearguard attempt to protect the Home Secretary and his sinking reputation.

I will not call the Home Secretary any names, but I repeat the point made by many of my right hon. and hon. Friends. When the right hon. Gentleman came to that office, he had the opportunity to grasp the nettle of prison reform. Indeed, he had a unique and historic opportunity because the Strangeways riot had already occurred, and the Woolf-Tumim inquiry was in progress. If he had had any foresight, when the Woolf-Tumim report was published, the right hon. Gentleman would have said to himself, "Here is a unique and historic opportunity for me to make my reputation as one of the great Home Secretaries of the 20th century." Those of us concerned with criminal justice matters are disappointed that the right hon. Gentleman did not seize that opportunity.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook said earlier, we have seen only a few small and rather insignificant measures that do not add up to a large impact on our criminal justice system, which is crying out for fundamental change. As I shall seek to argue, the opportunity was there; and the Home Secretary's failure has been that he did not grasp it. He will carry disappointment with him for the rest of his political career and, indeed, to the end of his days. Instead of seizing the opportunity to become one of the great Home Secretaries of the 20th century, he remains a rather shaky party politician.

Our view of the Bill has been expressed most clearly by the Government themselves in their White Paper, "The Prison Disciplinary System of England and Wales", which was published in 1986 in response to the Prior committee report. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook referred to that, and it does not harm us——

Mr. Kenneth Baker: There is no one else here.

Mr. Sheerman: The Home Secretary is worried about my declining audience. We shall see what audience his right hon. Friend the Minister of State has when it is her turn to speak.

I quote from the Government's 1985 report. It is a quotation to which the Home Secretary should listen to which his right hon. Friend the Minister of State should reply:

> "Since the Prior Committee's report was published, the Government's Public Order Bill (now the Public Order Act) has been brought before Parliament. Clauses 1, 2 and 3 create new statutory offences of riot, violent disorder and affray, with maximum penalties of 10, 5 and 3 years respectively. Clause 4 creates an offence of threatening or insulting behaviour which replaces the offence in Section 5 of the Public Order Act 1936. All these offences can be committed inside a prison establishment. Accordingly the use or threat of violence in connection with a prison mutiny can be dealt with under the general criminal law. Given the restructuring of public order offences in the Public Order Bill, the Government's view is that there is no need for a further specific offence of prison mutiny."

I hope that the Minister of State will tell us why the Government's policy has changed since 1985.

I can perhaps anticipate what the Minister will say. She might say, and I would not blame her for saying, that the Strangeways riot and the riots associated with it have given cause for a total and radical rethink. In some ways, she might be justified in using that argument. However, Lord Justice Woolf was asked to inquire into Strangeways and the other riots. He produced a report which is highly regarded. I have heard no demur from the opinion that the Woolf report is the finest document for 100 years on what is wrong with our prisons and the penal system and how to put it right. Everyone agrees that it is the report, and that there is no point in having a royal commission after Woolf. It is a brilliant report. Everyone who has knowledge of the criminal justice system says that Woolf is where it is at, and that, if the Home Secretary implemented Woolf within a reasonable timetable and with reasonable resources, he would have done what was needed.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook said, in his wide range of recommendations Lord Justice Woolf rejected a special measure to deal with prison riots and disturbances. The many days spent not only taking oral and written evidence but taking part in the interesting innovation of seminars in which all the participants in the criminal justice system could come together and discuss the issues convinced him that there was no call and no advocate for the creation of a specific offence.

The Home Secretary said that he had found prison governors who were in favour of the Bill. I hope that his right hon. Friend the Minister will name some of them. Certainly, the Prison Governors Association is not in favour of it. It is the time of year and the period of political history when many of the great campaigning organisations in penal reform have their anniversaries. The Prison Reform Trust recently had its 10th anniversary party. The National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders recently had its 25th anniversary. They were pleasant occasions, at which the Home Secretary was present. He would not find anyone among the people celebrating those events who was in favour of the legislation except his own Parliamentary Private Secretary who was also present, but that is to be expected.

[Mr. Sheerman]

When the public think of prison mutiny, they have in mind events such as those at Strangeways, when prisoners attempted to overthrow legitimate authority in a violent manner. That is the very event envisaged in clause 1(2)(a). If the Bill had stopped there, we would have supported it as an unnecessary but reasonably harmless measure, but it goes far beyond the type of incident about which we are all deeply worried.

Clause 1(2)(b) defines a mutiny as where two or more prisoners

"collectively resist, impede or disobey any exercise of lawful authority in the prison in such circumstances as to make their conduct subversive of order in the prison."

That is amazing. Who drafted it? I do not know who pays the salaries of the people who drafted it. It is an astonishingly broad remit. Presumably we shall have a good chew at the clause in Committee, but if it remains in that form we shall certainly be unable to support the Bill on Third Reading.

I said today to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook that if the Oliver Twist story were translated from the workhouse to a prison, the person who drew the short straw and was sent to protest about the food would come within the net of the Bill. It would be necessary only to produce evidence of the drawing of straws and some sort of conspiracy to send Oliver Twist to ask for more. It is ridiculous. Many protests in our prisons are about food, which is extremely important to the prisoners. They protest when the food is not up to standard or of the quality that they have come to expect.

Clause 1(4) says:

"Where there is a prison mutiny, a prisoner who has or is given a reasonable opportunity of submitting to lawful authority and fails, without reasonable excuse, to do so shall be regarded for the purposes of this section as taking part in the mutiny."

Again, the commission of this serious offence, which carries a maximum sentence of 10 years, need not involve any use or threat of violence. We find it amazing that men and women who take part in an action that does not use or threaten violence will have such a penalty thrown at them under the terms of the Bill.

No alarm, distress or breach of the peace need be caused. What is more, according to clause 1(3) there is no mens rea for the offence. Prisoners' intentions are inferred from their behaviour. Let us compare that with the offence of riot under the Public Order Act 1986, which also carries a maximum penalty of 10 years. It is an important comparison. Under the Act, a riot occurs

"Where 12 or more persons . . . use or threaten unlawful violence for a common purpose and the conduct of them . . . is such as would cause a person of reasonable firmness present at the scene to fear for his personal safety."

The same safeguards occur for the offences of violent disorder and affray, where the maximum sentences are considerably lower—five and three years respectively.

Let us consider what behaviour would be caught by the wide definitions in clause 1. First, prisoners will have disobeyed lawful authority if two or more of them have been involved in a sit-down protest in the yard about food or have refused to work in the workshop. I was talking to a prison officer this morning. He said that the legislation was unworkable. It is the normal daily routine in the prison that prisoners refuse to obey when upset about some change in routine or something that has happened. The Minister of State has visited many prison establishments since she took on her job, so she knows the mentality and psychology of prison inmates. She will be aware of the trigger points and catalysts that set off a disturbance. The Secretary of State made a short speech in which he said nothing about the main thrust of the argument and the criticisms that my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook and those who have lobbied him have made. I am making that criticism in detail, and I hope that the Minister of State will give us some answers.

We have to run our prisons on the basis of a law that works. Great damage can be done if we introduce an unworkable Bill. Legislation that no one understands and that no one can work with in any meaningful way will bring the law into contempt and may do more damage than good—it may backfire on those who drafted the Bill.

Sit-down protests in the yard about food or refusing to work in the workshop because the rota or the work has been changed without consultation are everyday occurrences. If two prisoners are involved in a rooftop protest to proclaim their innocence, they will be committing an offence. I do not like rooftop protests. I do not like people climbing up on to roofs and damaging them, but we must put that in perspective. Men who were later found to be innocent have used that means of protest to draw attention to the injustice of their sentence and conviction. There is a difference between mutiny and someone climbing on to a roof and saying that he is innocent but has had to go to that extreme. I do not condone it, but I understand it, and bringing it within the terms of the Bill is dangerous, because it would criminalise non-violent civil disobedience.

Mr. Timothy Kirkhope (Leeds, North-East): Rubbish.

Mr. Sheerman: The Whip, the hon. Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope), who is a great expert on such matters, says, "Rubbish." If it is rubbish, it is the rubbish that every informed person and knowledgeable pressure group involved with the penal system is coming out with. If the Whip—who does not usually say much, thank goodness—thinks that that is rubbish, I refer him to NACRO, the Prison Governors Association, the POA, the Howard League for Penal Reform, the Prison Reform Trust and New Bridge. We could meet some of them and he can tell them that it is rubbish. Perhaps we should go to one of his local prisons—there are several near his constituency. We could talk to the governor and see whether he says that it is rubbish.

The questions that I am asking are the questions that the informed and high quality lobby outside is asking. I have the opportunity to ask those questions at the Dispatch Box and I have the right to expect an answer, even in these late days of a regime which does not believe in parliamentary accountability any more.

Everyone accepts that prison authorities must have powers to discipline the non-violent prisoners I have described, but they have those powers under rule 47(19) of the prison rules, which make it a disciplinary offence for a prisoner to disobey any lawful order.

I was interested when one of the hon. Members representing Northern Ireland explained how the system works there. That shed some light, and I hope that the Minister learned from it. To charge prisoners with a serious criminal offence in those circumstances is

draconian and totally inappropriate. The Bill was not designed to deal with that sort of non-violent activity, and we have to do something about it.

Official prison returns show the extent of non-violent protests. My hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook gave the figures earlier, but they bear repeating. Between March and June 1991 there were 23 food protests, six rooftop demonstrations and 29 allegations of concerted indiscipline—a total of 58 protests.

A prison officer told me this morning that officers are paid to deal with that type of activity. He said that those were fairly normal occurrences. They are anticipated and are part of the job. All such incidents would fall within the scope of the Bill and would be criminalised. If the law were used in that way, it would undermine confidence in the process of prison reform. There are protests about conditions in many of our prisons.

I want to bring home to the Minister and to the Home Secretary that we are worried about the Bill because it seems like a sticking plaster job. It dwells on the surface of the problem and is peripheral to it. We keep invoking the Woolf report because it got beneath the surface. It got away from the periphery of the debate and went to the heart of the matter. Woolf drew our attention to the reason why the prison system in 1990-91 is a disgrace to a modern civilised nation. In every paragraph of that thick report, he pointed out that rotten, insanitary, and especially overcrowded prisons are the problem. The Strangeways riot and prison indiscipline resulted from packing men into inhumane conditions and treating them as less than human. That is the truth about our prisons.

I intervened on one hon. Member earlier who was being unusually nice about some of the things that happen in a few prisons. He was talking about work and assessing prisoners' potential for training. When I became interested in the penal system, I was horrified to find that that has not happened for years. There are about 47,000 prisoners, and the number is rising. Is it not possible to have a management structure which knows who the prisoners are, what they are doing, and their possibilities for education and training? Is it not possible to have a proper personnel file on each prisoner, to assess their potential for rehabilitation and their progress? Is it not possible to anticipate what stage one wants them to get to by the time they have served their sentence?

In the past few years, we have witnessed the Home Office's inability to tackle the fundamentals of the problem. We have also witnessed its ability to do great damage because it has been unable to stand up for the prison service with other Departments.

Yesterday morning, I was at a meeting called by the National Association of Probation Officers about employment opportunities for prisoners. It was not only dreary because very little was happening as regards employment opportunities for prisoners. A high percentage of prisoners—80 per cent.—cannot find employment when they come out of prison and stay unemployed. Consider the impetus to reoffend in those circumstances.

In the great drive towards privatisation and to make the Department of Employment more efficient, the Minister's colleagues got rid of the counselling service for prisoners before and on release. I wonder if they brag about that. I suppose that the Whip will say that that is rubbish, too, but it is true. That was a damaging blow to the prison service.

What a disgrace in 1991. Where was the Home Secretary when that decision was taken, a decision that damaged prisoners' oppoftunities? Probably it was not his fault but was the decision of a previous Home Secretary or one of his underlings. I do not know. There will no doubt be some excuse.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook was absolutely right. We must recognise why the Bill is thought to be so irritating by people outside: it is because it is a missed opportunity. We have an opportunity to create a good Bill—one that we could be proud of. I have often told the Home Secretary, although he does not like it, that he should come to the centre ground of informed opinion on penal affairs. He should throw off his ideological blinkers and join those of us who believe that Woolf, with a timetable and resources—something which his recent White Paper studiously avoided—is the way ahead.

We have no real timetable, unless one believes in the time mentioned by the Home Secretary, who referred to what might happen in the next 20 to 25 years. As John Maynard Keynes said, in the long run we are all dead. Nearly everybody now in the prison system will be out of it by the time the Home Secretary has finished reforming it. *[Interruption.]* All those now in prison will be out by then. Up to 25 years is too long for the radical reforms for which Woolf called. We want them much faster.

As I explained, if the law were used against non-violent disturbances in prison, it would undermine confidence in the process of prison reform. In many prisons, protests about conditions happen because the conditions are deplorable.

Lord Justice Woolf could not have made the case for reform more clearly. A key message to come out of his report is the need for justice in prison—the need for a mechanism to ensure that grievances can be aired. As he says, without justice, security and control inside prisons are compromised. The Bill flies in the face of justice. The use of the criminal law is no answer to legitimate protest.

Lord Justice Woolf, in his exhaustive report designed to prevent future prison riots, did not propose an offence of prison mutiny. Instead, in his 204 recommendations, he provided for a comprehensive list of reforms, including the need for accredited standards in prison, a new prison rule preventing overcrowding and the establishment of compacts with prisoners setting out their expectations and responsibilities. The idea of the compact went to the very heart of Woolf, but we have heard little about the concept. I know that Lord Justice Woolf himself believed that it went to the very essence of his report, but it was nicely sidestepped in the White Paper.

The Government's response to Woolf, in their White Paper, makes depressing reading. The White Paper rejects the proposal to end overcrowding and is notable for its avoidance of dates and timetables for implementing reform. Yet improving conditions and reducing overcrowding would have been a far more effective antidote to riotous behaviour than this measure. Parliamentary time should have been devoted to those parts of the Woolf report which require legislation and not wasted on this unnecessary measure.

Why are the Government so intent on pressing ahead with the Bill at this time? The answer lies in the Home Secretary's attempt to shore up his crumbling reputation.

Mr. Kirkhope: Oh dear!

Mr. Sheerman: I will willingly give way to the Whip if he wishes to intervene. *[Intervention.]* I think that the Home Secretary is making a comment, possibly about the length of my speech. If the time is up for anyone, it is up for him. The right hon. Gentleman is hoping that by sounding tough he can restore some of his credibility. The real problems facing the prison service deserve a considered response, not a political fix. To those who care about these issues, the right hon. Gentleman's reputation is less important than a proper path to constructive reform.

The Home Secretary cannot run away from the House forever. At some stage he will have to make a statement on the Brixton escapes. Clause 2 of the Bill is all about escapes. It increases the penalty for assisting an escape from five to 10 years and provides that the offence can be committed by sending something into a prison. How reassuring! But the real issue is making prisons sufficiently secure to ensure that prisoners cannot escape. It is no use increasing the penalty if prisoners can get over the wall —especially if, as is alleged, they received considerable help from special branch. If I had special branch helping me to get into or out of a prison, I would expect to succeed.

I suppose it is somewhat reassuring to know that members of special branch may be liable to longer sentences if they assisted the escape from Brixton. It would be far more helpful in preventing a repetition of that appalling bungle if the Home Secretary would tell the House what really happened, how those men could have been allowed to escape, and what action he proposes to prevent such an escape ever happening again. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook dwelt, justifiably, at length on that issue.

We are engaged in the European debate just now and are expressing worries about parliamentary responsibility and accountability. On an issue of great public concern, two of the allegedly most dangerous terrorists that we had behind bars in this country were allowed to escape. There is a total scandal about how they escaped and about whether special branch was involved in the escape. The Home Secretary has cheated the House of its right to an account of what went on.

Whether we be politicians or pundits, we feel cheated over the fact that the Home Secretary has not told us what went on. It is amazing that the Home Secretary should have been able to refuse to do that. If he has nothing to hide, why did he not make a statement? Why would he not accept the duty of a Home Secretary and be prepared to be asked questions by Members of the Opposition and others? What does he have to hide? We ask him again to change his mind and to clear the air. Those two dangerous men are still out there. The British public want an inkling of what went on and how those men were allowed to escape. We shall continue to press for an explanation.

The Opposition had anticipated that the Bill would be an irrelevance to the issue of preventing riots in prison, but it has proved to be far worse than we had expected—undermining civil liberties, criminalising non-violent protest and ultimately precipitating the very kind of disruptive behaviour that it was ostensibly designed to prevent.

We shall be working in Committee for major changes to be made to the Bill. I am sure that, in that process, the Minister of State and I will be engaged for some time in trying to make it a more palatable and acceptable measure. I do not hold out high hopes for it at this stage, but we shall do our best, for considering measures of this type should not be a question of party political concern: we all want a better penal system. We have consistently offered to be co-operative on such measures if we believe tham to be progressive and in the spirit of the Woolf report, but if such changes are not forthcoming, we shall oppose the Bill on Third Reading.

8.37 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): I wish at the outset to reiterate my belief that the scenes people saw on their television screens during April 1990 were genuinely acclaimed as an absolute disgrace. They were, unfortunately, a disgrace to the prison service. It was disgraceful that it was possible for prisoners to take that sort of action.

The Opposition misunderstand the reasons for the Bill. Despite the passage of the Public Order Act 1986, the previous Home Secretary—now Lord Waddington—at the time of the occurrences at Strangeways and other prisons in April was so shocked by them that he had a strong urge to reconsider the whole matter. He responded to the public outcry and said that further thought should be given to whether there should be a new offence of prison mutiny. When the present Home Secretary came to office, he considered that issue and agreed with his predecessor.

The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) and my hon. Friends the Members for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), for Newark (Mr. Alexander) and for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin) have all said that there is a misunderstanding of the public's concern about what happens in our prisons and what is acceptable. The Opposition must accept that people are genuinely upset, worried and, to a certain extent, disgusted when they see riots and misbehaviour in prisons.

The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said that, if people refuse to obey an instruction—for example, to leave a dining hall—that may be considered to be undermining discipline. The test is not whether an act undermines discipline, but whether a protest is subversive of order. That is the critical test. It will therefore be limited only to very serious events. Surely there can be no objection to introducing an offence for serious incidents. It is not for minor incidents, as Opposition Members have been at pains to imply. That is not the Bill's intention.

Mr. Hattersley: If the intention is to limit the Bill to serious matters, I take it for granted that suitable amendments will be accepted in Committee to make that clear. More important, will the Minister give an example of a serious matter that would be caught and punished under the Bill with a maximum sentence of 10 years, but would not be caught and punished under the Public Order Act 1986 with a maximum sentence of 10 years?

Mrs. Rumbold: The Bill will apply if a number of people within a prison refuse consistently to allow a prison officer to continue his duties and undermine the governor's lawful control of that prison. That is not exactly the same.

Mr. Hattersley: The hon. Lady must have misunderstood my question. I understand how the Bill could be applied. My question is which of the situations to which it could be applied would not be appropriate to the Public Order Act?

Mrs. Rumbold: Under the Bill, mutiny means any action or omission, which need not be violent, but which —this is the important point—destroys the lawful authority of the governor, with the result that he may lose complete control of the prison. The consequences or potential consequences are relevant, rather than the acts of disobedience. We must not lose sight of that fact, as it lies at the heart of the Bill.

Mr. Lawrence: May I try to assist my hon. Friend? If a judge considers what sentence should be imposed for that kind of misbehaviour, he will have regard to the fact that Parliament has deliberately decided to make an offence of prison mutiny, which he will consider will require a harsher sentence than he might otherwise impose under the Public Order Act.

Mrs. Rumbold: That is precisely what would happen. For minor offences, a prison officer will still be able to give the internal punishments to which he has had access in the past. Since Lord Justice Woolf's recommendations, the boards of visitors will no longer necessarily have that task.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) touched on a number of issues, including the issue raised by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) about Lord Justice Woolf's recommendations. The White Paper "Custody, Care and Justice" eloquently covers all those recommendations and contains extensive responses to the whole of Lord Justice Woolf's report. It has been carefully thought through and our responses have been welcomed by Lord Justice Woolf, who said that he was satisfied with how the Home Secretary handled the matter after the report.

Mr. Sheerman: Just for the information of the House, when did Lord Justice Woolf give his approval?

Mrs. Rumbold: When the White Paper was published, Lord Justice Woolf was perfectly happy to intimate publicly that he thought that it was a good response to his report. If the hon. Gentleman missed that, that is his problem—it is certainly not ours.

Several Opposition Members said that we should deal with overcrowding if we wished to tackle the difficulties within our prisons. There is no doubt that we should be looking at prison regimes. No one will deny that what has happened in our prisons is not acceptable in this day and age. I would not dream of saying that our prisons were running ideally, but many of the difficulties that the Government and earlier Governments have found were caused by the disgraceful inheritance of poor prison buildings that required a substantial injection of public funds.

Mr. Vaz: What does the Minister intend to do about the 3,000 young people in prison and the 1,700 prisoners who are being held in police cells? Does she have solutions to those problems?

Mrs. Rumbold: If the hon. Gentleman will wait, I shall endeavour to answer some of those questions. First, I want to tackle the accusations by Opposition Members about overcrowding.

My right hon. Friend has been tackling that problem —his predecessor also tackled it—by instigating a substantial new-build programme to replace old prisons and refurbish existing ones. There are now some 125 prisons in this country and there will be another 12 between 1992 and 1994, which will provide an additional 5,000 places within the prison system.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook argued that the right way to tackle the problem was not simply to provide more space within the prison system. None the less, the right hon. Gentleman and a number of Conservative Members would agree that people who must be kept within the prison system, must be kept in decent and humane conditions. That is one of our most urgent priorities, and it was backed up the Home Secretary in his speedy response on slopping out. He has brought forward by two years the date recommended by Lord Justice Woolf to end the disgraceful measure of slopping out. We should all congratulate my right hon. Friend for that. The Government's efforts on tackling the problems of prison buildings and overcrowding are beginning to come together.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the number of people who enter the prison system. That, too, has been dealt with by the Government. The Criminal Justice Act 1991—the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) served on the Committee and well knows the arguments —contains many different systems. We shall endeavour to keep people who should not go to prison out of it by ensuring that courts have non-custodial sentences available to them. People will then be able to serve sentences within the community rather than in prisons.

I shall answer the question of the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) later.

Mr. Sheerman: The Minister should not mislead the House about what happened in Committee, when there was agreement on some matters in the Criminal Justice Act 1991. We told the Government time and again that, unless they grasped the nettle and introduced some sentencing reform and a sentencing council, they would never crack the problem of overcrowding in our prisons and the fact that more people are in prison in this country than in any other country in Europe. We said that, if they did not grasp the nettle, no matter how many prisons they built, they would surely fill them, as the Americans have found to their cost. In the past 15 years, the American prison population has risen from 600,000 to almost 1·3 million. Is that the course she predicts for this country?

Mrs. Rumbold: The hon. Gentleman has a whimsical addiction to the notion that sentencing councils would prevent many people from entering prisons. I do not agree with that philosophy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr) made sensible comments about long-term prisoners. I shall take up his offer to write to him on the issues he mentioned, I say to him and to the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) that it is perfectly right to declare that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland does not wish the Bill to extend to Northern Ireland at present.

I am sad that the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) is not present, because I wanted to address some of the issues that he raised, including the necessity for good regimes—a point on which I agree with him. I shall reiterate the view of the Government on the matter of prison officers, which was raised by a number of my hon. Friends and the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland. No Conservative

[Mrs. Rumbold]

Member and certainly no Minister would ever do other than say that we recognise what a difficult task the people who work within our prisons have and how much we admire them for the work they do in prisons throughout the country. I want that placed on record. I pay tribute to their good work, especially that which is and was done at the time of the riots at Strangeways and other prisons.

We recognise the bravery that prison officers show and the difficulty and stress under which they work. It is important that when we tackle each of the issues raised by Lord Justice Woolf in his report, we take the prison officers with us because they are the ones who have to build up trust within the prisons. It is important to build up trust between prisoners and prison officers. If we achieve such a regime, it will prove the best way to prevent the sort of disturbances and riots that have occurred.

The hon. Member for Huddersfield mentioned the Prison Governors Association. The White Paper "Custody, Care and Justice" clearly stated that we intended to introduce the Bill. We gave prison governors and others the opportunity to comment on the White Paper. They have not yet done so, and no one to whom I have spoken has shown any intention of questioning us on that issue.

The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland spoke of the board of visitors and its changing role within the prison system. My hon. Friend the Member for Newark made some interesting comments about his experiences as chairman of the board of visitors and the way in which prisoners had to go through the system. Lord Justice Woolf recommended that the board of visitors should act much more in the nature of watchdogs in prisons. I agree, and believe that that would be a much more satisfactory way for the board to discharge its duties, with prison officers given the task of adjudicating on small offences —events that happen as a matter of course, and which Opposition Members have claimed that the Bill is all about. That is not true; small matters will continue to be dealt with within prisons.

The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish made a number of points that were also reiterated by many of my hon. Friends. He mentioned Manchester and its police force. He will be glad to know that I shall be visiting Manchester next Monday to see the position for myself. I think that the message that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary gave earlier will have been well understood by the hon. Gentleman. I am aware of the concern of the Greater Manchester policy authority and have been in correspondence with it. I shall listen to whatever worries it expresses when I visit the city on Monday. I am conscious that the Manchester police and neighbouring forces have had to accommodate more prisoners in police cells than forces in other parts of the country.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: Will the Minister bring a message to the Manchester police to ensure them that their present burden, at least, will be reduced, especially over the Christmas period? At that time, there are often people in police cells who have been arrested rather than remanded there by the courts.

Mrs. Rumbold: The hon. Gentleman is well aware that the issue of the additional number of prisoners has been overtaken by events. Earlier in 1991, we were looking at a reducing the prison population, but unfortunately, as the hon. Gentleman knows, the prison population has escalated by 3,000 more people than originally predicted. As the hon. Gentleman will no doubt know, that number will be traditionally reduced over the Christmas period. Whether that position will be sustained post-Christmas is an issue we shall have to address later, and I shall certainly tackle it. I want to see for myself at first hand exactly what the position is in Manchester. I shall look at and listen with interest to the suggestions that will no doubt be made to me when I make my visit.

The hon. Member for Leicester, East talked about youths in custody and asked me to comment on the death of a 15-year-old at a young offenders institute at Feltham. I think that I know the governor there as well as he does. We intend to phase out remand for 15 and 16-year-olds as soon as possible. We need to build more secure accommodation, which will take some time. There is no wrangle within Government over the money for that. We agree with the hon. Gentleman, and we certainly agree with Joe Whitty. I hope that that assists the hon. Gentleman. On a positive note, we are trying to ensure that juveniles on remand in local prisons are given as positive a regime as possible.

The introduction of the Bill, which is a small but significant and important measure, is in no way a Government response to an issue that has suddenly arisen. It is in response to a serious concern expressed by a number of people throughout the country. The general public expect Governments to act firmly when they see issues of great concern to themselves. They are genuinely worried about the sort of things that happened in our prisons last April. They are worried about the effect of escapes. They wish to be reassured and to know that people who commit such offences within our prisons, or coming out of our prisons, will be punished. This small Bill does exactly that, and I trust that it will command universal support outside the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill committed to a Standing Committee pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills).

Contempt of Court

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

8.58 pm

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): I rise to raise the subject of the operation of the law on contempt of court. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House would have wished to be in the Chamber and perhaps to speak in the debate, but, because the Government's business has been dealt with with more rapidity than they would have expected, they will be disappointed.

I am aware that a former colleague and writer on a national paper would have wished me to use my words with great care, but during the past few weeks Leicestershire has experienced the most horrific trial. I do not wish to deal with that trial, but something happened in the course of it which has astounded people and made them want to look again at the way in which we conduct ourselves and our trials in court.

In the course of that trial, one of the defendants, the major defendant, an evil man, chose to use the name of an honoured colleague in the House entirely for his own ends. He was determined, I think, to try to blackmail the—I almost put it in quotation marks—establishment.

I think that the defendant felt that, by naming persons who were in public life and putting them forward as people from whom children had to be defended—this was a child abuse case—he might frighten the authorities into not prosecuting or not pursuing the prosecution with the vigour that one might have expected. The defendant was wrong about that. He should have known that in Britain we conduct our prosecutions independently and fairly.

The defendant could not achieve his objective, but he sought to do so during the course of the trial, and anything said in the course of a trial is not subject to the laws of slander or libel when it is reported in newspapers. It was spread throughout the newspapers the length and breadth of the country, on the radio and on television.

The problem is that a person in that position has no way of defending his good name. If that person were immediately to issue a statement, which is the very least that one would expect could be done, he or she would be in contempt of court. The jury has to decide the case, and if anyone issued a statement denying that a witness or person is telling the truth, that would be a contempt of court. It would be interfering with the course of justice. It could be said that it would be trying to influence the jury to disbelieve the person who made the statement. So that person is in a hopeless and helpless position.

When such events happen so close to home, it strikes most hon. Members that this is an unjust and unfair procedure. There cannot be any justice in a person being pilloried, taken from pillar to post, by the press, when people are looking at him askance. The hon. Member concerned has not even been able to deny the allegations. He has not even been able to say that they are untrue. It affects himself and his family, and it must be a living hell.

Because that has happened to an hon. Member does not mean that it will not happen and has not happened to others who are not in the House. That is a danger into which any one of us could fall, and there is no way that one could stop it happening.

I recognise that, during any trial, it is absolutely necessary that the defendant and witnesses should be free to give evidence—because if constraints were placed on them in that regard, it could not be a fair trial. Mr. Beck was certainly given a fair trial—and a run for his money.

Having said that, there ought to be a way of excluding gratuitous evidence affecting those who cannot protect themselves from newspaper, television, and radio coverage of a trial—such as is done in the case of rape victims.

Ms. Clare Short (Birmingham, Ladywood): Sometimes.

Mr. Ashby: In most cases, I hope. I thought that, these days, such protection was given almost without exception. In blackmail cases—the trial to which I referred earlier was a form of blackmail—the judge directs that the name of the blackmailer's victim should not be disclosed in open court, but instead it is written down and presented to the court in that way .

That is a case in which the judge has a discretion—but I am not sure that the judge would always want to have that discretion. In any event, the identity of an individual who has no opportunity to defend himself should not be disclosed by the media. That would not affect the trial. Witnesses would be permitted to say what they wanted without fear or favour, but the innocent person would be protected.

It would require only a small clause in the next Criminal Justice Bill to provide that protection. Such a provision would be well in keeping with the most excellent policy of this Government of protecting the innocent, which has extended to withholding the identity of rape victims, and of children giving evidence in child abuse cases. We have a good history of improving the processes in our courts, of ensuring that injustices do not occur.

Needless to say, there must be justice for the defendant, and for the public, in terms of the defendant being properly prosecuted—but there must be justice also for innocent people who find themselves caught up in a trial and unable to control what is said about them. That would be well in keeping with everything that we have said over the years. Such an improvement should take place in our criminal justice system.

I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General and my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office will consider that it is time that their respective Departments started devising such a provision, so that it will be ready for the next Criminal Justice Bill and that further dreadful injustices will not be perpetrated.

I refer to the Member of Parliament for Leicester, West —as has my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham)—as my hon. and learned Friend. There have been times when we were adversaries, and we fought tooth and nail in this very Chamber when I first entered Parliament—but outside it, we are friends. In this Chamber, and on this matter, I call him my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner). I say that he and his family should not have been subjected to the ordeal that they were, and that we should strive to ensure decency in the courts in future.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Many hon. Members have a great regard for our hon. and learned colleague, the Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner), with the accent on "honourable". Many of us are not lawyers—happily, or unhappily for our pockets—so will my hon. Friend confirm that any wretched creature, such as this awful man who lampooned and libelled our good colleague, can say whatever they like

[Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark]

about any of us, yet if we defend ourselves we are in contempt of court? If that is so, I am sure that the House and the other place will want to sweep it to one side straight away. It is a calumny that none of us should have to put up with.

Mr. Ashby: I thought that I had made it clear. Joe Bloggs, who may never have visited Cornwall, could go to Bodmin court and make what statements he wished about someone. It would increase the sentence, but when someone is facing a life sentence, or five life sentences, it does not make much difference.

I wish to draw my remarks to a close, so that other hon. Members may speak in this important debate.

9.11 pm

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): I am deeply grateful to the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) for his friendship, for his kindness and especially for his courtesy in arranging this important debate. In the House, the enemy is sometimes behind one, but on this occasion it does not exist, and I am immensely grateful.

The hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West eloquently explained the laws on contempt and how they rightly protect those who are on trial. Wrongly, that law too often leaves those who are not on trial, but whose good names are unjustifiably savaged in court, totally unprotected. That is wrong.

Anyone involved in a trial can make any allegations they wish about anyone else—provided that the judge cannot disallow them as irrelevant—however harmful, horrendous and vile the lies may be. Those whose representations are attacked are forbidden even to deny the allegations. To do so would be a criminal offence—contempt of court.

As the House knows, Frank Beck of Leicester was convicted of a series of filthy and most serious crimes and received what must be a near record sentence—five life terms and a total of 24 years' imprisonment. He called Paul Winston as a witness. Long ago, when Winston was a deprived youngster living in a Leicestershire children's home, my family and I tried, unsuccessfully, to help him. Soon after, he was placed in a home run by Beck. After 15 years of Beck's influence—including a period when Winston lodged in Beck's private home—and after I had refused to provide Beck with references and shortly before Beck's trial was due to begin, they combined to make disgraceful, contemptible and totally untrue allegations of criminal conduct against me.

Their motive was made blazingly clear by a letter that I received only yesterday from a former cellmate of Beck's. I do not know the man, but he took it on himself to communicate with me. He writes that Beck told him that he—Beck—was going to frame me. According to Beck, that would take the light off him. To that end, Beck had enlisted the help of Winston. The former cellmate also wrote that the police knew that he was willing to give evidence to that effect if the Crown thought it necessary to call him. In the event, it did not, but the allegations against me were precisely as the prosecution alleged in Beck's trial—an attempted diversion from the reality of Beck's guilt. Both verdict and sentence showed—happily—that the attempt failed totally.

However, is it not horrendous that Beck and Winston were able to make such terrible and lying accusations against me in court and that the media could, and with honourable exceptions did, report these falsehoods, all under the cloak of absolute privilege? I had effectively no legal rights in the matter, and I was not allowed even to nail the lies. No wonder many people were mystified by my uncharacteristic silence—it was imposed by the cruel operation of the rules on contempt.

Happily, I am a fairly tough character. I have been able to ride out the agony on this ordeal in good heart. But it has not been easy. As a Member of Parliament, I am now well placed to fight back. That would not have applied to any of our constituents or to any other citizens placed by law in this impossible and unjust situation.

The injustice was both apparent and real. It imposed a special burden on my wife, on my children, on my mother and my sister and on all my family. I pay my loving tribute to them for their staunch and cheerful support during our shared ordeal. I also thank the many hundreds of people who have so kindly written, spoken to or telephoned us to express their affectionate encouragement. Several of them were themselves victims of Frank Beck. I salute their courage and send them my profound sympathy. We ourselves have received nothing but kindness, confidence and concern. We are very grateful. We are deeply blessed with our friends, not least those on both sides of the House and our friends in Leicester, West.

Surely there should now be a swift review of these injustices in our law and its practice. Surely it must be wrong for people who have no part in a trial to be open to venomous, preposterous attacks, with no remedy, no recompense and, above all, no right of reply. Surely others should not be forced to suffer as we have done. If such a review does lead to a just and useful alteration in the operation of the law of contempt, we shall not have suffered in vain.

9.17 pm

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): It is a privilege to follow the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner), who has given distinguished service to the city and county of Leicester and Leicestershire for more than 21 years in this House. He has made it clear—yesterday and today—that there is absolutely no truth in the horrible allegations that were made against him in the Beck trial. The House, of course, immediately and unreservedly accepts that statement from him. It extends to him its affection and sympathy in the abominable ordeal which he, his beloved wife Myra and all his family have endured for so long.

The hon. and learned Gentleman's many friends in Leicestershire, of which I am very proud to count myself one, and indeed anyone in Leicestershire who knew anything about the matter, never believed any of the repulsive muck for one moment. However, it grieved us greatly that he had to endure it, and that there was no way in which he could clear his name and answer the vile accusations without prejudicing the trial of Beck. There must be a better system than that. Any public figure—indeed, any private figure—could find himself or herself trapped for months in the same nightmare as the hon. and learned Gentleman.

The House has a proud record of friendship and of closing ranks, irrespective of party allegiance, around

those of its Members who are unjustly attacked or threatened. I hope that that day has now dawned for the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West after the long night of despair, but we should now, as a matter of urgency, examine the existing procedures to ensure that such a horrible event, without any redress for those who have been so long and so unjustly traduced, can never happen again.

9.20 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I first met my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) when, at his invitation, I came to the House with his son to see how Parliament operated. I would not have believed that a few years later I would have been selected as the prospective parliamentary candidate for Leicester, East, and would be his neighbour.

I am delighted to be here today to give my hon. and learned Friend my full support. My hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) cannot be here today because of his parliamentary duties in Northern Ireland, but he joins me in believing my hon. and learned Friend to be the victim of a cowardly and wicked attack by people who simply did not care what damage they did to him or to anyone else. I too wish to extend my good wishes to my hon. and learned Friend's wife and family, and to all his friends, who I know have stood by him during these terrible months. They have shared that terrible burden.

My hon. and learned Friend is a distinguished Member for Leicester, West. His family in intertwined with the history of the city of Leicester. Before he was elected in 1970, his father was the Member for Leicester, West. The people of his constituency do not believe the lies. They are with him now, and they will be with him in the future, because they know of his unstinting service to anyone who approaches him, for whatever cause. He has vindicated himself, and all of us, in what he has said tonight.

I remember a speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short), who is another brave Member of the House who has suffered at the hands of a certain newspaper. I worked in the corridor where she had her office, and we miss her in the west cloisters—especially her use of our fax machine. I recall that, just before her speech, my hon. Friend went through an agonising time wondering whether she should come before the House to tell it what she felt. Courageously, she did so—and struck a blow for every one of us in the House.

My hon. and learned Friend, too, is a brave man in what he has done, said and endured over the past weeks and months. Every one of us should be grateful to him, because, as the hon. Members for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham) and for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) said, what has happened to my hon. and learned Friend could happen to any one of us, so we should all be aware of it.

During the course of that terrible ordeal, I suggested to the Lord Chancellor that there should be a change in the law to provide for the protection of the innocent. The Lord Chancellor said that he would consider the idea. The Solicitor-General is here today, and I make him an offer. I came 18th in the ballot for private Members' Bills. I know that that is not very high—and there are other subjects that I wish to raise. Nevertheless, I would happily introduce a Bill to cover the point if the right hon. and learned Gentleman would promise it a safe passage through the House.

We should not wait for another Criminal Justice Bill. There is parliamentary time, and we should get on with the job. I foresee that many unscrupulous people in this country would be prepared to do exactly the same thing again. If it is possible to do so, I will happily give the Solicitor-General my place.

Mr. Martin M. Brandon-Bravo (Nottingham, South): I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman, and I join in the comments made so far. I am drawn 15th in the ballot. I have already tabled a Bill to provide for the innocent victims of sexual offences. It may be possible, if the Bill receives an unopposed Second Reading, for an amendment in Committee to address the point. I hope that it may be so.

Mr. Vaz: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. Is there any improvement on 15th?

The great thing about my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West is that he is a great survivor. Almost alone in some cases, he has taken up great causes and won them. I listened to one of the greatest speeches that I have ever heard in the Chamber when my hon. and learned Friend spoke during the passage of the War Crimes Bill. I was very moved by what he said. He is a survivor, and I am sure that he will survive this great ordeal. I and colleagues will be with him, and the people of Leicester, West, whom he and his family have served so well over the past few decades, will also be with him.

9.25 pm

Sir John Farr (Harborough): I support all that has been said about the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner). I have probably known him as long as any hon. Member of any party has. I knew, admired and respected his father, who was a distinguished Labour Member, as his son is today.

I support all that my hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) said about the law and about the need for change. I support all that has been said by Labour lawyers about the law being an ass. It is an ass, and in this case, it has been very damaging to the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West and to his family. It is wrong. We have the opportunity and ability to put the law right simply in this place.

I can probably say with more licence than many others here that this will not be the first time or the last time that the law in Britain has been an ass and hus been proved to be an ass. We have an opportunity to put it right tonight, and I am pleased to be associated with the tribute to the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West and to his family. They must never be subject to such a threat again.

9.27 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): The price that many hon. Members pay for their service in the House is frequently high. It is not always appreciated by those who do not closely understand the enormous pressures that are put not only on Members of Parliament, but on their families.

I have had the honour of knowing my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) for many years. I knew his father and mother before him. I

[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]

could almost say that I grew up with my hon. and learned Friend, except that he is far younger than I am. That means that I know him not only as an extremely upright, tolerant and charming man, but as a man who is trusted by people in all walks of life. He is trusted not only in his constituency and in the House, but by anyone in need of succour and support. Such a person can always go to my hon. and learned Friend and find understanding, tolerance and a real effort to help alleviate whatever difficulty that person faces.

I feel especially strongly about the ordeal that my hon. and learned Friend and his family have suffered because my own family went through a similar ordeal many years ago. People outside the House who, like myself, are not lawyers find it almost impossible to understand the byzantine intricacies of what people can and cannot do.

One of the frightening aspects of modern political life is the tremendous power in the hands of the press. Anyone could have found themselves in my hon. and learned Friend's position. The terrifying quality of the real and long travail that my hon. and learned Friend and his family have suffered was made 100,000 times worse by the behaviour of certain members of the press. As Members of Parliament we are never allowed to say the odd word of criticism of a free press because it is somehow felt that there is an interrelationship and a need for elected Members to get their views over.

That is true, but it is also true that those who seek to divert attention from their own open evil know that if they nominate or mention in a court case someone who is of interest to the press they will automatically receive publicity of a strength, breadth and constancy that they would not succeed in getting in any other way. Those who purport to be editors of responsible newspapers, news bulletins and television newscasts have a task to look carefully at the decisions they take and the manner in which they handle such matters.

It is no accident that it has taken a long time to take this case to court, and it is no accident that a long time passed before my hon. and learned Friend could make a statement and clear his name. All those things were aggravated, exploited and made 100,000 times worse by those who behaved as they did for the worst possible reasons—because they were concerned with the sale of newspapers and not with what they were doing to an honourable, learned and responsible man.

I hope that the House will seek to protect anyone who finds himself or herself in that position. I remember what it did to my family when they were named in a case many years ago and were unable to reply. I remember what that cost in personal unhappiness. It is too high a price for anyone who gives a commitment to this House as an elected Member. My hon. and learned Friend is a man of such stature that I can only pay tribute to him and give him one promise—that those of us who honour his friendship and look forward to enjoying his company for many years will not tell all Members of the House of Commons how many letters we have in our personal files signed, "Love, Greville."

9.32 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): I am not a lawyer, so unfortunately I cannot speak with the eloquence of someone who is familiar with the law, but I can speak as a layman who has been disgusted in recent weeks by the press coverage and the pillorying of an innocent victim mentioned in a court case. Justice should be seen to be done in a court case, but where is the justice in British law when an innocent individual who is not even a party in the case can be dragged through the court and vilified day after day by someone who remains in the gutter? There is something inherently wrong when British justice condones that state of affairs and allows it to happen and to persist.

As hon. Members have mentioned, the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) is in a position to try to do something about the grave injustice inflicted upon him and his family, because he is a Member of this House. As my hon. Friends have said, there are probably thousands of other people outside who have similarly had their names defamed and their private lives wrongly dragged through the courts and into the newspapers. They are the little people. They do not have the power or the backing to get the justice that they, too, rightly and richly deserve.

Something must be done. My hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) mentioned rape and blackmail cases. If it is possible in a British court for names not to be mentioned in such cases, why on earth cannot something be done to change the law so that innocent bystanders do not have to have their names dragged through the courts? I believe that that protection is long overdue, and this case has highlighted the fact more than many in recent years.

It is a sad fact of life that there are, unfortunately, people who believe everything they read in the newspapers. I am afraid that by many people in this country the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West has been found guilty. They do not understand what reporting on the courts in a newspaper is all about. They see an accusation in the newspaper and take it as a fact; or it is a case, of "no smoke without fire", to use that dreadfully trite expression. We all know that it is not true, but for far too many people it is true and they believe it.

I hope that two things will come out of this debate. It has provided an opportunity for the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West for the first time to state the truth and to clear his name of these despicable accusations, so I hope that the newspapers which were ready to give as much coverage as they saw fit to the case when it was going on will tomorrow morning make sure that the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West gets just as much coverage so that people are left in no shadow of a doubt that there was not one scintilla of truth in the ghastly, grubby accusations that that horrendous man was prepared to make under the cloak of privilege in a court of law.

I should like to say one thing to my right hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General, who is present tonight. I am sure that many other hon. Members would say the same. Surely there is now an overriding need not only to examine and look again at this aspect of the law and of our court proceedings, and not just to think about it but actually to do something. Something should be done quickly, though not in such a hurry that it fails to solve the problem, so that never again will anyone have to go

through the sort of nightmare that the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West and his poor, suffering family have had to go through. If something can be done quickly, it will not make it all worth while, but it will right a great wrong.

9.37 pm

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): I rise to speak briefly—principally, like so many others, because of my high regard for my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) and his family, whom I know, including his father and mother. But that would not be enough, and I wish to make two further points.

In recent years—since the televising of the House, I suppose—people have asked me, as they have asked other hon. Members, why the House of Commons behaves so badly, like a bunch of yobs. One tries to explain that it happens on the odd occasion, at Question Time, which is not a great parliamentary occasion, and that is what the media pick up. What the media, whether television or the press, never pick up is an occasion such as this, when the House of Commons is at its best in terms of the relationships between people in all parts of the House.

I wonder to what extent this debate will be reported. If we were all shouting at one another, the media would be here. What the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) has done tonight, and what other hon. Members on both sides of the House have done, although in this respect principally on the Conservative Benches, is to their credit and to the credit of Parliament.

My second point is this. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West has had his name in all the newspapers, and in one newspaper in particular. My right hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General will be dealing with the question of contempt. I hope that he will not forget the newspapers, in particular. I wonder how many of them will fill their pages tomorrow or the day after in the way they have done in the past few weeks. There is a great deal of talk about freedom of the press. When I think of what went on in eastern Europe, and in fascist Europe before the war, when I was younger, I am glad that we have a free press.

Ms. Short: We do not have a free press.

Mr. Rees: We have a press that is free in one sense: it engages sometimes in the most scurrilous reporting and colours it up under the heading of a free press. I wonder what the press will do about this matter in the next few days. With a few exceptions, I suspect that it will do very little.

9.39 pm

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): I am delighted to take part briefly in the debate. The hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner), whom I am pleased to call my hon. and learned Friend, and I entered the House on the same day, and we have been friends ever since. We worked together to form the committee for the release of Soviet Jewry, of which he was the first secretary and I the first chairman. We have not always agreed—I think that he was profoundly wrong on war crimes—but we have always respected and liked each other. I was as appalled as anyone at what happened in recent weeks. It was a terrible ordeal for my hon. and learned Friend and for his family. I endorse everything that has been said from both sides of the House in support and admiration of him and of the courage and fortitude that he and his family have displayed.

I should like to address my few brief remarks to something else. I am sure that my hon. and learned Friend will endorse what I say. It has already been mentioned that those who serve in the House have an opportunity to put wrongs right. My hon. and learned Friend was able to apply for an Adjournment debate. When it was not appropriate to have it last week, my hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) made the facility available this evening. Had he not done so, another hon. Member would have obliged, and we would have had the chance to debate the matter and to make the points which have been made with such eloquence and fervour on both sides of the House.

What would have happened if the man who had been traduced and vilified had been a village schoolmaster? What if he had been a vicar, a Methodist minister or a rabbi? He would not have had this forum. He would not have had the opportunity to command the attention of the media. Although I endorse totally what the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) said and have doubts about how much of the debate will be reported, nevertheless, we have this privilege and opportunity, but our constituents do not.

Let us imagine the unspeakable agonies of horror that would have been suffered by someone in—I will not say a less exalted—a different position who had been similarly vilified. Perhaps in a moment of desperation he would have written to his local newspaper. Perhaps he would have gone to his Member of Parliament. As a result, there might have been some minor publicity, but how right my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) was: people would have talked about there being no smoke without fire. Mud would have stuck. A career of public service in a quiet and restricted environment might have been ruined.

There is something wrong with a law that allows that to happen. What we must do because of this horrific and terrible example—I use those words deliberately—is put the law right. In the high court of Parliament, we have a unique opportunity to put the law right. I look forward to a positive and enthusiastic response from my right hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General. Even though I did not draw even 15th in the ballot and can offer neither blackmail nor whitemail, I hope that there will be a firm commitment from my right hon. and learned Friend, endorsed by the Opposition parties, that the law needs to be amended, not to restrict in any way the freedom of those who are innocent until proved guilty but to prevent the vile calumny which we are discussing from being perpetrated again.

If that happens, the sufferings of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West, of Myra and of his family, whom many of us know and admire, will not have been in vain. This case will produce something that all of us want to produce—a positive improvement in the law. We can expect no more than that, and we can certainly ask for no less.

9.44 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): I can but echo the tributes that have been paid to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner). He is a man of determination and enthusiasm, whose integrity and will power have crossed party lines. I for one value the friendship that he has given me in the eight and a half years that I have been a Member of the House, despite the fact that we are in different parties and disagree on many issues.

Mr. Beck is an evil man. Perhaps more to the point, he is a corrupt man. Several hon. and hon. and learned Members who are present, some of whom have already spoken, have, like me, had the opportunity over the years in their professional lives to meet corrupt and evil people and to examine and sometimes cross-examine them in court. I am sure that those who share my professional experience will agree that those who have trodden in the mire of corruption all too easily become corrupt to the core. They cease to recognise the difference between what is good and what is bad and between what is honourable and what is corrupt.

They turn, like Mr. Beck, easily to more corruption and try to wheedle their way out of their own previous corruption—and that is what has happened in this case. That is why my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West was slandered with dreadful calumny by Mr. Beck. That is why it does not surprise me in the least to hear from my hon. and learned Friend about the letter that he received yesterday from Mr. Beck's erstwhile cellmate. It is common for such evidence to appear, but all too often only after a great deal of harm has been done.

I believe in jury trial and that, however evil they are, people should be entitled to present their defence to a jury if they wish to do so. Mr. Beck would have been extremely well advised to plead guilty. He would have been well advised not to drag the name of my hon. and learned Friend through the courts and an undiscriminating press. He would have been well advised not to compel—because he did compel—his own lawyers to regard what he said about my hon. and learned Friend as part of his case. However, he chose to do so.

I suggest to the Solicitor-General that a clear intellectual distinction can be drawn between evidence that relates to those who are parties to a trial and those who are not parties to a trial.

I can see the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) in his place across the Chamber. I know that he has shared my experience many times of being involved in what we lawyers call "cut-throat" trials. Those are trials in which the one defendant makes accusations against the other, and the other often makes even worse accusations against the one. The distinction between those cases and this is that the lawyer for the other can immediately attack the one—there is somebody there to protect the reputation of each defendant who is in the court—but in a case such as that which has affected my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West, there is no such opportunity to defend oneself. There is not even, as we have heard, any opportunity to make a realistic and meaningful statement in public, not even in the House, for to do so might affect the outcome of the trial.

Within the past few years, we have witnessed a case in which a senior Minister made a statement during a trial in which the defendants were convicted. In consequence, those defendants had their convictions quashed on appeal. It was a trial of the greatest public importance, involving alleged IRA terrorism. It demonstrated clearly to all Members of Parliament the dangers of making even inadvertent and mild statements about a trial while it is taking place.

Therefore, I respectfully suggest to the Solicitor-General that a clear and simple change can be made to the law which would protect those who are not the parties to a trial—third parties outside a trial. It would in no way inhibit the right of a defendant to make his defence, however dishonest. It would in no way inhibit his right to instruct his solicitors, however egregiously. But it would prevent the press from publishing calumnies which cannot be answered, as in the Beck case, sometimes until weeks or even months after the allegation is made in the public arena of a court. I hope that we shall hear the Solicitor-General tell us shortly that such an amendment has the approval and support of the Government.

9.50 pm

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): It is most unusual for an Adjournment debate at this hour, at the end of which there will be no vote, to attract so many Members into the Chamber. Come to think of it, it is most unusual at any hour for so many hon. Ladies and hon. Gentlemen in the Chamber to remain seated when I rise to speak. If the debate had started at 10 pm when it was scheduled to start, and if the normal business of the House had continued, many more hon. Ladies and hon. Gentlemen from both sides of the House would be here tonight.

The reason why so many of us are here is the immense regard which we all have for the hon. and learned Member, our friend, for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner). We have immense regard for the way in which he conducts himself not only in Leicester but in the rest of the United Kingdom and on behalf of the United Kingdom abroad. He is a famous personality. The number of people to whom he is a friend, if not because he has met them but because they know of the good works that he has done not only in Britain but throughout the world, must run into many hundreds of thousands.

It is precisely such a person who can be brought lowest by the hateful things that may be reported about him in a court of law. The matter that has given me most cause for admiration is the way in which he has conducted himself while the horrible events have gone on and been reported in the press. That shows an inner strength which must be the result of his deep religious conviction. We all have reason to regard him, the causes that he espouses and his beliefs highly.

We must address what can be done to stop this kind of thing happening again. It is difficult and probably impossible to allow people thus abused to make statements in the press which can only interfere with the process of justice by which someone is tried. However mean, miserable and undeserving a defendant is, he is entitled under our system to a fair trial and not to be the subject of attack, however justified, from someone who has no particular connection with the issue in the case, even if the defendant brought it on himself.

It would be almost impossible to ban such remarks in a court of law, but there is no reason why a judge should not be empowered to say that, in an appropriate case, the name of the person maligned should not be repeated in the

press. There does not have to be a statutory ban—it can be left to the good judgment of the court. As in so many other matters, the judge should be given the discretion to tell the press that they may not publicise the name of a person, because to do so would be in contempt of court.

I know that my right hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General is giving urgent consideration to the matter. Will he seriously consider whether that sort of amendment would be acceptable to everyone? I urge him not merely to consider the matter but, because of the strength of feeling shown here, to take action as soon as possible, so that our hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West and his family will not have suffered in vain.

9.55 pm

Mr. Roland Boyes (Houghton and Washington): Before I became a full-time politician, I was assistant director of social services in a large authority. Wicked episodes were often brought to my attention, but nothing either then or since has been as evil as the man Beck. In this short speech, I wish to think for a moment about all the youngsters who were so badly damaged and hurt by that evil man. He well deserved the sentence he got, but to many of us five life sentences do not seem quite enough for what he did to our youngsters.

Our hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) was also caused grave hurt. Having known him in this country and having travelled around Israel with him, I know that he is tough and resilient. I have a high regard for him, and I pay him tribute. I think especially of his family. When we come here, we know what we are up to, but our families, hundreds of miles away, suffer the most. We can rationalise and fight our way out, but they are often deeply hurt. I am sure that all hon. Members in the Chamber will be thinking not only of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West but of his wife and children.

9.58 pm

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) has asked to be associated with my unusually brief remarks.

I am happy to count the Janner family as friends. I congratulate them all on the quiet dignity and courage that they have displayed in recent weeks while vile, vicious and baseless allegations were made by a proven liar. The fact that such allegations could be made under the cloak of privilege, and the victim has had no right of redress or to cross-examine those making them, has been a blot on our system of justice. I hope that that basic injustice can be tackled. If it can, good will come out of the traumas that our colleague has suffered and that will be for the good of potential victims. We have been through a ghastly situation, and I hope that some good can come of it.

9.59 pm

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): I rise to break my Trappist vow of six years to say how honoured and privileged I have been to attend and take part in this debate. We cannot always say that. Indeed, as Whips we must sometimes sit through long and tedious debates—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Many of my hon. Friends will take revenge on me for making that remark, because the Whips hijack hon. Members into taking part in, and thereby lengthening, long and tedious debates. However, this has been a very special debate.

I wish at the outset to thank the hon. Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) for initiating the debate. It was a generous gesture on his part. Adjournment debates are hard won and precious to Back-Bench Members. We thank him sincerely for his generous gesture in allowing this debate to take place.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Mr. Foster: It is a reflection on the unusual nature of relationships in the House that a member of an opposing party can make such a generous gesture. Again, we thank him deeply. I have rarely seen the House so unanimous in warmth and affection, and especially in its understanding of the severe ordeal that one of our colleagues and his family have had to endure for many months.

A Chief Whip is in a special position to be able to understand the many strains in the lives of colleagues that are unheard of beyond the bounds of Westminster, and often unheard of except within very small circles in this place. The strains of being a Member of Parliament are extremely great from time to time. The strains on families are also great, and their sacrifices are rarely known.

The way in which our hon. and learned Friend the Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) has conducted himself has been a model for all of us to follow, though we hope and pray that most of us will not have to undergo that sort of ordeal. If we do, we now have a model and can say that he and his family have been through it and have borne it with great fortitude, resilience and courage—as has been said, only through their deep religious faith—and that that has been a great lesson to us all. A powerful case has been made for a change in the law. I am sure that the Solicitor-General will address himself, as only he can, to those remarks.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition would have liked to be here this evening because I know well that he has been a tremendous support to my hon. and learned Friend and his family in many small and touching ways, which I know have been deeply appreciated.

Mr. Janner *indicated assent.*

Mr. Foster: If the Opposition could facilitate a change in the law—it would be widely welcomed, as is clear from what has been said in the debate tonight—I am sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends would be willing to do what they could to assist.

10.3 pm

The Solicitor-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): It is absolutely clear that my hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West (Mr. Ashby) has done the House a service by raising this matter. I associate myself with the remarks made by hon. Members in all parts of the House about the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner), who has been through an ordeal that none of us would wish to share. I associate myself also with the remarks made by the Opposition Chief Whip about the dignity with which the hon. and learned Gentleman has borne himself in adversity.

[The Solicitor-General]

When the House is unanimous on a subject, it is a moment to think deeply, particularly when profound principles are involved. As on so many occasions when we discuss matters in the House, we are faced with a conflict between principles, each of which is important, and with the question of how properly to resolve such a conflict. This is not the first time that this issue has reached the public domain, or will it be the last time that the House is asked to focus on the rights and duties of citizens in circumstances—from time to time inevitable circumstances—when the interests of one individual or one set of individuals necessarily impinge on and potentially damage the interests of others.

We have heard speeches not only by my hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West, who initiated the debate, and the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West but by the hon. Members for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham), for Harborough (Sir J. Farr), for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack), and for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall), my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) and the right hon. Members for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) and the hon. Members for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), for Houghton and Washington (Mr. Boyes), the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), and the Opposition Chief Whip.

The speeches by and in support of the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West raised important questions of principle that govern three important matters: first, the need for open justice; secondly, the provision of proper opportunities for the defence in criminal proceedings to deploy the case on which the defence relies; and thirdly, the issue on which we focused most, the effect of the existence of those rights on third parties who necessarily can play no part in the proceedings and who consequently have no immediate opportunity to defend themselves or their reputations.

The principle that justice should, as far as possible, be open is central to our system of criminal justice. It is a fundamental requirement of any democratic and just society that the process by which individuals are accused, tried and, where appropriate, punished should be open, and exposed to public scrutiny and comment at an appropriate moment, other than in wholly exceptional circumstances—for example, where on grounds of national security the court must receive evidence about matters of security or intelligence; or where, for purposes of the administration of justice, particular matters must be dealt with concerning informants. The rule that criminal proceedings are conducted in open court would be hollow unless those proceedings could be freely reported by the press and television, and the media in general. For that reason, both Houses of Parliament deliberately built into the Contempt of Court Act 1981 a robust declaration of the right to report proceedings in open court, subject to one limited exception.

Section 4(1) of the 1981 Act provides:

"Subject to this section a person is not guilty of contempt of court under the strict liability rule in respect of a fair and accurate report of legal proceeding held in public, published contemporaneously and in good faith."

The only exception is where it appears to a court that the reporting of the proceedings before it might prejudice the administration of justice in other proceedings imminently pending in another court, or shortly to follow thereafter. Even then, there is no power to prohibit reporting of proceedings. All that the judge may order is a postponement until the risk to the administration of justice has passed. The law does not permit the right of the press freely to report proceedings in open court to be fettered, notwithstanding that such reporting may be or would be embarrassing, damaging or inconvenient to an individual who has featured in the case. That would be a major inroad into a constitutional safeguard and would expose the courts to the risk of pressure from interested third parties.

Mr. Cormack: Are we not dealing with something a little more serious than inconvenience? I respect what my right hon. and learned Friend is seeking to say, but surely no true freedom would be properly fettered if there were an inhibition on the publication of names.

The Solicitor-General: We are certainly dealing with matters much more serious than mere inconvenience. Perhaps I should have reordered my remarks and said "inconvenient, embarrassing or damaging"—sometimes deeply damaging. To take my hon. Friend's point, I ask the rhetorical question: is it possible to solve this grave difficulty simply by suppressing a name or ordering the press not to publish it? [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] I hear a number of my hon. Friends saying yes, but I invite the House to reflect cautiously before interfering in what seems to be a small particular in the right of the press to make a fair and accurate report.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): The press?

The Solicitor-General: Yes, the press or television.

Let us reflect on the matter for a moment. If one suppresses the name, one does not suppress the rest of what is reported, so it is reported that someone, or perhaps more than one person who has been defamed, has done something in the course of the case and it may be that he or she is not known to the public and is of no interest to the public. So far, I am happy to say that in the case of children—I was about to come to that exception—and in the case of rape victims, the balance that Parliament has chosen, in that it has granted exceptions in those cases, has proved to be an effective one. However, once we start to distort the operation of open justice and the consideration of the matters, we may very well, through the operation of rumour and all its insidious effects that are so damaging in libel cases—the only justification that I know for the high damages granted in such cases—inflict more damage on justice than we realise.

Mr. John Marshall: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that in cases of blackmail one refers to Mr. X. Surely in a similar case such as this one, it would be fairer to the individual involved to refer to him or her as Mr., Mrs., Miss or Ms. X.

The Solicitor-General: I ask my hon. Friend to reflect that, if Mr. X were a Member of the House, or Mrs. X were a member of the nobility—[HON. MEMBERS: "Lady X."] If she were a Lady, she would still be referred to as Mrs. X. If the person were a member of the nobility or someone in whom the press had an interest, rumour would

start to circulate, and damage could not be avoided. I have acknowledged the great damage done to the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West.

Mr. Burns: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

The Solicitor-General: No; otherwise, I shall not finish what I have to say. I apologise for not giving way, but I am sure that the House will understand.

When one conceals matters, one does not necessarily quieten them. The law does not permit the right of the press freely to report proceedings in open court to be fettered, notwithstanding that such reporting would be inconvenient, embarrassing or damaging to some individual who has featured in the case. That would be a major inroad into a constitutional safeguard and would expose the courts to the risk of pressure from interested third parties.

Anyone who has prosecuted in the criminal courts—I see a number of such hon. Members here—will know that, in case after case, it is necessary to bring in damaging things about third parties. They may be co-accused who have never been tried and are entitled to the presumption of innocence, or they may be people against whom the defendant has a grudge of any nature. Are all those names to be kept from the press? Is it always to be Mr. X or Mrs. X? I suggest—I put it no higher, and we shall resolve nothing tonight—that we should think very carefully indeed.

Parliament, which has considered the matter carefully, has decreed that the only exceptions should be children involved as victims and the victims of rape. The law of contempt is a doctrine of wide scope which manifests itself in a variety of types of contempt. Their common feature —if I can capture the interest of hon. Members—is that they seek to ensure the efficacy and integrity of the judicial process, which is of concern to us all, so that justice may be administered to all without interference from any quarter.

Proceedings for contempt of court are the means by which obedience to orders of the court and adherence to undertakings are ensured. Those minded to take reprisals against witnesses on account of the evidence that they have given can also be punished for contempt. Those who disrupt proceedings or undermine public confidence in the administration of justice by scandalising the judiciary are also liable to be dealt with for contempt of court. The media are also required, when reporting matters which are relevant to imminent legal proceedings, to ensure that their reports do not give rise to any substantial risk of prejudice.

Ms. Short: The mood of the House has changed since the Solicitor-General started speaking, and a mood of exasperation is now spreading widely. Has the right hon. and learned Gentleman anything positive to say to us, or will the rest of his speech simply seek to justify the status quo and say no to everything that has been put before him tonight?

The Solicitor-General: It sounds as though the hon. Lady has made up her mind.

Ms. Short: I think that we should look at the question.

The Solicitor-General: What I am putting before the House are serious considerations about the balance between the rights of individuals, which may be damaged in the course of a case but where the record can subsequently be put straight, the rights of those who are before the courts, accused, to deploy their defence, and the rights of the public at large to scrutinise that process.

I ask the House to be careful when it has one of its own Members in its charge. We are right to sympathise with the hon. and learned Member for Leicester West.

Mr. Cecil Franks (Barrow and Furness): It is the principle that matters.

The Solicitor-General: Exactly. My hon. Friend is entirely right: it is the principle that matters, and the ultimate principle is that there should be justice and that justice should be seen to be done.

Mr. Franks: There are many lawyers in the House, including myself, and we take a completely different view. I speak not as a lawyer but as a politician. It is just not good enough if the House does nothing. I have the greatest sympathy for hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner), but there is a principle involved and it is about time that my right hon. and learned Friend stopped speaking as a lawyer and started acting as a politician.

The Solicitor-General: I hear what my hon. Friend says. I have had many pleasant discussions with him, but I must say to him and to the House in all firmness that to ask us to talk about justice as politicians is to go down a very dangerous road. When we consider justice, we stand back as politicians and invite independent courts and wholly independent juries to consider hotly contested matters.

Right hon. and hon. Members are failing to remember in how many criminal trials it happens, often necessarily, that allegations are made by the prosecution or defence which are damaging to persons who are not immediately before the court.

Mr. Franks: Let us deal with that point.

The Solicitor-General: My hon. Friend says that we ought to deal with that point. The suggestion before the House is that, in such cases, it would be right and proper not to publish the names of the persons involved. The House has not focused its mind yet on whether any name should be published, or whether only some names should or should not be published.

Ms. Short: The right hon. and learned Gentleman will not even consider that point.

The Solicitor-General: I ask the hon. Lady to relax for a moment. I am not saying that the country should not consider the matter. It will undoubtedly be one for public debate, and rightly so. My hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West and the ordeal suffered by the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West will make it a matter, rightly, for public debate. Nevertheless——

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South) *rose*——

Mr. Ashby *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I believe that the Solicitor-General does not want to give way.

The Solicitor-General: I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Leicestershire, North-West, who initiated the debate.

Mr. Ashby: I appreciate that one must approach the matter with considerable caution, and that we cannot go at it in a bull-at-a-gate fashion. It is important to hear the arguments on both sides, and to consider them carefully. I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for replying to the debate in the way that he is doing. I accept everything that has been said so far, but is it really necessary for the persons in question to be the subject of media coverage? I cannot see how it aids justice one iota for that to happen.

The Solicitor-General: What is reasonable and what the law should forbid are not necessarily the same. We have a very wide press in this country, and we count that as one of our freedoms. However, it embraces a whole spectrum —from a deeply responsible press that is extremely careful in what it publishes and which tries to balance one thing with another, to an element that many people regard, perhaps rightly, as frequently scurrilous or simply aimed at making a profit. I suggest, however, that that is part of a free society. Although it has disadvantages, it is a great deal better than the kind of society in which there is no free press, or in which the press is gagged by more and more complex and frequently unworkable rules.

I must move on, because there are one or two other points and safeguards that I want to mention. As I said, safeguards apply in the case of children and of rape victims, and they seem to have worked well. The judge also has the power, where the reporting of one case may affect the interests of justice in a subsequent case, to postpone the reporting of the earlier case.

Mr. Burns: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

The Solicitor-General: I shall not give way to my hon. Friend, as I believe that I have done so once already and I have only a little time left.

Professional safeguards apply to those who appear for the prosecution and the defence. The Bar code of conduct requires that those who appear should use their powers as responsibly as the interests of justice may reasonably allow. Paragraph 610 of the Bar code provides, first:

"Counsel must not make statements or ask questions which are merely scandalous or intended or calculated only to vilify insult or annoy either a witness or some other person; counsel must if possible avoid the naming in open Court of third parties whose characters would thereby be impugned; counsel must not suggest that a witness or other person is guilty of crime, fraud or misconduct or attribute to another person the crime or conduct of which his lay client is accused"—

[HON. MEMBERS: "What about this case?"]—

"unless such allegations go to a matter in issue (including the credibility of the witness) which is material to his lay client's case and which appear to him to be supported by reasonable grounds."

I hear hon. Members saying, "What about this case?" I am on common ground when I remind the House that this case was immensely serious. If someone is to be tried for matters as serious as those for which Mr. Beck was tried and to receive the condign punishment that Mr. Beck received, it is essential that he should have a fair trial and that he should be given every opportunity to deploy his defence.

Hon. Members are saying, "We all agree, but what about the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West?" I must remind the House of another important principle. If I may say so, I acquit the hon. and learned Gentleman of the misguided approach that some hon. Members are taking. He has deported himself with great dignity. That is the way in which we should deport ourselves. He was not on trial. His opportunity to answer necessarily had to be deferred until the trial was over, and he has now had an opportunity to be heard. *[Interruption.]* I hear the point that other people do not have the same privilege as hon. Members.

The suggestion is not that we should lift the laws of libel, which would be one other possible step to take, because if we were to do so witnesses would be inhibited and the opportunity for justice would be damaged.

Mr. Lawrence: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

The Solicitor-General: No, I am sorry, but I must conclude.

The hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West is not on trial. He has had an opportunity to make his point, and I wish to end with one important point. As a result of a number of miscarriages, we are scrutinising our system of justice. I hope that the House will never forget that no one is guilty of an offence unless they have been duly tried and convicted and that everyone is entitled to the same presumption of innocence.

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): Tell that to the press.

The Solicitor-General: I do tell that to the press.

If I may speak for the Law Officers of the Crown, we are scrupulous in bearing that vital principle in mind. We are right to be scrupulous to maintain our system of open justice, to require that people be tried for charges the purport of which is known, and in courts which are open to the public and to the press and can be fully and fairly reported. Despite the undoubted hardship, not only to the famous such as the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West and other hon. Members, but to those who are known only to their families—I know from correspondence that many ordinary people suffer hardship because of what is said and done in court cases—I suggest to the House that we interfere with this at our peril, and at peril to our liberties and system of open justice. I commend that principle most sincerely to the House.

The motion having been made at Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at half past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 4 December 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF EDINBURGH DISTRICT COUNCIL ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

STRATHCLYDE REGIONAL COUNCIL ORDER CONFIRMATION BILL

Read the Third time, and passed.

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Homelessness

1. **Mr. Kilfoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has concerning the number of people registered homeless in Liverpool.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tim Yeo): The information available to me, provided by Liverpool city council, is that it accepted 397 households as homeless in the second quarter of this year.

Mr. Kilfoyle: Is the Minister aware that since 1988 in the city of Liverpool there has been a 48 per cent. increase in the number of homeless families? We have had the smallest number of new home completions in the city since 1982-83. In addition, nationally in the first six months of 1991 there was a 53 per cent. increase in the number of mortgage repossession orders. In this year, the 25th anniversary of Shelter, does the Minister agree that the time is right for him to give effect to the Prime Minister's boast in his letter of support to Shelter that the Government would employ public expenditure where necessary? Or does he concur with the view of the Minister for Housing and Planning that the homeless are merely the people whom one steps over on the way out of the opera?

Mr. Yeo: I share the concern expressed by the hon. Gentleman for homeless people in Liverpool. It is because I share it that I must draw attention to the scandalous mismanagement of the housing stock in Liverpool. There are 5,733 empty council houses, almost 2,000 of which have been empty for more than a year. There is £16 million of uncollected rent, more than a quarter of the total rent roll. Those resources in property and money could be put to good use to top up the £23 million housing improvement programme allocation this year, the £12·5 million of estate action money, the £71 million of Housing Corporation money and the £15 million for the vacant dwellings initiative. Those are huge resources which taxpayers are making available to Liverpool. If the city council was doing its job, it would put those resources to good use on behalf of the tenants.

Mr. Alton: Is the Minister aware that in addition to the 5,700 empty council-owned properties, there are a further 7,000 empty properties in the private sector, bringing to over 12,000 the number of empty properties in the city of Liverpool? Although I agree with the Minister that empty properties could be used to house homeless people, is not it the case that until capital receipts are released from the sale of council properties, councils will not have the resources to put properties back into use for people who need them?

Mr. Yeo: I have already listed the extensive resources that are available to the council. In addition, the vacant dwellings initiative, which provides £15 million of public money, topped up by £17 million of private investment, is designed to bring privately owned empty properties back into use. There is even more good news on the horizon for Liverpool in the form of a housing action trust. Despite the unremitting hostility of the Opposition Front-Bench team, I am glad to say that the majority group on the present Liverpool city council, in contrast to its predecessor, is showing interest in a housing action trust and my Department is discussing the matter with it.

Local Government Reform

2. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response he has so far received on his White Paper about reform of local government.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Michael Heseltine): A list of the respondents to the consultation paper, "The Structure of Local Government in England" and copies of the responses were placed in the Library of the House on 14 October. There were 1,893 responses.

Mr. Pawsey: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the draft guidance issued by his Department does not require local authorities to be of any particular size to deliver an effective and efficient service? Does he agree that, generally speaking, smaller authorities are closer to local people and better able to reflect their needs and aspirations? Therefore, will he do what he can to encourage a response from small authorities to adopt the new powers?

Mr. Heseltine: My hon. Friend will be glad to hear that in our draft guidance we have left considerable room for the discretion of the Local Government Commission. We are looking for authorities that can deliver efficient and effective services. Certainly there will be every opportunity for authorities of any potential size to put forward their views.

Mr. Pike: Does the Secretary of State accept that if local government is to be local, it is essential that we do not repeat the mistakes of the 1973-74 reorganisation and that any reorganisation must be acceptable to local people?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman has obviously followed the Government's proposals, which are designed carefully to consult local people and to find out whether we can create local authorities that reflect a genuine sense of local community.

Mr. Channon: Does my right hon. Friend agree that his proposals are welcome, but that the sooner the uncertainty is removed the better? By what date does he believe that the reform of local government will be complete? Will he do his utmost to ensure that it is as quick as possible?

Mr. Heseltine: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his support. We expect that the first of the new authorities will be in place by April 1994. We have not set a date for the completion of the exercise, but I shall bear what he said very much in mind.

Local Authority Housing

3. **Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his funding of local authority new build.

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Sir George Young): The building of new social housing is now mainly the responsibility of housing associations, with local authorities assuming an enabling role.

Mr. Steinberg: Is the Minister aware that in my constituency, because of Government policy, little house building has taken place? As a result, people can expect to be on the waiting list for about seven years whereas under the Labour Government it was about one year. Is not that a disgrace? Will the Minister confirm or deny that his Department is now threatening local authorities that plan new builds, by saying that it will take away discretionary housing grants?

Sir George Young: I can deny that. No departmental official of mine has told a local authority not to build new. In one case—I think it was in Warwickshire—a local authority, on reflection, revised its bid and decided to develop its relationship with housing associations rather than commit its allocation to its own project.

I notice that the housing investment programme allocations to the city of Durham rose from £1·8 million in 1988-89 to nearly £3 million in the current year. On top of that, £358,000 was allocated to housing associations. I urge the local authority in Durham to develop a relationship with housing associations so that it can make faster progress in meeting the problems to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. David Nicholson: In answer to an earlier question the Under-Secretary of State mentioned the vast resources given to the city of Liverpool, and by definition to other inner city authorities, which have not used housing resources sensibly and have not proceeded far with the right to buy. Is my hon. Friend aware that many authorities in the south-west have not only used housing resources sensibly, but have sold about 25 per cent. or more of their stock? In making HIP allocations, will he take those matters into account as well as the efficiency with which those authorities use their stock and their willingness to co-operate with the private sector? That will be good for the building industry and for meeting housing need.

Sir George Young: Local authorities that use their resources sensibly, develop an enabling role and co-operate with the private sector and housing associations will benefit from the new regime being introduced this year by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, whereby HIP allocations take account of the use to which resources are put to give an added incentive to local authorities to improve their performance and the standard of service for their tenants.

Mr. Soley: Is not the Minister dodging the question yet again? Only the other day on "Panorama" Conservative councillors in Worcester said that they could not build new council houses without losing money. Is not the truth of the matter that the way in which the Government have skewed the finances means that councils cannot provide that housing? How much more bad publicity do the Government have to get on the failure of their housing programme from the Duke of Edinburgh, Conservative councillors and their supporters around the country before they do what we are all asking them to do and undertake a planned release of the capital receipts? That is money from the sale of council houses and the Government should invest it again in housing.

Sir George Young: Much of the bad publicity on housing accrues to Labour-controlled local authorities that have mismanaged their resources, let down their tenants, do not implement the right to buy, have been short-sighted about the role of the housing associations and have not developed the enabling role. The Government are making £8 billion of housing resources available next year and £24 billion over three years. We believe that that is a square deal for the housing movement.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: Will my hon. Friend confirm that it is often precisely those authorities that complain most about not being able to use capital receipts which have used the most in the past few years? My local authority, sadly Labour-controlled, has been able to use £16 million of capital receipts in the past five years. Many of those authorities also have land available which they are able to use with housing associations to provide new build, but they would not have been able to do so had not this Government been in power.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary have talked with housing authorities throughout the country in the past few weeks and we have been interested to find out that many local authorities have land banks which they are not prepared to make available to housing associations. They are not adopting the broader role that we envisaged. I hope that any local authority that has land available will develop a dialogue quickly with the housing association movement, whose resources are increasing substantially, to see whether it can make faster progress than would otherwise be the case in meeting housing needs in its area.

River Quality

4. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the condition of Britain's rivers following the 1990 river quality survey conducted by the National Rivers Authority.

The Minister for the Environment and Countryside (Mr. David Trippier): I understand that the National Rivers Authority intends to publish the results from its 1990 river quality survey shortly.

Mr. Williams: When the Minister reads that report, which has already been widely leaked, he will discover that 11 per cent. of Britain's rivers have improved in quality since 1985, but that 15 per cent. have deteriorated. From 1958 there was a steady improvement in the quality of Britain's rivers, but since 1980 there has been a net deterioration of 6 per cent. Is not that an appalling commentary on the Government's record of caring for the environment?

Mr. Trippier: No, it is not. First, the hon. Gentleman has suggested that the report, which he says has been leaked, is accurate, but I suggest to him and to the House that it is not. That will be revealed by the time the report is published by the NRA. Secondly, the fact that 90 per cent. of river water in the United Kingdom is judged to be of a good or very high standard is something of which I am enormously proud. That contrasts with the rest of the European Community, where 75 per cent. of river water is judged to be of good quality. I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that our record is the best in the European Community.

Mr. Dunn: Is my hon. Friend aware that large sections of the River Darent, which runs through the constituency of Dartford—hence the name Dartford—have largely disappeared? Will my hon. Friend therefore give me an undertaking that he will visit Dartford early in the new year, or on Christmas day if need be, to see for himself the damage that has been done to our river and how much has been lost? My hon. Friend should bring with him members of the NRA so that they can provide best advice on how we can give our river back to the people of Dartford.

Mr. Trippier: I am happy to give an undertaking to my hon. Friend that I would be only too delighted to visit his constituency, but I should be grateful if he would release me on Christmas day.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: Does the Minister realise that his attitude on river quality is incredibly complacent and that the condition of Britain's rivers is causing great concern to many people, from anglers and recreational users of rivers to the chief scientist of the NRA? Why has there been a downturn in river water quality under the Government which has reversed the trend since the mid-1950s? That downturn is all the more remarkable considering the damage that the Government have done by reducing British industry.

Mr. Trippier: It is brass cheek for the hon. Lady to refer to the Government's record on river quality and water in general when one remembers that the Labour Government cut investment in water quality by 30 per cent. It would have taken a considerable amount of time for any Government taking over their shambolic performance to improve the quality of just about everything in the environment, as we have been doing. I remind the hon. Lady who set up the National Rivers Authority. She at least praises the National Rivers Authority on every conceivable occasion. We invented it and set it up—the Labour party did not.

Poll Tax

5. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to abolish the poll tax 20 per cent. contribution rule for 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): I do not propose to make any change in the existing basis of liability or the benefit arrangements for the remaining period of the community charge.

Mr. Madden: Will the Minister now accept that the 20 per cent. contribution is perhaps the cruellest feature of the poll tax fiasco, placing a significant burden on those with the lowest incomes, including many pensioners, in places such as Bradford? It costs local authorities more to collect than it raises in revenue. Is not the Minister deeply ashamed that he intends to carry on with that cruel and stupid tax instead of scrapping it, as he should have done a long time ago?

Mr. Key: There is nothing cruel or stupid about providing a benefit system which more than compensates for the 20 per cent. that those people are asked to pay. As for it costing more to collect, the average 20 per cent. charge is about £50, whereas the average cost of collection is about £12.

Mr. Janman: Was not extra money given to those on income support specifically to pay the 20 per cent. contribution? Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government are being amazingly generous with taxpayers' money from 1993 onwards, when although the minimum 20 per cent. contribution will have been abolished, those on income support will still receive that extra money, which they started to receive two years ago?

Mr. Key: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I wonder what advice Opposition Members give to their constituents who are liable to pay that 20 per cent. when they discover that they are not paying more than the 20 per cent. that they receive from the rest of the taxpayers.

Mr. Blunkett: Will the Under-Secretary of State read the Audit Commission's evidence about the cost of collecting the 20 per cent. contribution, the havoc that it is causing in terms of non-collection rates and the administrative difficulties that it is causing in magistrates courts? Does he agree that the announcement last Thursday by the Secretary of State for Social Security is nothing short of a scandal? It suggested that when the 20 per cent. is abolished the taper will be changed so that, instead of people over social security levels losing 15p in the £1, they will lose 20p, thereby penalising people who are struggling to lift themselves out of poverty, provide pensions for themselves and do what the Conservative party always preaches—stand on their own two feet. Is not it a scandal that, in so doing, their feet will be kicked out from under them?

Mr. Key: Before my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made his announcement, Opposition Members accused us of creating a situation where there would be no taper, but a cut-off and said how cruel that would be. Now that there is a taper, they complain just as loudly. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for

Social Security for providing a generous new benefit system for the council tax, from which there will be no clawback of the uprated benefit.

Oxleas Wood

6. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what new proposals he will be putting forward to protect the environment of Oxleas wood in south-east London.

Mr. Yeo: English Nature is discussing with the London borough of Greenwich the adoption of a management plan for the wood.

Mr. Townsend: As the wood is an 8,000-year-old oak wood only eight miles from the centre of London on a site of special scientific interest, could not the Department have done more to insist that the important new road going close to my constituency was cut-and-cover? Following the thought of my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn), may I invite the Minister to come there for a walk with his dog on Christmas day to envisage the damage that the new road will cause?

Mr. Yeo: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his invitation. I was brought up until the age of seven near Oxleas wood and I do not recall so much publicity about the value of that 8,000-year-old wood 40 years ago. A cut-and-cover tunnel would involve slicing a great swathe through the wood to construct the tunnel, quite apart from the £10 million that it would cost. In addition, such a tunnel would involve the closure of the south-facing slip roads at Shooters Hill and would increase traffic on local roads. English Nature is discussing the management plan and proposes the readoption of the practice of coppicing. It also proposes more exploitation of the wood for educational purposes. The local borough has proposed that the wood should be declared a local nature reserve.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Are not the Government missing an opportunity to be both good Europeans and good environmentalists at the same time? Would not it be easy to accede to the commissioner's request to change the three points in the regulation which the Commission says are defective and deal with Crown immune areas, reduce the latitude given to authorities and ensure that environmental assessments are recorded in writing so that we have proper regulations and proper environmental impact assessments? That would test whether Oxleas wood, Twyford down and other such places would survive if there were proper implementation of European law.

Mr. Yeo: As I have made clear, the disagreement between the Government and the Commission does not involve the merits of the case, but the procedures. I do not think that many people are fully aware of that. The Government intend to comply with the Commission's directive and have an exceptionally good record of compliance with directives on environmental assessments. In this case, we followed the procedures in operation at the time. We are good Europeans. For the reasons that I gave in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend), I believe that we are looking after the interests and future of the wood as thoroughly as any reasonable person could.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: Does my hon. Friend accept that the change is that there is now a proposal to cut a road through the wood whereas 40 years ago there was not? Would not it be legally wise and politically sensible not to go ahead with the compulsory order to bring in bulldozers until difficulties with the European Commission and local people have been resolved? I can tell my hon. Friend that local people would not mind losing the south-facing slip roads.

Mr. Yeo: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his offer to defend increasing traffic in his immediate neighbourhood. A cut-and-cover tunnel involves cutting, so considerable damage would be inflicted on the wood if that alternative were chosen. In addition, I do not believe that it would necessarily be the most cost-effective use of resources in terms of environmental output to spend such a substantial sum on that project.

Council Tax

7. **Mr. John Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what method he will use to value domestic properties for council tax purposes.

Mr. Heseltine: The principles and assumptions to be used for valuations were set out in regulations laid on 2 September.

Mr. Evans: How long does the Secretary of State expect that it will take to complete the valuations and how long will it take to deal with householders' objections to those valuations? Will not local authorities, which will still be wrestling with the poll tax in 1992, be in a state of total chaos in April 1993? Will those householders whose properties are valued through the use of aerial photographs be informed of that?

Mr. Heseltine: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that responsibility for the detailed exercise of the valuation measurements is the responsibility of my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury. I can help the hon. Gentleman by saying that we believe that we are on schedule for the introduction of the council tax in April 1993.

Mr. Bowis: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that he has listened to hon. Members and representatives of people with disabilities who are worried that the additional room or larger property that they need to accommodate their disabilities might take them into a higher band and that he has decided that any such people should fall within one band lower than would otherwise be the case?

Mr. Heseltine: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding the House of our special announcements to ensure that special features of properties adapted for the disabled should be disregarded.

Local Authority Services

8. **Mr. Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the efficiency of local authority professional and technical services.

Mr. Key: The Government believe that competition is the best guarantee of efficiency. That is why we are consulting on our proposals for extending compulsory competitive tendering to professional and technical

services carried out by local authorities. These are set out in "Competing for Quality—Competition in the Provision of Local Services", published on 5 November.

Mr. Cryer: Does the Minister accept that the vast majority of professional and technical officers in local authorities are providing a devoted, decent and efficient service for the benefit of local communities? Does he recognise that his proposals are a kick in the teeth for that devoted service and an invitation not to services that are democratically accountable to the local community, but to the spivs of the free enterprise service sector such as Mr. J. G. L. Poulson, the well-known Tory who demonstrated what sort of corruption can be applied to private enterprise competitive local authority services?

Mr. Key: It is always a pleasure to reply to the beguiling and dulcet tones of the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer). I seem to recall that a gentleman called T. Dan Smith was also involved at that time and that he was not a Conservative.

As I said in Chester to the Society of Chief Architects of Local Authorities, I greatly admire the work carried out by local authority professionals. It is precisely because the best is very good that we want to make it apply to everyone.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Does my hon. Friend accept that in many authorities the work being carried out by professional and technical officers is of a high standard and very cost-effective? However, that is not universally the case. Do we not owe it to community charge payers in each of those areas to ensure that the best value is obtained for their money and that they get the most efficient service? The only way to do that is to make sure that they have the fresh air of competitive tendering.

Mr. Key: My hon. Friend is right. I would add just one other factor. On performance standards, under our proposals in the Local Government Bill which is going through another place, the Audit Commission will issue directions whose effect will be to define yardsticks against which local authorities will report their performance. That is not a retrospective or prescriptive but a descriptive process and will allow the citizens of this country to measure the standards of service that they receive from their local authorities.

Mr. Gould: Now that the extension of compulsory competitive tendering has been rejected by the professional bodies, by the whole of the local government world and, most recently, by their Lordships, why will the Minister not admit that the game is up, that the consultation paper will have to be withdrawn, and that the Government must abandon their dogma-driven obsession with privatisation in favour of our insistence that quality and value for money must be the sole criteria?

Mr. Key: Like the hon. Gentleman, I read the Association of Metropolitan Authorities press release calling for withdrawal of the consultation paper. It is astonishing that the Opposition should ask us to legislate without consulting on this very important issue.

Council Tax

9. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received on the proposed council tax.

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): My Department received more than 800 representations in response to the consultation paper, "A New Tax for Local Government", most of which welcomed its principles.

Mr. Greenway: What changes does my hon. Friend envisage in the assessment of local authority spending needs and in the distribution of Government grant under the council tax? Is he aware that the spending assessment for Ryedale district council, which is in my constituency, is some 20 per cent. lower than that for neighbouring Hambledon, part of which is also in my constituency, even though the two districts have similar characteristics? Does he agree that if the distribution of Government grant were seen to be fair, local residents would not only be able to assess the performance of local authorities but would begin to see that our new council tax is a far better deal than the uncosted return to the rates—or, even worse, the uncosted local income tax—proposed by the Opposition parties?

Mr. Portillo: Our distribution is fair. The reason why Hambledon and Ryedale get different standard spending assessments is not that they are similar but that in some ways they are dissimilar. For example, Hambledon scores much higher on the sparsity valuation, and sparsity was one of the factors that we took into account and put into the process precisely because the Association of District Councils thought that it was a relevant factor. The association is right: it is more expensive to provide services in an area of sparsity than in an area which suffers less from that.

Mr. Bellotti: Will the Minister confirm that he has received representations from Age Concern and others about the income of single pensioners being 60 per cent. of the average income of a retired couple? In the light of those representations will he reconsider the Government's attitude towards the 25 per cent. discount with a view to increasing it?

Mr. Portillo: I believe that 25 per cent. is the right logical discount for single people. The tax is a 50 per cent. property tax and a 50 per cent. personal tax, so the full tax is payable if there are two or more people in the household, while half the tax is payable if the property is empty or is not a sole residence. Therefore, 75 per cent. of the tax is payable if a single person lives there.

I am glad that the hon. Gentleman and I agree that there should be a discount for single people—I am only sorry that the Labour party continues to insist that we should return to a rating system in which single people would have to pay through the nose, as they did before.

Miss Emma Nicholson: In view of the forthcoming reform of the common agricultural policy, farmers are naturally concerned about downward pressure on incomes. Will my hon. Friend confirm that under the council tax farms will be identified as working farms and thus avoid an unnecessarily high banding?

Mr. Portillo: Valuers will have to take account of what properties are really worth. If they are tied into a working farm, or if there are legal agreements that constrain the ways in which they can be used, clearly that will be a material factor in determining whether the properties have a market value and what it is. The answer to my hon. Friend's question is that of course those are relevant considerations for valuers to take into account.

Mr. Gould: In response to the statement by the Birmingham city treasurer that he would have to keep a register to administer the council tax, the Minister asserted that the keeping of such a register would be unlawful. Does he adhere to that assertion and, if so, what was the basis for it?

Mr. Portillo: The basis is that there is no power in the Local Government Finance Bill now in Committee for councils to keep a register. Nor is there any power for them either to require details from people in order to keep a register or to require people to continue to notify them of changes in any register. Therefore, I believe that my comments were valid.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Will my hon. Friend commend as compulsory reading part of our proceedings in Committee when for the first time hon. Members listened for two or two and a half hours to—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not going to talk about what is going on in Standing Committee.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: If people cared to read that record, they would know that for two and a half hours the Liberal Democrats proved beyond—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend is right to say that the local income tax is not an alternative to council tax which commends itself to Conservative Members—or even to most Opposition Members, and he is right to say that anybody interested in knowing why local income tax will not work could do no better than to read the report of our proceedings in Committee.

Poll Tax

10. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people he estimates will be liable to pay the 20 per cent. contribution to the poll tax in Calderdale for 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The number of people liable to pay 20 per cent. of the community charge in Calderdale next year will depend on a number of factors, including the number of people on incomes at or below the income support level.

Mrs. Mahon: My local authority informs me that the proportion of the population will be 12 per cent. In this season of goodwill, will the Minister promise to listen to the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, the Audit Commission and every other organisation, including the charities, which say that the 20 per cent. tax is unfair, and that it is a bad tax which works against the poor, or is he content to support the Ebenezer Scrooge of the Department of the Environment? That miserable gentleman repented. May we have an assurance that the Minister will do the same?

Mr. Key: I do not think that anyone has ever accused me of being Ebenezer Scrooge. I am informed that Calderdale tells us that about 11 per cent. of its payers are at the 20 per cent. community charge level—which means about 16,200 people this year, 600 of whom are students. I have explained to the House that we shall not change the benefit system or the 20 per cent. system until we introduce the council tax, but of course I will listen with care to any representations that are made, as I always do.

Mr. Dickens: Is it not a fact that because we have introduced up to 100 per cent. rebates on the new council tax, my constituents in Littleborough and Saddleworth, on the border of Calderdale, will gain quite significantly if they are on income support?

Mr. Key: My hon. Friend is right. Those people will benefit in a number of ways. When the next Conservative Government are re-elected, we shall have a growing and buoyant economy, and everyone will be better off.

Mr. Nellist *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: I know that Coventry is nowhere near Calderdale, but let us see what the hon. Gentleman can do.

Mr. Nellist: Will the Minister still tell people in Calderdale that no one who cannot afford to pay the poll tax will go to prison for that inability? If so, what are they to make of the case last week of Maria Jones, a 22-year-old woman who was 31 weeks pregnant? She offered £5 per week out of her £42 per week benefit, but was sentenced to 60 days in prison by magistrates in Stroud. Will the people in Calderdale still believe him?

Mr. Key: I do not know the details of the individual case; that is a question for the magistrates. My advice to the hon. Gentleman's constituents is not to listen to the advice of someone who does not pay the tax himself and who advises others not to pay.

Planning and Compensation Act 1991

11. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement as to the progress he is making in implementation of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend has already brought some provisions of the Act into force and intends to bring all its provisions into force progressively within about one year of enactment.

Mr. Steen: Is my hon. Friend aware that directors of planning all over the country and hon. Members of all parties are concerned that the number of unauthorised developments has risen from 60,000 in 1988 to more than 90,000 in 1990? Will he assure the House that the new planning practice guidance that he is to issue will give planners teeth, and not just false teeth, to deal with the unauthorised developments being built all over the country? Planners must be given powers to stop that happening before such developments cover the countryside.

Sir George Young: The particular provisions of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 in the consideration of which my hon. Friend played such a distinguished part do not come into force until next month, so directors of planning will not yet have had the benefit of the

provisions. They come into effect next month and we shall issue planning policy guidance later this month. I hope that when planning directors have the new powers available to them they will be able to take faster and more effective action against unauthorised development.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Does the Minister intend to bring the concept of sustainable development right into planning guidance as a primary role? Will he confirm that the primary role of the plan will take precedence over all other considerations? Will he beef up the public consultation procedures which his Department are currently casting aside like autumn leaves shrivelling on the ground, or do we have to wait for a Labour Government in the full flush of a green spring and summer to bring sense back into our planning system?

Sir George Young: No, that delay will not be necessary. We had a long debate in Committee on sustainable development. There was a lot of sympathy for the concept, but we saw real difficulties about enshrining it in the planning machinery without far more information about how one would take the concept of sustainable development forward in district plans. We are moving towards a plan-led system in which, other things being equal, what is in the plan will happen.

There is a balance between getting the plans up and running quickly and a protracted consultation procedure. We do not want to diminish the opportunities of local people to consult on the plans, and I do not believe that we have cut corners in the way that the hon. Gentleman implied.

Business Rates

12. **Mr. Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his estimate of how much more businesses would have paid in rates during 1990-91 and 1991-92 if uniform business rate had not been in operation.

Mr. Portillo: Taking account of actual levels of local government spending for the two years, we estimate that without the uniform business rate businesses would have paid £1 billion more in 1990-91 and £850 million more in 1991-92.

Mr. Squire: Those figures are significant. Given that the Labour party has pledged to abolish the UBR, will not the consequence inevitably be higher business rates for many businesses, which Labour says it is concerned about, leading a number of those businesses to the very edge of bankruptcy and liquidation and increasing unemployment as a consequence?

Mr. Portillo: Yes. In so far as I can make out the policy of the Labour party, it is to give the business rate back to local authorities. We know what the experience has been over the years. Local authorities increased their spending much faster than inflation, which meant that business rates had increased faster than inflation. Under the uniform business rate, the rate in the pound that businesses pay stays in line with inflation and never rises faster than inflation. That is a major gain for business.

Mr. James Lamond: While we are on the subject of the amount paid in business rates, can the Minister tell us whether shops whose rates have been assessed on the basis of six-day or even five-and-a-half-day trading will have their rateable values reassessed on the basis of seven-day trading?

Mr. Portillo: The next revaluation will be carried out in 1993. It will come into effect in 1995.

Mr. Oppenheim: Bearing in mind the need to keep the business rate down, has my hon. Friend had time to glance at a pamphlet entitled "The Citizens' Charter", written in 1921 by one Herbert Morrison, then secretary of the London Labour party, which states that the best way to improve local services is to increase competition? Does that not illustrate that no amount of tacky red plastic roses or glossy image-making can disguise the fact that, far from progressing, Labour policy is regressing?

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. It seems that only the modern Labour party is opposed to competition. I have not read that pamphlet. Perhaps during the next hour-long speech by the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) in Committee I will find an opportunity to do so.

National Parks

13. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the work of the Edwards committee on national parks for England and Wales.

Mr. Trippier: We welcome the general thrust of the report of the Edwards panel and the recommendations for the future of the national parks put to us by the Countryside Commission and the Countryside Council for Wales. We have already announced our intention to establish independent authorities for the eight national parks currently run as county council committees. We are considering very carefully the other recommendations from the countryside agencies.

Mr. McFall: Given that the Government have broken two of their manifesto pledges—the implementation of the Common Land Forum and increased protection for national parks—will the Minister give an assurance now that he will implement the recommendations of the Edwards committee in full? Given the comments of the right hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Patten), when he was Secretary of State for the Environment, that national parks were the jewels in the crown, does the Minister not think it fair that that should apply to the entire United Kingdom, not least to my constituency which contains Loch Lomond which is facing ecological disaster as a result of the political intransigence of the blockheads in the Scottish Office in Edinburgh?

Mr. Trippier: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that he seeks that I will agree with everything that the Edwards committee has recommended, but I can certainly assure him and the House that I will respond positively to the recommendations. On the precise matter that he raised regarding Scotland, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland has set up working parties to advise on the need for early action on the Cairngorms, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs. My right hon. Friend has asked Scottish Natural Heritage to consider how to protect Scotland's special areas more effectively in the future.

Mr. John Greenway: Will my hon. Friend assure the House and my many constituents in the North Yorks moors national park that whatever new structure he puts in place to manage the parks, the planning policy guidance given to the park authorities will give the social and economic needs of the people who live in the parks a high priority in the considerations for planning permissions?

Mr. Trippier: I am happy to give my hon. Friend that assurance.

Public Sector Housebuilding

15. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the latest figures for housebuilding in the public sector; and what are the comparable figures for 1979.

Mr. Yeo: The public sector, mainly local authorities, completed 9,000 dwellings in England in the year to September 1991 compared with 75,000 in 1979. Housing associations, which are in the private sector, are now the main providers of new social rented housing. They completed nearly 16,000 newly-built dwellings in the year to September 1991, and together with acquisition and renovation of houses for letting, building for shared ownership sale, and other activities, the total output of housing associations was almost 22,000 units in 1990-91, compared with only 16,000 in 1979. Under our public expenditure plans, housing association output is due to rise substantially to at least 40,000 by 1993-94.

Mr. Skinner: Is it any wonder that every one of my hon. Friends is now inundated with more complaints about housing matters than at any time since we have been in the House? Is the Minister aware that eight times as many houses were built under the previous Labour Government than those doctored figures show for the last financial year? It is high time that we got rid of the Government who have characterised the 1980s with cardboard city and got a Government for the 1990s who will start using bricks and mortar again.

Mr. Yeo: It is no surprise that hon. Members are inundated with complaints because the problem with housing policy in Britain is that, although it is made by the Government, it is delivered by the local authorities, far too many of which are Labour controlled. There are two real housing scandals in Britain today. The first is the appalling mismanagement and waste of resources. In the hon. Gentleman's constituency of Bolsover no less than 5·3 per cent. of rent remains uncollected. That puts it in the worst quarter of local authorities. More than 120 authorities do twice as well as that with uncollected rent less than half the level in Bolsover. The other scandal is the doctrinaire attitude of Labour-controlled councils such as Plymouth city council which, when Labour took control in May this year, halted for several months the previous Conservative policy of selling land to housing associations at concessionary prices, enabling rents to be kept down and output to be increased.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: With regard to complaints about housing, of which I have many from my constituents, will my hon. Friend confirm that if Labour-controlled Norwich city council were to adopt a more up-to-date approach to housing, co-operate properly with housing associations and take advantage of the various initiatives that have come from the Department of the Environment, it would be better for housing in my constituency and better for my constituents?

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently visited my hon. Friend's constituency and delivered a few home truths to the city council about its housing policy failures. If Norwich were to adopt a proper enabling role and take advantage of the huge opportunities that the Government have made available to local authorities for delivering increased housing output, particularly in co-operation with the private housing sector and the housing associations, the people of Norwich would be much better served.

Mr. O'Brien: Is it not a fact that due to Government policy local authorities will be building no new houses next year and housing associations will achieve only what they achieved in the mid-1970s? Is it not also a fact that waiting lists for houses to rent are increasing and have more than trebled since the Conservatives took office? When shall we have the affordable rented houses that people need? The Government's housing policy is abysmal. When shall we have some policies to provide affordable homes for rent?

Mr. Yeo: The hon. Gentleman obviously was not listening to my answer. Housing association output will soon be running at three times the level that it was in the 1970s. In addition, Britain's total housing stock has increased by 2 million units in the past 12 years—a far higher rate of increase than that of the population as a whole. But the fact remains that while local authorities demonstrate their continued inability to use the resources that are already at their disposal, when so many Labour-controlled authorities cannot even be bothered to collect the huge sums in uncollected rent, I cannot see why the hon. Gentleman should be concerned about the level of rents.

Mr. Ian Taylor: Does my hon. Friend agree that in constituencies such as mine in the south-east there are problems in providing houses for those most in need and I welcome the additional figures that he has announced for housing associations? One of my boroughs, Elmbridge, tried it, but there were objections from Labour groups connected with housing and now my tenants are in a much worse position than they otherwise would have been.

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend has made a most important point. Those authorities that transferred their stock, under the large-scale voluntary transfer policy, have received a substantial capital receipt, a quarter of which they are able to use. In addition, independent research shows that tenants in those areas where transfers to housing associations have taken place have been extremely satisfied with the service that they get and the improved repairs. Moreover, the rent guarantees that they were given have been honoured. I would also draw my hon. Friend's attention to our planning circular 7/91 in which we have encouraged local authorities to identify housing need in their areas and then, when private developers bring forward proposals for new housing, to negotiate with them an element of affordable housing in their developments.

Sand Extraction, Druridge Bay

16. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will undertake an environmental assessment of the effect of sand extraction at Druridge bay, Northumberland.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): The extraction activities began at Druridge bay many years ago and my right hon. Friend does not have powers to initiate environmental assessments in such circumstances.

Mr. Beith: How can it be acceptable for this beautiful beach to be shipped away in unlimited quantities under planning permissions granted by Ministers on appeal 30 years ago? That would never be acceptable today. Since it was central Government, not the local communities, who made the decision to allow that to happen, the Minister surely recognises that central Government must play some part in bringing this disgraceful practice to an end.

Mr. Baldry: I think that the hon. Gentleman knows that in the first instance it is for the mineral planning authority to decide whether to revoke the planning consent for extractions and whether such action is warranted.

Eco-labelling

17. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received recently regarding an eco-labelling scheme for environmentally benign products; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: The Environment Committee published its report on eco-labelling in September and the Government responded in November.

Mr. Illsley: I am grateful for the Minister's reply. Do the Government intend to implement an eco-labelling scheme? Can the Minister say whether the Government will agree to a Europewide eco-labelling scheme, to try to eliminate some of the misleading claims that are made on behalf of some products, which prejudice products that are environmentally safe? For example, glass products are completely recyclable. Will the Minister ensure that a life cycle analysis is built into the scheme to ensure that a product is judged from the time it is produced until it is recycled or destroyed?

Mr. Trippier: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. A number of misleading claims are made by companies suggesting that their products are environmentally friendly when clearly they are not. In many cases, that can be a rip-off for the consumer. We should prefer to go along with the European Communitywide scheme so that British industry is not put at a disadvantage. I hope that the Environment Council of Ministers that I shall attend next week in Brussels will decide on a directive.

Sir Hugh Rossi: Does my hon. Friend agree that the answer lies in early amendment of the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 so that the misleading claims to which he has referred can be squashed?

Mr. Trippier: Such an amendment might well be needed, but it is more important that we get the European eco-labelling scheme up and running. I am anxious that we should play an active part not only in setting it up but in ensuring that it is in operation in the United Kingdom by the end of 1992.

Mr. Turner: Does the Minister recognise that the people of Wolverhampton do not regard the Secretary of State for the Environment as environmentally benign, certainly over the problems that they face with the new standard spending assessment announced in the past few days——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That was a bit wide of the question.

Mr. Turner: It affects the people of Wolverhampton.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, I know, but the hon. Gentleman must keep to the question.

Mr. Turner: How can the Secretary of State for the Environment be environmentally benign when he is introducing the Heseltax, as it is known in Wolverhampton, and disastrous standard spending assessment being inflicted on Wolverhampton?

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friend is not environmentally benign but environmentally friendly. His friendliness is made clear in Wolverhampton's settlement. Although the hon. Gentleman may be concerned about it, I prefer the view of his neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mrs. Hicks), who is extremely pleased with my right hon. Friend's settlement.

Local Government (Competitive Tendering)

18. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the savings to local authorities from competitive tendering.

Mr. Key: Research into compulsory competitive tendering under the Local Government Act 1988 has shown average savings of 6 per cent. in the annual value of contracts for all services subject to competition. Average savings of between 10 and 15 per cent. of annual value have been achieved on services such as refuse collection and building cleaning. Standards of services have generally been maintained or improved.

Mr. King: I thank my hon. Friend for that encouraging reply, but does he share my concern that certain Labour authorities, such as the city of Birmingham, carry out the letter but not necessarily the spirit of the law on competitive tendering? What proposals has he to ensure that local authorities, particularly Labour councils, achieve the full benefits of competitive tendering for poll tax payers?

Mr. Key: We are introducing our proposals in the other place. Contrary to some of the comments of Opposition Members, the Opposition amendment made in the other place this week makes no difference to our determination to encourage compulsory competitive tendering in the interests of the taxpayer.

Public Expenditure (Scotland)

3.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on public expenditure in Scotland.

In his autumn statement on 6 November, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced his public expenditure plans. I should now like to tell the House how I have decided to allocate the £12·4 billion available for Scotland among the various spending programmes. As usual, a table summarising my decisions is available in the Vote Office and will be published in the *Official Report*. Full details will be included in my departmental report, which will be published in February.

Overall net spending plans for the Scottish Office and associated Departments total £12·4 billion in 1992-93. In addition, there is £0·1 billion for the Forestry Commission. Those are significant sums. Of that, £7·2 billion will be spent directly by my departments or as capital expenditure by local authorities. That provision is 9·2 per cent. higher than was planned for 1991-92, and the increase is twice as high as inflation. The remainder comprises grants to local authorities totalling £5·2 billion in 1992-93 and the external financing limits of the nationalised industries.

Earlier this year, I announced that local authorities would receive aggregate external finance of £5·13 billion. After allowing for the community charge grant, which is now part of aggregate external finance, that is almost £300 million more than this year—an increase of 6·1 per cent. In the light of our success in containing inflation, it is a very fair settlement. It is £50 million more than the formula consequences of the England settlement, with the result that I have that much less available for other programmes.

My hon. Friend the Minister with responsibilities for industry and local government announced last week a further reduction of £60 million in business rates next year. That is £14 million more than previously planned, reflecting the importance that I attach to this policy. Again, that reduction will make a call on the resources that I have available to increase our programmes.

I shall announce shortly details of rate poundages and the level of industrial derating for next year, but this reduction will ensure a cash decrease in the average poundage in Scotland, compared with an increase of 4·1 per cent. in the national non-domestic rate for England and Wales.

I have increased resources for local authority non-housing capital expenditure to £620 million next year—an increase of more than 18 per cent. on this year's planned figure. Total resources available to Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the local enterprise companies will be £531 million in 1992-93, compared with this year's planned total of £489 million. That is an increase of 8·6 per cent.

Of that total, the Scottish Enterprise network will be able to spend £453 million and the Highlands and Islands Enterprise network £78 million. These figures include £21·4 million for the employment action programme, which will be operated by the local enterprise companies in Scotland.

The total includes additional resources for Scottish Enterprise of up to £25 million to help deal with the industrial problems of Lanarkshire. I intend that Lanarkshire Development Agency should continue to receive special additional funding in subsequent years. I am also providing additional funding to Highlands and Islands Enterprise specifically to tackle the effects of the winding down of the Holy Loch naval base. This level of provision represents a very substantial commitment of resources to the enterprise bodies and it should be sufficient to enable them to carry through the wide range of tasks expected of them and to build on their excellent first year of operation.

I have been able to give particular priority to spending on the health programme. Next year the programme will amount in gross terms to more than £3·7 billion. This is more than 10 per cent. higher than the plans for the current year and will provide for further expansion in health services. It will also mean that gross expenditure on the national health service in Scotland in 1992-93 will be as much as 44 per cent. higher in real terms than it was in 1979-80. Within the total health figures, recurrent expenditure on hospital and community health services in 1992-93 is planned to increase by £230 million over this year. When planned savings from increased efficiency are taken into account, the year-on-year increase in resources will be 11 per cent. Further increases in health expenditure, to over £4 billion, are planned by 1994-95.

The resources devoted to my law and order programme will be substantially increased. Provision will rise to £406 million in 1992-93, an increase of 17 per cent. over planned expenditure in the current financial year. This increase underlines my commitment to improvements across the whole range of law and order programmes, consistent with the undertakings outlined in the recently published "Justice Charter for Scotland".

I have also been able to make significant extra resources available to safeguard the environment, on which expenditure is planned to increase by more than 27 per cent. next year compared with this year's plans. I intend to launch Scottish Natural Heritage, which will combine and enhance the functions of the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland and the Countryside Commission for Scotland, with a starting budget of £34·6 million, an increase of more than 28 per cent. over the combined budgets of its predecessor bodies this year. I also secured a special addition to the block to help fund improved water quality and sewage treatment standards. Planned provision in 1992-93 will be £221 million, 33 per cent. higher than that for the current year.

I have substantially increased the roads and transport programme by nearly £40 million or 10 per cent. next year compared to this and made further increases which will bring the programme to over £450 million in 1994-95. Our investment level next year will be 50 per cent. greater than it was four years ago. I have been able to boost the Scottish roads programme at both the national and local level. This will be welcomed by all those who are concerned to see an improvement in Scotland's infrastructure. It enables continued good progress on the A74 and further improvements to the M8 and other trunk roads and local roads.

My plans for 1992-93 provide for an overall increase in my education programme of some 15 per cent. over that for 1991-92. I announced in the House on 26 November my plans for recurrent and capital expenditure on grant-aided colleges. These measures will allow for almost one in three of all young Scots to enter universities and colleges next year. My plans also allow for an additional

£30 million to be spent over the next three years on improving our school buildings, an increase of 17 per cent. over previous plans for these years.

On housing, I have increased Scottish Homes' grant in aid next year by £27 million compared with 1991-92 planned expenditure—excluding repayments to the national loans fund—more than double the rate of inflation. I have also made available to local authorities resources to enable the level of expenditure per council house to be maintained and to enable further measures to be taken to tackle the problems of homelessness and dampness in council housing. Local authorities will also be able to sustain their expenditure on improvement grants this year in real terms.

The provisions I have announced today will allow us to continue the progress we have made in our important public services. Public spending has to be at the level the taxpayer can afford, but through our prudent management, we are able to increase spending for 1992-93 by more than the rate of inflation, allowing significant improvements in health, education, law and order, transport and the environment, amongst others. I look to those responsible, including local authorities, to use these resources wisely and to improve the value for money in the services they buy. I commend the proposals to the House.

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden): When the Secretary of State made the equivalent announcement a year ago, I congratulated him on his promotion to the Cabinet. I remember welcoming in particular his pledge to "dialogue and accord" in Scotland. A year on, I cannot repeat that courtesy. Dialogue and accord have been translated into government by diktat. Dialogue with the Scottish Office is dialogue with the deaf, as yesterday's statement on the health service underlined.

Planned public expenditure for the next financial year is up by 7 per cent. in cash terms over this year's estimated outturn. In real terms, that represents an increase of 2·4 per cent. Does the Secretary of State accept that the real-terms increase across the United Kingdom on the same basis in the next year is 3·5 per cent., which is a considerably higher figure? Is that not the real measure of the Secretary of State's influence in the Cabinet?

There is apparently some good news. *[Laughter.]* I always give due credit. The Scottish Natural Heritage figure is up over the grant in aid for 1991-92 for the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland and the Scottish Countryside Commission by 21 per cent. in real terms. However, as the Secretary of State will understand, there are substantial start-up costs, and conservation interests will be disappointed because of the enhanced responsibilities that they are taking on board and the increased staffing to which they are committed.

Will the Secretary of State specifically consider protecting the new body's budget against the extraordinary awards made recently to landowners for not planting trees on sites of special scientific interest? That has reached the proportions of a scandal and those non-trees give a new meaning to the term "invisible assets".

Does the Secretary of State accept that, if the special measures designed to help Lanarkshire and the Cowal peninsula are discounted, there is in real terms a cut of £7·6 million—or 1·6 per cent.—in the budgets of Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. It is little wonder that Crawford Beveridge, the chief executive of Scottish Enterprise, when searching his heart for charity, described his network's provision for next year as "broadly the same level of resources as this year."

It is at best a standstill and does not measure up to the problems of dereliction and rising unemployment.

With regard to the industry budget as a whole, there is a cash cut of £16 million in real terms between the net planned outturn and planned spending for the coming year. In real terms, that is a cut of £40 million, or 7·2 per cent. A further cut is planned for 1993-94.

The Secretary of State surely cannot justify a cut in the industry budget when, in the past year, unemployment has risen by almost 30,000. This is bad news for the Scottish economy. Does the Secretary of State agree that the individual totals announced today do not in all cases stand up to comparison with real-terms increases south of the border?

The Secretary of State made a particular point about the health service budget. Looking at the figures, I understand that the increase in real terms in England is 4·8 per cent. between the net outturn and planned expenditure. In Scotland, it is only 4·2 per cent. From what the Secretary of State has implied about the performance of opting-out hospitals, I take it that there is likely to be a weighting in their favour. If that is true, those figures bring little consolation to the national health service as a whole.

Yet again, housing is the main sacrificial victim. The cut in cash terms is £65 million on the same basis of comparison that I have used throughout my comments. In real terms, it is £93·1 million, or 13 per cent. Even allowing for the technical adjustment for repayments to the national loans fund that is mentioned in the footnote, that is a depressing story.

The Secretary of State rather coyly referred to the increase in Scottish Homes' total funding, but not to the overall position. I am not surprised by that. Does not the right hon. Gentleman have any appreciation of the problems of dampness, the reduction in choice and the spiralling and ever-increasing tragedy of homelessness? A total of 34,521 families and single people have applied to the local authorities under the homelessness legislation in 1990-91. There is no hope for them in today's announcement. The only good news and the only real cheer that I can take from today's events is that this is the last occasion on which such an announcement will be made by this Secretary of State or by a Conservative Government.

Mr. Lang: We have just heard the usual mixture of muddle, confusion and gloom to which we have become accustomed from the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar), who tries every year to prove that more equals less. Year after year, he tries to compare like with unlike. He should be comparing planned expenditure last year with planned expenditure this year. If we look back at what was spent in 1978-79 under the last Labour Government, we find that it was £3·7 billion, but we are now talking about a budget for next year of approaching £12·5 billion, which is a real increase of 19 per cent.

The hon. Gentleman asked me a number of specific questions. The Scottish Natural Heritage budget is being increased by 28 per cent. over the combined budgets of its two component parts. By anybody's standards, and even

[Mr. Lang]

by the rather disorganised measurements applied by the hon. Gentleman, that is a substantial increase. It includes provision for any obligations that may arise as a result of the management agreements relating to the sites of special scientific interest.

The hon. Member for Garscadden then considered the Scottish Enterprise and the Highlands and Islands Enterprise budgets and, because that was good news, he immediately tried to take the Lanarkshire component out of it. However, to a large extent, the Lanarkshire component is part of that budget, and it would be wrong to take it out. Our proposals for Scottish Enterprise and for Highlands and Islands Enterprise for the next year amount to an increase of £37 million, or 8·8 per cent., above the planned expenditure for a year ago. That is a substantial increase by any criteria. That figure contains substantial provision for the needs of Lanarkshire.

On the industry budget, regional selective assistance, which is led by demand on the part of applicants for assistance, is expected to be down next year, which is only to be expected in the present economic circumstances. However, the budget will increase from £619 million in 1991-92 to £636 million in 1992-93.

The hon. Gentleman made comparisons with south of the border to try to imply that we have somehow done less well in Scotland. However, the fact is that the bulk of the budgetary figures flow from the formula consequentials arising from the statement of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. As I said at the outset, spending plans in Scotland are 8·1 per cent. higher than a year ago. The hon. Gentleman may like to know that spending per head in Scotland will be 22 per cent. higher than in the rest of the United Kingdom.

The hon. Gentleman then referred to housing, which he regarded as a depressing story. If he wants a depressing story, he should look back to the housing expenditure of the last Labour Government. In 1974-75, the last Labour Government spent £1,425 million in real terms at 1991-92 prices; by 1978-79, that had fallen to £918 million. That means that there was a cut of 35 per cent. in real terms under the last Labour Government, whereas in the past 12 years there has been an increase of more than 19 per cent. in the housing budget.

In addition, we are making provision for an increase of 10 per cent. for Scottish Homes next year to provide more money to cope with dampness and homelessness. We shall be spending more than £1 billion gross on the housing budget. The figures that I have announced today represent very good news for the people of Scotland.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Yesterday, I was able to call all the Scottish Members because there was little pressure on the subsequent debate. That is not the case today. As there is a great deal of pressure on our subsequent debate, I shall allow questions on the statement to continue for half an hour, until 4.20 pm, but we must then move on. I ask hon. Members to ask brief, not multiple, questions, please.

Sir Hector Monro (Dumfries): Unlike the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden, who made a typically miserable response, the people of Scotland will realise that this is an excellent statement. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the emphasis that he has given to housing, bearing in mind the homeless problem, and to Scottish Enterprise, will be valuable in terms of employment? The additional money that he has given to health and school building and repairs will also be welcomed by the people of Scotland. I wish my right hon. Friend's plan every success.

Mr. Lang: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend. Of course, the reason why we are able to increase those programmes is the efficient way in which the economy has been run. We have reduced inflation and enabled the economy to grow and yield the necessary revenues in taxation, even at the lower level of taxation imposed by the Government. Thus we are able to devote increased resources to various deserving programmes.

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): It is a matter of regret, indeed something of a disgrace, that the spending plans have been announced today in the House when there is still no Scottish Select Committee to scrutinise what the Scottish Office is doing.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): And no Scottish Parliament.

Mrs. Michie: Indeed, as the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) says, the spending plans should be announced in a Scottish Parliament.

May I ask the Secretary of State specifically about the extra resources to compensate for the running down of Holy Loch? I welcome the money that he announced the other day. Could he use his influence with the Secretary of State for Defence to persuade him to hand over the Ministry of Defence buildings so that the money that the Scottish Office has allocated is not used to pay for them? That would be a great help.

I am disappointed——

Mr. Speaker: Briefly, please.

Mrs. Michie: I am disappointed that the statement does not contain a commitment to get rid of the poll tax in Scotland a year earlier, because it was inflicted on Scotland a year before everyone else.

One other point, Mr. Speaker. I am also disappointed at the amount that has been given to Scottish Homes for housing. Perhaps the Secretary of State is not aware of the severe problems, particularly in rural areas and in Rothesay in my constituency.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Lady suggested that a Scottish Select Committee could scrutinise the figures. During all the years that the Scottish Select Committee existed, I do not recall it undertaking that task. However, I am grateful to the hon. Lady for welcoming the announcement that we have made of increased resources for Holy Loch, following the withdrawal of the American navy. It has not been possible for the American navy to leave behind the assets that it had developed there, but my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will certainly take note of the point that the hon. Lady raised about Ministry of Defence assets in the area.

On the community charge, the funding for local authorities has been increased by 6·1 per cent. for next year —well above the rate of inflation. That should enable local authorities to maintain sensible spending programmes without any need for a real increase in community charge levels.

The hon. Lady may not have heard what I said about Scottish Homes. I announced an increase of grant in aid of 10 per cent., roughly two and a half times the present rate of inflation. That will be valuable to that body.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): Does my right hon. Friend know that I gave up the opportunity of becoming a solicitor like the hon. Member for Glasgow, Garscadden (Mr. Dewar) because accountants put the losses on the right and the profits on the left? The hon. Gentleman appears not to understand the vast opportunities that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has announced today and the profits that Scotland is getting. Those of us who are citizens of the United Kingdom who live north of the border have benefited from my right hon. Friend's sagacity and influence in the Cabinet and are vastly privileged by the statement that he has made today.

Mr. Lang: I am most grateful to my hon. and learned Friend. Soliciting's loss was clearly advocacy's gain. He was absolutely right to welcome the substantial increases that I have announced today for a range of programmes. My hon. and learned Friend will be glad to welcome the 16·7 per cent. increase for the law and order programme. There has also been a 10·1 per cent. increase in the health programme, a 15 per cent. increase in the education and sport programme, an 18 per cent. increase in the environmental services programme, a 20 per cent. increase in the agriculture programme and an 18 per cent. increase in the local authority capital non-housing programme. Those are examples of some worthwhile increases in the spending programmes in Scotland.

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): How much has Strathclyde regional council asked for to improve the roads programme, how much has the Secretary of State given, and how much has been earmarked or ring-fenced for the extension to the A77 to meet the M8?

Mr. Lang: We have made provision within Strathclyde's budget for funds to enable it to undertake development of the A77. How those resources are apportioned is a matter for the council. Within the increased roads programme that I announced today—a road programme which will have increased by 50 per cent. in a four-year period—I have also included provisions to enable work on the A77 Ayr road route to start within the planning programme period.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): Will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating the 200 people who will be sleeping out in Glasgow on Friday night to highlight the plight of the homeless? Does he realise that, on every working day last year, 84 Scottish young children became homeless? Would he mind spelling out precisely what he is going to do to help the homeless? He failed to do so in his brief statement from the Dispatch Box. We would all like to hear about a far larger programme than any he has managed to announce since the Government came to office; otherwise, they stand convicted of hypocrisy and bad faith.

Mr. Lang: We made special provision for the homelessness problem last year, and my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for housing will be making a further announcement in the next day or two about the homeless figures for which we are making additional provision in the current year. One has to acknowledge that homelessness is not merely a housing problem but is also a social problem, which requires not merely money but an approach to discourage and prevent young people from becoming homeless.

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): Would the right hon. Gentleman consider a proposition that would increase public spending in Scotland without costing the Government anything? We are a signatory to an EC agreement which Germany, France and Spain have honoured—the grants given by the EC to areas of industrial dereliction, especially mining areas like Midlothian, which would qualify for such grants. There is £100 million available for grants in mining areas. Why does he not convince the Cabinet to be good Europeans and to obey the rules like France, Germany and Spain? Then that money could be made available to areas in Scotland where coal mining has contracted, such as Midlothian.

Mr. Lang: The Government have an unrivalled record of achievement in securing grants for Scotland under the various European Community schemes. If anyone needs to be convinced about the need to release the money for grants, it is the hon. Gentleman's right hon. Friend, Commissioner Millan, who is now attacking the additionality rules that he defended when he was Secretary of State for Scotland. He should face up to the need to release those much-needed funds for Scotland.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): Is the Secretary of State aware that, by the admission of his hon. Friend the Minister responsible for Scottish industry, the Paisley postcode area lost 76 per cent. of its manufacturing jobs between 1979 and 1989? Is he also aware that further job losses are in prospect at Coats' in Paisley? In that situation, why is he not taking the chance to make an announcement on a special economic initiative for Renfrewshire? As part of that, the European social fund could have been used to give twice as much money to the area, because that is what Commissioner Millan wants to do, using the additionality provisions.

Mr. Lang: The hon. Member will know that Renfrewshire is within Strathclyde and therefore within the Strathclyde integrated development operation, which is the largest single area for assistance identified by the European Community. For a number of years, the Government have secured substantial funds for the area. He will also be aware of the fact that the Inverclyde enterprise zone is within Renfrewshire, and will be aware of the existence and extreme competence of the Renfrewshire enterprise company. All those bodies are able and available to help meet Renfrewshire's problems, using the resources of central Government, which will be substantially increased as a result of my announcement.

Mrs. Irene Adams (Paisley, North): The Secretary of State said in his statement that he would maintain the level of spending on council houses and would make extra funds available to combat homelessness and dampness. Is he aware that, in Renfrew district, the council estimates that, during the next five years, it will need £300 million to bring houses up to a tolerable level? Will he put a figure on the amount that he intends to make available to deal with homelessness and dampness?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend the Minister responsible for housing will make an announcement about that figure shortly. It will be in addition to the £9·5 million that we made available to deal with homelessness and dampness last year. That figure will be part of a programme through which we will spend more than £1 billion on housing next year. We might have been able to put more into housing this year, but we had to put £50 million out of the block into local authority spending. Had I not had to do that, to meet the high spending levels of local authorities, that £50 million could have been available for housing.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): When will the Secretary of State wake up to the realities of public finance in the United Kingdom? Is it not the case that his departmental budget is increasing less quickly than that of any other major spending Department? Can the right hon. Gentleman explain why the Department of Transport, whose budget has increased three times the rate of that of the Scottish Office, can find £1·5 billion for additional railway improvements in the south of England, but cannot find £80 million to electrify the Edinburgh-Aberdeen railway line? When will public finance in the United Kingdom stop being a ramp for the subsidy junkies of the south of England?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman is wrong if he seeks to characterise the Scottish budget for next year as somehow lower than the spending increases for other Departments. The increase for the Scottish Office will be 8·1 per cent. higher than the current year, and spending in Scotland will be 22 per cent. higher per head than that in England. If the hon. Gentleman wants a level playing field between Scotland and England, he will have to face up to a substantial drop in spending by central Government in Scotland.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): If that sentiment was intended to sound like the deathbed conversion of Scrooge, I am not sure that it was entirely convincing.

The Secretary of State mentioned roads, but he did not refer to the A1. The right hon. Gentleman now has figures available that reveal that the A1 in East Lothian is carrying as much traffic as the A74, so when can he make an announcement about the timetable for dualling the A1?

Mr. Lang: We shall be making an announcement on more of the detail of our roads programme in due course. In the meantime, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will welcome the £38 million increase in the roads programme next year—an increase of 10 per cent. Within that programme, it should be possible to make allowances for work at Tranent and on the dualling to Haddington on the A1.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Why did the Secretary of State keep using the qualifying phrase:

"I have . . . less for other programmes"

in his budget? What is he trying to hide?

On the distribution of moneys, can the right hon. Gentleman assure me that resources for the health service will not be skewed towards the new NHS trusts as a bribe and a reward to those who took the bids?

Mr. Lang: Leaving aside the phrase that the hon. Gentleman attributed to me in the early part of his question, I can reassure him that the budget for the health service will be £3·7 billion, an increase of £342 million, or 10·1 per cent. Earlier this year, his hon. Friend the Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden (Mr. Galbraith) called for a £500 million increase in the health budget. Since then, we have increased it by £225 million and have now raised it by a further £342 million. We are already spending, or propose to spend, more than the Opposition have called for. Those resources are equivalent to a 44 per cent. increase in real terms since 1979; that is why we are able to deliver such improved health care in Scotland.

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): The Secretary of State mentioned school buildings. Is he aware that Western Isles is contemplating the closure of as many as five secondary schools next year because of the revenue shortfall faced by the council? The right hon. Gentleman properly mentioned the difficulties faced by Holy Loch. Is he completely insensitive to the economic, social and financial crisis that now threatens to engulf the Western Isles?

Mr. Lang: Certainly I am not, which is why I gave it consent to borrow such a substantial amount of money. We have committed ourselves to increase the programme on school buildings by 16 per cent. for each of the next three years. I believe that that will be welcomed throughout Scotland.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): What exactly is the Secretary of State doing to redress the increasing problem of homelessness as revealed in the recent Shelter survey, which showed that the number of applications from homeless people throughout Scotland has more than doubled in the past seven years, bringing the Scottish total to a shameful record of more than 34,000? Bearing in mind the fact that, in Falkirk district, for example, the number of homeless applicants is now more than 1,300, the district council has received hardly a penny in housing support grant in the past decade or so, and the capital allocation is so inadequate that council house building is at a standstill, will the Secretary of State take urgent action now to provide the resources to house those homeless people instead of cutting the housing budget by more than £90 million in real terms?

Mr. Lang: Gross provision for housing in 1992-93 will be up by £33 million—as the table to be published in the *Official Report* will reveal—after making allowance for the repayment to the national loans fund of £170 million. We shall make extra money available next year, on top of the extra money that we have already made available this year, for homelessness, and my hon. Friend the Minister responsible for housing will make an announcement about the details very shortly.

Mr. Mike Watson (Glasgow, Central): Is the Secretary of State aware that the real capital spending increase per house allowed in respect of Glasgow city council's stock in the past 10 years has been less than half that permitted in respect of Scottish Homes and its predecessor body? How does the Secretary of State justify that? He must by now have had time to digest the city council's recently published housing plan for 1991. Will he therefore undertake to carry out one of the major recommendations of that plan by increasing the council's housing revenue account spending allocation per year to the £162 million that is vital to begin to redress that imbalance?

Mr. Lang: Individual housing balances are matters for local authorities, and we shall apportion resources to them at the appropriate time. Our record on housing stands good comparison with that of the Labour party. More than 235,000 houses have been built since 1979, the number of sheltered dwellings has almost quadrupled to more than 31,000, and the number of amenity dwellings has more than quadrupled to more than 15,000. That is part of a record of which we are proud.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): The Secretary of State will be aware that his cruel statement will be received tragically in my constituency, where £93 million-worth of housing cuts in real terms will affect my constituents and where, in the past seven years, homelessness has increased by 400 per cent., and now stands at the record level of 1,725. What message does the Secretary of State have for the 30 or so constituents with young families who will come to my surgery tomorrow for advice on housing? Is his advice that they should stand on their own two feet? Is the Secretary of State entirely cold about their plight? Is that the Christmas message that I must give families in such tragic circumstances?

Mr. Lang: I think that the hon. Gentleman should point out to his constituents the dramatic increase that has taken place in housing expenditure in real terms since the Government came into office, compared with what we were left with by the outgoing Labour Government in 1979.

Mr. John McAllion (Dundee, East): The Secretary of State has repeatedly claimed this afternoon that he has made and is making special provision for the homeless. How then does he explain the survey published this week by Shelter, which shows homelessness at record levels in Scotland last year, with up to 35,000 homeless applicants in a single year alone? Against that background, how can he justify this afternoon's statement, slashing millions of pounds from Scotland's housing expenditure? As the homeless can have no hope so long as he holds on to his office, why does he not do the decent thing and resign now?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman obviously did not hear me point out that the gross provision for housing will rise by £33 million and that the budget for Scottish Homes will rise by 10 per cent. He asked about the increase in homelessness. The answer is that that is a social rather than a housing problem. He may like to know that we intend to increase the social work training budget by 18 per cent.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): I am sorry to sound parochial, but it was the Secretary of State who mentioned the Inverclyde enterprise zone. Are funds available within those figures to help the conservation and renovation of the Gourock rope works? If that building were renovated and the Land Registry were to set up home there, possibly creating several hundred jobs, that would be a remarkable measure for Inverclyde and might give some substance to the Minister's claim the other night, when he spoke in such glowing terms of Inverclyde's economic prospects. The Land Registry located in the Gourock rope works would be a marvellous Christmas present for my constituents.

Mr. Lang: I certainly know the Gourock rope works building. One cannot avoid seeing it as one drives into Greenock and Port Glasgow——

Dr. Godman: It is a mess.

Mr. Lang: Indeed it is a mess.

There is provision within Scottish Enterprise budget of resources for Renfrew Enterprise, and no doubt the hon. Gentleman will wish to put his case to that organisation. I know that the hon. Gentleman is in correspondence with my hon. Friend the Minister responsible for the environment.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): Having frozen the tourism budget, how can the Secretary of State justify the cut in it of 40 per cent. that he has announced today? Does he not realise the damage that that will do to the promotion of the beautiful districts of Scotland, including its capital city, Edinburgh?

Mr. Lang: The tourism budget is being increased by £300,000 next year and will be up by 30 per cent. in real terms since 1979.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Coming from the country that has to foot the bill for this largesse, may I ask my right hon. Friend how I am supposed to justify such expenditure to my constituents in Teignbridge, given the ungracious and grudging attitude with which today's announcement has been received? If we have to spend 23 per cent. more than the United Kingdom average on the people of Scotland, perhaps a balancing adjustment should be made and we should reduce the number of Scottish seats to that of the United Kingdom average.

Mr. Lang: Let me assure my hon. Friend that the current spending levels in Scotland reflect the needs of different categories in that country, which is as true in some parts of England as it is in Scotland. Nevertheless, my hon. Friend identifies a problem that will have to be addressed by those who seek to upset the present financial and constitutional arrangements in the United Kingdom as they affect Scotland.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): I always welcome additional public expenditure, although it may not be enough, but I am extremely disappointed that the Secretary of State did not mention any additional expenditure to promote and develop the ports at Cairnryan and Stranraer. I deeply regret that he does not appear to have a commitment to maintaining the Larne, Stranraer and Cairnryan corridors as the Euro-route from Northern Ireland to the mainland. Will he give us a commitment and evidence in the near future that he has the same commitment to his constituents as we in Northern Ireland have to ours?

Mr. Lang: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman and am happy to give that commitment. On Monday of this week, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and I issued a joint statement underlying the continuing high commitment that we give the Stranraer-Larne route. There has been speculation, fed by scaremongers in other parties, suggesting that that route was being downgraded. That is not the case, and I am happy to reassure the hon. Gentleman of that.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): May I start by congratulating my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland on his excellent financial statement on committing resources to Scotland? I do not take umbrage at the fact that the taxpayers of Scotland are receiving 22 per cent. more per head of population than those of the United Kingdom. I like the Scottish people; they are nice. I am also pleased that I have——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let us have a question, please.

Mr. Dickens: Oh yes, it is just coming—I have waited so long, Mr. Speaker.

I do not take umbrage at the fact that there are two thirds of Scottish Conservative Members in the House, as opposed to a smaller percentage of Opposition Members. What is all the nonsense about wanting to break up the union, when the resources of United Kingdom taxpayers are being poured into Scotland? Why on earth do the Scottish people want to break away from us when they are doing so jolly well?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend puts his finger on an important point that the people of Scotland should address. It is undoubtedly true that, when 22 per cent. more of public expenditure is spent per head in Scotland than in England, the Scottish people should reflect on whether it is sensible to run the risk of upsetting that unfavourable financial arrangement. I have no doubt that, if they addressed that issue and realised the massive rise in income tax that they would have to pay to a Scottish Parliament or Scottish Assembly, they would decide that the present United Kingdom arrangements were more favourable to them.

Mr. Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): When, during the last year, the Secretary of State announced special measures for Lanarkshire and Dunoon and for employment action, it was said that it was extra money, extra funding for the Scottish economy because of need. When one takes out the money for Lanarkshire, Dunoon and employment action, one sees that there has been a cut in real terms in the Highlands and Islands and Scottish Enterprise budget of 1·5 per cent. How can the Secretary of State justify that cut in his industry budget at a time when the needs of the Scottish economy are becoming even more grave?

The Secretary of State said that he intended to increase the amount for capital building on schools. If my calculations are correct, it means that, next year, £80 million or thereabouts will be spent on Scotland's schools. At 1992-93 prices, in 1979 we spent £134 million on Scotland's schools. That is a cut of 40 per cent. over 12 years. How can the Secretary of State justify such a cut in school building?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman seems to have forgotten that there has been a substantial reduction in school rolls. If he compared like with like, he would find that spending per pupil has increased over that period. The hon. Gentleman spoke about Scottish Enterprise. Of course, if part of its budget is taken out and the reduced level compared with something else, a different result is obtained. Scottish Enterprise's budget will be up by £37 million compared with the planned figure a year ago, an increase of 8·8 per cent.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned Lanarkshire. Taking into account trunk roads, local roads and local authority factory building provision, the figure for next year is £29 million, including the Scottish Enterprise figure of up to £25 million for Lanarkshire. The following year, that would increase to £44·4 million, and in the year after that it would increase to £58·9 million. On top of that, there is provision for more expenditure by local authorities, local enterprise companies and other Scottish Office budgets in the Lanarkshire area. Therefore, it can look forward to a continuing commitment of Government funds as we tackle the problems in that area.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No, I shall take first the application under Standing Order No. 20.

Following is the table:

£ million

	1991-92 Estimated Outturn		*1991-92 Planned Provision*		*1992-93 Planned Provision*		*1993-94 Planned Provision*		*1994-95 Planned Provision*	
	gross	*net*	*gross*	*net*	*gross*	*net*	*gross*	*net*	*gross*	*net*
Central government's own expenditure (including public corporations other than nationalised industries) and local authority capital expenditure										
Agriculture, fisheries and food	258	250	255	250	307	300	310	300	310	300
Industry, energy, trade and employment	629	553	612	527	616	537	620	530	620	580
Tourism	14	14	14	14	14	14	10	10	220	20
Roads and transport	383	379	384	381	423	419	440	440	460	450
Housing	1,246	719	1,162	719	1,029	654	1,050	690	1,110	760
Other environmental services	425	333	415	318	475	375	500	390	500	400
Law, order and protective services	347	331	348	312	406	386	410	380	420	400
Education	545	545	545	545	627	627	670	670	710	710
Arts and libraries	41	41	41	41	49	49	60	60	60	60
Health	3,422	3,321	3,383	3,282	3,725	3,615	3,900	3,780	4,030	3,910
Social Work services	51	51	51	51	61	61	60	60	70	70
Other public services	198	158	196	159	206	164	230	180	230	190
Total central government and local authority capital	7,557	6,695	7,407	6,598	7,937	7,203	8,250	7,510	8,540	7,830
Central government support to local authorities' current expenditure		4,892		4,396		5,203		5,480		5,700

	1991-92 Estimated Outturn		*1991-92 Planned Provision*		*1992-93 Planned Provision*		*1993-94 Planned Provision*		*1994-95 Planned Provision*	
	gross	*net*	*gross*	*net*	*gross*	*net*	*gross*	*net*	*gross*	*net*
Nationalised industries financing limits		49		48		32		−10		−20
Total expenditure within the Secretary of States responsibility		11,635		11,042		12,437		12,980		13,510
Forestry Commission		83		83		99		90		90
Total		11,718		11,125		12,536		13,070		13,610

Notes:
1. 1991-92 and 1992-93 rounded to nearest £1 million. 1993-94 and 1994-95 rounded to nearest £10 million.
2. Figures may not add due to rounding.
3. Central government support to local authorities comprises revenue support grant, grants to local authorities for specific purposes, and income from non domestic rates.
4. Housing figures for 1991-92 include repayments to the National Loans Fund of £170 million (gross) and £38 million (net). These are technical adjustments and the amounts were not available for spending on programmes. The comparable figure for the other years is £4 million (gross).

Mirror Group Newspapers (Pension Fund)

4.17 pm

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the safeguarding of contributors to the Mirror Group Newspapers pension fund in view of a statement made by representatives of Mirror Group Newspapers last night that unauthorised loans had been made from the fund to private companies controlled by the late Mr. Robert Maxwell."

This is a specific matter, in that it relates specifically to people who have contributed to the pension fund and who woke up this morning to read reports that £300 million had been spirited out of their fund. In particular, members of the former Thomson group pension fund, many of them based in Manchester at Withy Grove, the former Fleet street of the north, were urged to enter the fund by the late Mr. Robert Maxwell, who suggested that they could see no increases in their pensions unless they transferred from the former fund into this fund. It is an important matter that many of the contributors are now retired. They are elderly people who are completely bewildered by what they read and are very concerned about what will happen to them from now on.

Above all, the matter is urgent. I was pleased to see that today, since I gave notice of the application, the Serious Fraud Office has been called in. It has been said that the Department of Social Security will introduce new rules. It is also urgent, because foreign banks are already circling over what is left of the Maxwell empire, and the funds must be traced before they leave the country. It is urgent that every Department looks to see whether it has powers to freeze the Maxwell assets before they leave the country, because if they are not frozen it may be too late.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) seeks leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely:

"the safeguarding of the Mirror Group Newspapers pension fund."

I listened carefully to what the hon. Member said about the matter. As he knows, I have to decide whether his application falls within the Standing Order, and whether I should give it precedence over the business set down for today or tomorrow. I regret that, in this case, the matter that he has raised does not meet the requirement of the Standing Order, and I therefore cannot submit his application to the House. Nevertheless, I am sure that Ministers will have heard and will take into account what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have been given the expenditure figures that the Secretary of State placed in the Vote Office. They show that spending on tourism has been frozen at £14 million, and will drop by 40 per cent. to £10 million.

Mr. Speaker: That may be so, but what is the point of order for me?

Mr. Griffiths: Will you, Mr. Speaker, give the Secretary of State the opportunity to come back and tell the truth to the House?

Mr. Speaker: I must ask the hon. Gentleman to withdraw that phrase.

Mr. Griffiths: I certainly withdraw it, Mr. Speaker. Will you give the Secretary of State the chance to come back and correct the misinformation that was given?

Mr. Speaker: I am not aware of any misinformation. We must get on.

BILLS PRESENTED

National Lottery

Mr. Ivan Lawrence, supported by Sir Richard Luce, Mr. John Moore, Mr. Denis Howell, Mr. John Lee, Mr. Richard Tracey, Mr. Ken Hargreaves, Ms. Kate Hoey and Sir Cyril Smith, presented a Bill to establish a national lottery for the benefit of the arts, sport and heritage; to make provision for its regulation, licensing and conduct; to provide for the allocation by trustees of the proceeds of the lottery, save for a proportion to be paid into the Consolidated Fund; to provide that any residue shall be applied to such charitable purposes as those trustees may determine; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 17 January 1992 and to be printed. [Bill 16.]

Traffic Calming

Mr. Keith Mans, supported by Mr. David Amess, Mr. John Bowis, Dr. Keith Hampson, Mr. Kenneth Hind, Mr. Gerald Howarth, Dr. Kim Howells, Mr. Robert G. Hughes, Mr. John Lee, Miss Emma Nicholson, Mr. David Alton and Mr. Tony Banks, presented a Bill to make provision about the carrying out on highways of works affecting the movement of vehicular and other traffic for the purposes of promoting safety and of preserving or improving the environment; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 24 January 1992 and to be printed. [Bill 17.]

Medicinal Products: Prescription by Nurses etc.

Mr. Roger Sims, supported by Mr. Sam Galbraith, Sir David Price, Ms. Hilary Armstrong, Mr. Archy Kirkwood, Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones, Mr. Dudley Fishburn, Mr. John Butterfill, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Mr. Jerry Hayes, Mr. Jack Ashley and Miss Emma Nicholson, presented a Bill to make provision with respect to medicinal products prescribed or otherwise ordered by registered nurses, midwives and health visitors: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 31 January 1992 and to be printed. [Bill 18.]

Timeshare

Mr. Andrew Hunter, supported by Mr. Michael Brown, Mr. John Carlisle, Mr. Roger Knapman, Mr. Michael Lord, Mr. Humfrey Malins, Mr. Richard Shepherd, Mr. Ian Taylor and Mr. John Watts, presented a Bill to provide for rights to cancel certain agreements about timeshare accommodation: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 7 February 1992 and to be printed. [Bill 19.]

Wild Mammals (Protection)

Mr. Ron Davies, on behalf of Mr. Kevin McNamara, supported by Mr. Terry Lewis, Mr. Andrew Bowden, Mr. Ron Davies, Mr. Alan Williams, Mr. Andrew Welsh, Ms. Marjorie Mowlem, Mr. Simon Hughes, Sir Teddy Taylor, Dame Janet Fookes, Mr. Elliot Morley and Mr. Tony Banks, presented a Bill to make provision for the protection of wild mammals from cruelty; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 14 February 1992 and to be printed [Bill 20.]

Referendum

Mr. Richard Shepherd, presented a Bill to require a national referendum as a precondition of the ratification of certain treaties: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 21 February 1992 and to be printed. [Bill 21.]

Freedom of Information

Mr. Menzies Campbell, on behalf of Mr. Archy Kirkwood, supported by Mr. Robert Maclennan, Mr. Rupert Allason, Mr. Chris Smith, Mr. Richard Shepherd, Mr. Jeff Rooker, Miss Emma Nicholson, Mr. Jonathan Aitken, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Mr. James Wallace, Sir Teddy Taylor and Mr. Dafydd Wigley, presented a Bill to establish a general right of access to official records for members of the public subject to certain exemptions; to provide for the correction of inaccurate records; to require the publication of certain information; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 24 January 1992 and to be printed. [Bill 22.]

Home Rule (Scotland)

Mr. Menzies Campbell, supported by Mr. Paddy Ashdown, Sir Russell Johnston, Sir David Steel, Mr. James Wallace, Mr. Malcolm Bruce, Mrs. Ray Michie, Mr. Robert Maclennan, Mr. Charles Kennedy, Mr. Nichol Stephen, Mr. Richard Livsey and Mr. Archy Kirkwood, presented a Bill to establish and entrench a Scottish Parliament elected by a system of proportional representation, with revenue-raising powers, to assume legislative authority on all matters of public policy relating to Scotland, under reservation of matters relating to defence, international and macro-economic affairs which shall remain the preserve of the United Kingdom Parliament; to provide for changes in the constitution and functions of certain public bodies; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 7 February 1992 and to be printed. [Bill 23.]

Civil Rights (Disabled Persons)

Mr. Alfred Morris, supported by Mr. Jack Ashley, Sir Richard Body, Sir David Steel, Rev. Martin Smyth, Mr. David Hinchliffe, Mr. John Hannam, Mrs. Margaret Ewing, Mr. Gordon McMaster, Mr. Richard Shepherd, Mr. Dafydd Wigley and Mr. Robert N. Wareing, presented a Bill to prohibit discrimination against disabled people on the ground of their disability; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 31 January 1992 and to be printed. [Bill 24.]

Stillbirth (Definition)

Mrs. Rosie Barnes, supported by Dr. David Owen, Mr. John Cartwright, Mr. Nicholas Winterton, Mr. Simon Hughes, Mrs. Ann Winterton, Mr. David Hinchliffe, Sir David Price, Mr. Roger Sims, Ms. Kate Hoey and Mr. Peter Thurnham presented a Bill to amend the law in respect of the definition of stillbirth; to make certain consequential amendments of the law; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 7 February 1992 and to be printed. [Bill 25.]

TIMESHARE CONTRACTS (TIME FOR RECONSIDERATION) (SCOTLAND)

Mr. Alex Eadie, on behalf of Mr. Harry Ewing, supported by Mr. David Marshall, Mr. Alex Eadie, Mr. Gordon McMaster, Mrs. Irene Adams, Mr. Dennis Canavan, Mr. William McKelvey, Mr. John McAllion, Mr. Tom Clarke, Mr. Jimmy Hood, Mr. Jimmy Wray and Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie, presented a Bill to provide for a period during which the parties in a timeshare purchase may withdraw; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 14 February 1992 and to be printed. [Bill 26.]

CORPORATE SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION

Mr. Jeff Rooker, supported by Mr. Dafydd Wigley, Dr. Norman A. Godman, Sir Richard Body, Mr. John Garrett, Mr. Seamus Mallon, Mr. Nigel Foreman, Rev. Martin Smyth, Mr. Archy Kirkwood, Ms. Jo Richardson, Miss Emma Nicholson and Mrs. Sylvia Heal, presented a Bill to amend the Companies Act 1985 with respect to the disclosure of information in the directors' report; to permit regulations to be made requiring the publication of certain information by public authorities and nationalised industries; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 17 January 1992 and to be printed. [Bill 27.]

TOURISM (OVERSEAS PROMOTION) (WALES)

Mr. Keith Raffan, supported by Mr. Gareth Wardell, Mr. Alun Michael, Mr. Ted Rowlands, Mr. Ian Grist, Sir Anthony Meyer, Mr. Richard Livsey, Mr. Geraint Howells, Mr. Alex Carlile, Mr. Dafydd Wigley, Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas and Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones presented a Bill to enable the Wales Tourist Board to carry on abroad activities to promote tourism to and within Wales: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 17 January 1992 and to be printed. [Bill 28.]

NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE (SUPPLY OF MEDICAL EQUIPMENT)

Mr. Rhodri Morgan, supported by Mr. Win Griffiths, Mr. William O'Brien, Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse, Mr. Allen MacKay, Mr. Alan W. Williams and Mr. Dennis Turner, presented a Bill to clarify the law relating to the supply of medical equipment to national health service patients: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 24 January 1992 and to be printed. [Bill 29.]

SEXUAL OFFENCES (AMENDMENT)

Mr. Martin Brandon-Bravo, supported by Mr. Andy Stewart, Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody, Mr. David Bellotti, Mr. Jim Lester, Mrs. Llin Golding, Mr. Michael Knowles, Mr. Terry Davis, Mr. Andrew Mitchell, Mr. Norman Hogg, Mr. Richard Alexander and Mr. Jacques Arnold, presented a Bill to make provision with respect to anonymity in connection with allegations of, and criminal proceedings relating to, certain sexual offences: and the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 31 January 1992 and to be printed. [Bill 30.]

HOUSING (FITNESS STANDARD) (AMENDMENT)

Mr. Merlyn Rees, supported by Mr. Derek Fatchett, Mr. John Battle, Mr. David Hinchliffe, Mr. Jim Marshall and Mr. Alun Michael, presented a Bill to amend the Housing Act 1985 so as to add the criteria of internal arrangement and thermal efficiency to the fitness standard; to provide for the enforcement of the fitness standard where only part of a unit of accommodation fails this standard; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 14 February 1992 and to be printed. [Bill 31.]

FIREARMS (AMENDMENT)

Mr. Michael Lord, supported by Mr. Andrew Hunter, Sir Trevor Skeet, Mr. Humfrey Mallins, Sir Michael Marshall, Mr. Phillip Oppenheim, Mr. Patrick Thompson, Sir Hal Miller, Mr. Richard Page and Mr. Ian Taylor, presented a Bill to empower the Secretary of State to extend the period for which firearm and shot gun certificates are granted or renewed: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 17 January 1992 and to be printed. [Bill 32.]

IMPACT OF DISASTERS

Mr. Keith Vaz presented a Bill to provide that persons involved with and in a disaster receive psychological assessment and, as required, psychological treatment: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 31 January 1992 and to be printed. [Bill 33.]

SEA FISHERIES (WILDLIFE CONSERVATION)

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim, supported by Dame Janet Fookes, Mr. Elliott Morley, Mr. Geraint Howells, Mr. Michael Brown, Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones, Mr. Simon Burns, Mr. Anthony Steen, Mr. Tony Speller, Mr. Roger Gale, Mr. Richard Alexander and Mr. Robert B. Jones, presented a Bill to require appropriate Ministers and relevant bodies to have regard to the conservation of flora and fauna in the discharge of their functions under the Sea Fisheries Acts: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 31 January 1992 and to be printed. [Bill 34.]

EDUCATION (SCHOOL PREMISES)

Mrs. Edwina Currie, supported by Mr. Robert Hayward, Mr. Peter Viggers, Mr. Gerald Howarth, Mr. Roger King, Mr. Alistair Burt, Mr. Robert G. Hughes, Mr. Denis Howell, Miss Kate Hoey, Mr. Tom Pendry, Mr. Kevin Barron and Mr. Menzies Campbell, presented a Bill to make provision with respect to the agreements which may be entered into by the governors of a voluntary school, or the governing body of a county or maintained special school, concerning the use of school premises outside school hour: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time upon Friday 24 January 1992 and to be printed. [Bill 35.]

WELSH AFFAIRS

Ordered,

That the Matter of the Urban and Rural Regeneration of Wales, being a matter relating exclusively to Wales, be referred to the Welsh Grand Committee for its consideration. —*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Speaker: I must announce to the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown).

4.24 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. John Selwyn Gummer): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 8356/90, relating to agricultural production methods, 7570/91, and the Supplementary Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 13th November 1991, relating to the development and future of the Common Agricultural Policy, and 8886/91 + COR 1, 8950/91 and 9136/91, relating to amendments to the legal framework of the Common Agricultural Policy; and supports the Government's intention to seek reform of the Common Agricultural Policy which will make Community agriculture more market-orientated and efficient, will put more emphasis on environmental care, will reduce the cost of that Policy and will apply fairly throughout the Community.

The Agriculture Council is now considering the proposals that we shall discuss today. It held its first discussion on arable crops, sheep and tobacco in November. Next week the Council will focus on beef, milk and the accompanying measures.

The Government have had considerable support from hon. Members of all parties in their attempts to achieve reform of the common agricultural policy. That is no new-found demand, but one that the United Kingdom has clearly made for many years. We have to start, therefore, by recognising that the Commission's acceptance that major reform is needed is itself a good thing. Unfortunately, its proposals would not, in our view, lead to the kind of reform that we seek and would not benefit the Community as a whole, as we want it to benefit.

In the short term, the Commission's proposals would address some of our current problems. There is no doubt that compulsory set-aside would cut production of cereals. Lower cereal prices would lessen the cost of exporting the remaining surplus and would reduce the tension between the Community and other cereal exporters.

In the longer term, the Commission's proposals would repeat the mistakes of the past. They are designed to keep as many farmers as possible on the land and especially to protect small farmers, as defined on the continent and not as defined in the United Kingdom, from change.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): Did my right hon. Friend see the article in *The Sunday Times* about set-aside? If so, will he tell us whether set-aside has a part to play in the proposals? I understand that the reforms are such that, even though the Isle of Wight is the smallest county in Britain, almost none of our farmers would benefit from the proposals in the MacSharry reforms.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend raises a matter of considerable importance. There is no doubt that set-aside plays a part in the Commission's proposals and it is one of the issues that we shall have to discuss. I read with some concern the article in *The Sunday Times*. I am sad to say that *The Sunday Times* carried a wholly erroneous report. The House should know about that, or it cannot consider the motion with the necessary clarity because set-aside is so central to what happened.

Dr. N. Rufford, who claimed to be engaged in agriculture and to be the owner of 1·2 hectares of agricultural land, applied for and was allocated an agricultural holding number. He was not the owner of the land and he gave a fictitious name for the alleged previous owner. An agricultural holding number does not confer any rights, but merely refers to a particular piece of land.

On 6 September, signed registration and application forms for the five-year set-aside scheme were received from Dr. Rufford, who turns out to be a journalist on the staff of *The Sunday Times*. The application form had to be returned to him twice because he had not filled it in properly and he would not answer the question confirming that he had been farming the greater part of the holding since 1 October 1990. That is a direct question which has to be answered directly. The documents and associated map included what are clearly fictitious details of previous and current cropping. Dr. Rufford signed declarations that he had given correct answers. They were false.

Contrary to the allegations in the newspaper, officials did not accept Dr. Rufford's application. They were suspicious and decided that a physical inspection should be undertaken to verify the details. Of course, *The Sunday Times* said that no such inspection was needed. Dr. Rufford said that it was essential for him to accompany the inspector, but he could not find a convenient time. He appeared to find a convenient time to be photographed on the site by a *Sunday Times* photographer. Of course, he was trespassing on the site because it was owned by someone other than himself.

That was the position last Sunday when *The Sunday Times* article was published; Dr. Rufford had not received an acceptance. He telephoned the Ministry's office in Ipswich on Wednesday 27 November, claiming to be trying to arrange a date for the field inspection. He asked to be sent a copy of the approval document. He was told that an approval document had not been issued as his application had not been approved. Later that afternoon, at a time when he had been told that the officer dealing with his case would not be available, he telephoned again. He claimed to have mislaid his acceptance letter although he knew that no such letter had been issued. So that he could reconstruct his correspondence, he asked a clerk to fax him a copy. An updated, unsigned draft letter, on plain paper, was faxed to him.

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it appropriate that such an obvious plant should take place in the middle of an agricultural debate?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): What the Minister has said seems to be relevant to the debate.

Mr. Barry Field: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I resent being accused of being a plant. May I point out that I am a Field, not a plant. I very much resent the allegation that I am a plant.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Chair has no knowledge about plants.

Mr. Gummer: The matter is serious and the point that I have to make is clear. Because Dr. Rufford asked for the approval to be sent to him on the basis that he had already had it, an undated, unsigned draft letter on plain paper was faxed to him. It was the standard letter which would be sent out if the application was accepted. The application had not been accepted and would not be until the inspection took place.

[Mr. Gummer]

This is a serious matter. That letter was reproduced in *The Sunday Times* report under a faked Ministry letterhead. *The Sunday Times* story was therefore fabricated. The application had not been approved. The inspection of the land would have revealed that the application was fraudulent. Dr. Rufford gave false information on the ownership and cropping of the land. He obtained a draft letter by deceiving a junior officer. *The Sunday Times* then published that letter with a faked letterhead.

I have dealt with the matter in depth after the question was asked of me because it is very important, if we are to have a set-aside system, that it is properly carried out. I am determined that it shall be properly carried out. I deeply deprecate the activities of newspapers aimed not at the Minister, the Ministry or anybody in the House but at junior staff who try to carry out properly their job. In this case two members of staff carried out their job absolutely properly. I have asked that that be made clear to them because they have been extremely upset by the action taken by the newspaper.

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): I thank the Minister for illuminating the matter so clearly. If, as he says, a letter was forged by the use of the letterhead of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, will he take the necessary steps to prosecute the individual? If he does so, he will have the full support of the Opposition.

Mr. Gummer: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that comment. It was clear to me that the editor of *The Sunday Times* would have been unlikely to have known the basis upon which the report was published. *[Interruption.]* I am sure that he would not have known and I have written to him in those terms. I shall be answering a written question and I shall ask him to quote the whole of that answer in the newspaper so that the readers of *The Sunday Times* may understand what happened and he can retract something of which I am sure he was not aware.

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): If the editor of *The Sunday Times* who, as he says, is an honourable man, refuses to publish such a statement, will my right hon. Friend give the House an undertaking that he will make an official complaint to the Press Council?

Mr. Gummer: If one asks an honourable man to do something, it must be without a threat. I shall not make any threats. I shall ask him to do what I have just outlined and I am sure that he will agree.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): The headed notepaper might be appropriate to what the Minister is saying, but it is hardly important to the CAP negotiations and certainly is not crucial to the agriculture industry faced with the CAP proposals and GATT and worried about eastern European imports. Will the Minister now guarantee to spend as much time quantifying the effects of the CAP proposals on agriculture? What figures does he have to show the quantitative effects of the MacSharry proposals on the industry? Will he spend as much time telling the industry about that as he has done dealing with the headed notepaper?

Mr. Gummer: I assure the hon. Gentleman that not only shall I now spend more time on that than on anything else, but I have been doing so week in week out, month in month out. Nobody in the agriculture industry or outside does not now realise from what I have said how damaging Mr. MacSharry's proposals would be to British agriculture and particularly to Scotland. They are special attacks on the real problems of the most distant parts of the United Kingdom, whether they be in Scotland or in Wales. No one can deny that I have made that case over and over again because I believe it so strongly.

I answered the question in detail, quoting from my reply today to the written question, because set-aside is necessary if we are to get to grips with the overproduction of cereals in an immediate and direct way. I am afraid that that is true. I wish that there were a better and quicker way, but there is not. Therefore, we must ensure that set-aside is properly run. I want it to be clear that I have no intention of allowing Britain to be party to a system which is not properly organised and dealt with.

I assure everyone that, although it is usual to inspect set-aside land when it has been set aside, because to look at it before it has been set aside tells us much less, when we believe there to have been a fraudulent application we seek to do so in advance. That is what we have sought to do and I do not want anyone to be unaware of that.

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Will my right hon. Friend also encourage the newspaper to print facts which it did not print explaining that set-aside can be environmentally friendly and it can be hugely profitable for the taxpayer to pay farmers to indulge in set-aside rather than have to deal with surplus food which nobody wants and which has to be stored for many years and then disposed of, often in a parlous condition, at the end of that time?

Mr. Gummer: My right hon. Friend who was, in a sense, the inventor of set-aside, who did so much to campaign for reform of the CAP and who began that reform in a most remarkable manner, will know better than anyone that it is much more sensible to pay people to look after the land—I emphasise that—than to produce an unwanted crop which then has to be stored and subsidised in order to export it to other countries whose agriculture system is then undermined. As long as set-aside is environmentally friendly—as long as I am Minister it will be—with people being paid to look after the land, that is the right and immediate but not the long-term mechanism for dealing with the problem.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Gummer: No. Perhaps my hon. Friend will allow me to give way to her later.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I wanted to refer to set-aside.

Mr. Gummer: I may return later to set-aside.

The proposals are unacceptable because they do not take into account the need to ensure that agriculture is efficient. They are designed to take European agriculture back to the past rather than forward to the future. Although the methods of support would change with the introduction of direct payments, the underlying objective —to insulate producers from market realities—would not change. The cost of the common agricultural policy would therefore remain very high.

I hope that all hon. Members recognise that the Commission's suggestions relating to costs are far from realistic. If a new group of people—pensioners—is created, one must expect them to demand pension increases year after year. That is the nature of a permanent pension. If, therefore, figures for future years are produced on which the assumption is made that the cost will magically fall, one ends up with unrealistic figures. If support is given to the proposed system, budgetary costs will increase year in, year out. Furthermore, farmers on very small plots who would have retired and amalgamated their plots with those of their neighbours will not do so. They will sit there and take the pension. The position is then fixed as it is now and the natural change which would have happened, and which is necessary if countries have badly structured agriculture, will not take place. That is what is necessary if those farmers are not to be disadvantaged.

That is one reason why I feel so strongly about the issue. It is not just that the Commission is discriminating against the United Kingdom, although that would be bad enough, but that it is saying to those parts of the Community that have not benefited from the structural changes that have taken place in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland that for ever their circumstances will not be viable and that they will become merely the pensioners of the European Community. That is not a fit choice to offer the people of Portugal, Spain, Greece, Italy or Ireland. That is not the way to protect farmers' futures. That is not proper for them, any more than it is proper for the efficient farmers of the northern European countries and Britain in particular.

Discrimination against larger commercial farms forms a key part of the Commission's plan to protect small farms from the effects of change. We are wholly opposed to that and we are supported by a number of our Community partners. Such farmers are the key to the retention of a viable and sustainable agricultural industry in the future, one that can compete in world markets. It would make no sense to penalise them for the progress that they have made by suddenly setting a premium on inefficiency. The effect would be to make Community farmers less able to compete in the liberalised world market in agricultural trade which we are trying to create in the general agreement on tariffs and trade negotiations. No wonder that the only Agricultural Minister who wholeheartedly supports Mr. MacSharry's ideas is Ed Madigan, the United States Secretary for Agriculture. He knows that if we were to carry out Mr. MacSharry's proposals we should be unable to compete with the United States in world markets and that that would do them good. I did not support Britain's entry into the European Community and I am not a great enthusiast for Europe in order to be second rate. I am an enthusiast for Europe because I want Europe to be first rate and Britain to be first rate with it. This is the way to make European agriculture second rate.

The Commission's aim is to fossilise existing farm structures in their present form and to halt the development of more viable farming sectors in the Community. That is unwelcome to those member states with a developed farming structure and it is also unwelcome to those with less advanced farm structures. The Commission's approach also ignores differences in farming conditions and structures in the Community. One cannot have a single model for European farming. Due to the nature of their climate, the Spaniards have to feed their beef animals from feed lots. To penalise them because they do not feed their cattle in the same way as cattle are fed in County Kerry is unfair to the European Community system.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): There is little dispute about the discrimination that is inherent in the MacSharry proposals, but the Minister has rightly been criticised in previous debates for not making his own positive proposals to counter the MacSharry proposals. The Minister has published "Our Farming Future" in the last few weeks. If the proposals contained in that document were implemented, what would be the impact on net farm incomes in Scotland on the one hand and in England and Wales on the other?

Mr. Gummer: It is difficult to answer the hon. Gentleman's question when he clearly does not understand what negotiation is about. If I were to say to the House, "My bottom line consists of the following detailed matters and it will have the following result", does the hon. Gentleman think that one could negotiate a proper outcome? Has he never negotiated in his life? He is supposed to be the leader of a party. He should be ashamed of himself. Has the hon. Gentleman heard about the French, the Dutch, the German, the Luxembourg or the Greek proposals? Of course he has not. No sane Government would produce detailed proposals; they want to safeguard their negotiating position. That is why I made it clear in that document, if he read it, that these are not proposals but the general principles upon which I shall be negotiating.

The hon. Gentleman is joining the official Opposition in undermining the British Government's position in these negotiations. I am the only Minister who is negotiating on the basis that the Opposition are demanding constantly that I do something different. In this, like Maastricht, we find that the Opposition are not prepared to support the Government in their European Community negotiations. It is all very well for the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) to grin. Just because this question was asked by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) does not mean that the canker has not reached that part of the Labour party which pretends to understand agriculture. In a recently published document the hon. Gentleman said:

> "In essence the MacSharry proposals will be accepted by the Council of Ministers."

They will not be accepted by the Council of Ministers. There is not a Minister who accepts them—except, possibly, the Greek Minister. If the hon. Gentleman says that, what is he doing? He is supporting the Commission's line. He is supporting Mr. MacSharry, who is going round saying that that is what is going to happen. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for South Shields says, from a seated position, that that is what is going to happen. Week after week, month after month, we shall come back and tell him how wrong he was. If that were to happen, British agriculture would be undermined. This Government and this Minister will not allow that to happen, although on this occasion the hon. Member for South Shields will do what his leader would do at Maastricht—lie down and be tickled.

I understand that the chairman of the European Commission did not find time to see the Leader of the Opposition. Clearly Mr. Delors does not need to see the Leader of the Opposition; he knows perfectly well that the Leader of the Opposition will support whatever he says.

[Mr. Gummer]

What goes for the hon. Gentleman's leader goes for agriculture, too. The hon. Gentleman would accept anything that the Commission put forward, for that is now official Labour party policy.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Gummer: I dare say that if I give way to the hon. Gentleman I shall hear the alternative Labour party policy.

Mr. Home Robertson: I wish that the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food would stop trying to trivialise these debates, which are very important to many people who work for the industry in rural areas all over Britain. These are not petty party politics. We are dealing with the future of the countryside. I wish that the Minister would bear that in mind. Has he been able to put a figure on the number of farm workers' jobs that would be threatened by the proposals?

Mr. Gummer: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is right. The MacSharry proposals affect not only farmers and large landowners but employees. They affect all sections of the community and treat farm workers as though they do not count. They regard only landowners as being suitable people to be looked after. The British farmer often employs up to three people, who have families. He is often in partnership with his brother, son or daughter, so together they look after a number of families. Yet the headage limits to which they are subject do not take that into account.

I am sorry that the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) feels that my mentioning an official Labour document, which I think was published last Friday and which accepts that Mr. MacSharry's plan will be accepted, is trivialising the subject. I am highlighting the seriousness of the situation. Any party that cares about the future of British agriculture would not put that in a document. It would say: "The Labour party wholeheartedly supports the Government in their battle to ensure that Mr. MacSharry's plan is not accepted."

The fact that that does not appear in Labour's document reminds us how uninterested in agriculture it is. I exempt the hon. Member for East Lothian from that criticism. It is a pity that he is not on the Front Bench, as in his previous incarnation, when we knew that Labour had at least one person who understood the problems experienced on a farm. He knew about the problems of quite large farms, I admit, but we miss his contribution.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: No, I must get on. The hon. and learned Gentleman has plenty of time to make his speech.

I shall give the House the details of the proposals to show what we are up against. Farmers in the United Kingdom would have to set aside 14 per cent. of their arable land. The average for the rest of the European Community would be 9 per cent. In the rest of the Community, almost 70 per cent. of set-aside will be paid for, but only 40 per cent. in the United Kingdom. United Kingdom sheep producers would have 15 per cent. of their eligible animals excluded from the ewe premium, compared with a Community average of 3 per cent. They would bear 60 per cent. of the impact of the new headage limits, although the United Kingdom breeding flock represents only 28 per cent. of the European Community flock.

It cannot be argued that the United Kingdom flock has caused market problems in the sheep sector. Between 1984 and 1990, claims for the ewe premium in the United Kingdom grew by 36 per cent. The comparable figure for Germany was 72 per cent., for Ireland 114 per cent., for the Netherlands 170 per cent. and for Italy 746 per cent. Countries that have caused the problems in the sheep industry would barely be affected by the MacSharry plans, but this country—the traditional supplier of sheepmeat for the Community—would be almost uniquely affected. That is why the subject is serious and why I am not being trivial in showing how dangerous it is to give aid and comfort to those who propose this preposterous plan.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Will the Secretary of State give way on that point?

Mr. Gummer: I must get on. Many hon. Members wish to speak.

Mr. Carlile: On that point.

Mr. Gummer: As long as the hon. and learned Gentleman understands that I am not giving way again, I will give way to him.

Mr. Carlile: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. I agree with everything that he said about headage limits. When he is negotiating, will he make it clear to his European colleagues that a British farmer's wife who is in partnership with her husband plays a genuine role in the farm, because in many continental countries English, Welsh and Scottish partnership law is not properly understood? We must protect our partnerships.

Mr. Gummer: Not only will I, but I have done so. I made the Commission change its proposals on that basis. The hon. and learned Gentleman is perfectly right and I shall put it clearly to Mr. MacSharry that it would be outrageous if it were possible to have a partnership with one's mistress that one could not have with one's wife. I would find it particularly difficult to propose that to the British people.

The extension of headage limits to the suckler cow premium would exclude about 8 per cent. of suckler cows in the United Kingdom—twice the Community average—and I point out to Scottish Members that the figure would be nearly 30 per cent. in Scotland.

The proposals, therefore, are unacceptable and unnecessary and do not meet the real issues. We cannot accept them because they discriminate not only against the United Kingdom but against efficiency, speciality and excellence. They make it impossible for Europe to compete with the rest of the world, they make a distinction between northern farming and southern farming and they discriminate against particular kinds of southern farming. For example, extensive farming is necessary on the poor ground of some parts of Portugal. Is it reasonable to discriminate against that?

Mr. Kiechle, the German Minister, recently made a speech saying how much he supported the British position on non-discrimination. That is another reason why the suggestion that we shall accept Mr. MacSharry's scheme

as a whole is rather wide of the mark. Mr. Kiechle said that he accepted our position on discrimination. I know why. How could the system discriminate against the poorest farmers in eastern Germany who have large farms, low productivity and a sad history?

There is natural concern among farmers which I share. We are faced with great uncertainty; we have not yet reached a solution on GATT; and we have not begun the first round on many dossiers in the discussion on CAP reform. That is another reason why I find it difficult to say that the MacSharry proposals will be accepted by the Council of Ministers. The hon. Member for South Shields cannot say that when some of the proposals are not even in written form yet. The idea that anybody could have decided to accept them or not surely is wide of the mark.

The problem for farmers is that they cannot judge where they should invest, how they should prepare for the future and what they should take into account until those decisions are made. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan has left the Chamber, but perhaps his two hon. Friends would be kind enough to tell him my additional answer to his question. One reason why it is impossible to quantify the results of the negotiation is that the negotiation has not been completed. I would not wish to mislead farmers when the current uncertainty is causing much difficulty.

Mr. Andrew Welsh: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: No, I will not give way again.

The only thing that would be worse than uncertainty would be to be given duff information. I certainly will not do that. However, I can tell the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan what I am seeking to achieve.

I wish to remove the proposals that discriminate against larger farms, against the United Kingdom, against northern farms, against specialists and against the position in, for example, Spain, Portugal and eastern Germany. That is the first area that must be put right.

Secondly, all the members of the Community have agreed—I think without exception—that there will be no agreement on anything until there is agreement on everything. It would not be proper to start talking about such matters in their final form until we know about olive oil, sugar and wine and the other products about which there are real issues to be raised.

Thirdly, there is a concern to explain to the Community that if there are to be compensations, we cannot create a whole new system of compensatory payments which will last for ever at a price which will never be able to be paid. I am sure that the hon. Member for South Shields will be pleased to hear that I agree with him on that. In a document which contained precious little about what he would do for the future of British agriculture, he had one crumb of comfort for the farmer. I point it out because it is hidden away in a lot of business about freedom of information and other issues about which he is so keen. In the middle of the document, he says that if the MacSharry proposals were accepted—he says that they would be—they would not last very long because they would be too expensive. That is why they must not be accepted. They would cost far too much and would be impossible for the future. That is why many countries, including, for example, Italy, are so deeply opposed to the proposals.

Of course, I cannot go into detail about what we would seek to do, but I shall give one or two indications because that is only fair to the House. In the arable sector, it is clearly important to reduce the end price and to ensure that farmers are able to continue to look after the land. That means that we must have a set-aside system. However, it would be wrong to have a system which meant that some countries set aside land so that other countries could produce more. Therefore, we seek a system which will share out the burden of set-aside between the major producers in particular and will not exclude some countries while laying the burden on others.

It is also important that we do not allow many farms to be excluded on the ground of their size. To have a set-aside system which applied only to farms in the north of Europe would discriminate considerably. I am happy to have a de minimis figure which would avoid the bureaucratic nightmare that we do not want. However, it would have to be a de minimis figure and not one inclined to exclude very large numbers of producers to the small number.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: When considering the regulations for set-aside, which is a very valuable tool in the present negotiations, will the Minister make them rather more positive by enabling farmers who have land set aside—especially, perhaps, for one year—to use the year to clean the land rather than merely to cut it? In that way, when the land eventually came back into production farmers would use fewer chemicals which would be even more environmentally friendly.

Mr. Gummer: I am certainly open to my hon. Friend's suggestions. I am not keen on one-year set-aside schemes. I do not think that one can be sufficiently environmentally friendly from one year to another. The longer scheme is widely thought to be better and I should like it to be more at the centre of the proposals, as I want the environment as a whole to be at the centre. However, I shall certainly consider whether her suggestion could be included and I am sure that she is right to suggest the positive rather than the negative.

As for the beef regime—a second area that we have not yet discussed—there is another reason why it might be thought that the hon. Gentleman was a little premature in suggesting that we had already agreed these matters. We are about to have our first discussions. The Commission's proposals on beef are absolute nonsense. They do nothing to solve the problem. Indeed, they do not begin to face the problem. They only make the problem worse in certain areas, not least in Scotland. I do not understand how we are supposed to have a system which deals best with the most difficult parts of the Community but which makes matters worse in Scotland and Wales, but that is what the scheme does. It does not work because it does not meet the problems of intervention. We must reduce the degree to which intervention plays a part and increase that to which the premium plays a part, and I am negotiating along those lines. I hope that we can find an answer.

The spokesman for the Liberal Democrats will probably agree that to go into further detail could make it less easy to get the type of consensus that we want. It will not be perfect, it will not be what I should like, but it will be better than what is before us—better in terms of our particular problem—and I hope that it will deal entirely with the discrimination.

[Mr. Gummer]

It is unacceptable to have headage limits for sheep—I do not mean new headage limits, but the present ones—because they do not deal with the problem. It is not the number of ewes that a particular unit has which causes the problem; it is the increase in the production of ewes generally. That is a wholly different argument and it is therefore important to concentrate on it.

My priority is to get rid of discrimination and we shall have to find out which of the various possibilities will be the best alternative to that which is now proposed. I should not like to commit myself too closely to any one of them because my priority—in negotiating one must be clear about one's priority—is to get rid of discrimination. That is the one thing that really matters in the House and we must not undermine it in our negotiations.

On the cost to the European Community budget, I do not believe that it is sensible to have a system that costs more. We must have a system that uses what we spend more effectively. If, for example, we reduce the share of the system taken up by intervention in beef, we should be able to get that money more directly to the farmer. Locking beef up in a cold store, paying the storage man to look after it and then paying more to export it is not a sensible use of Community money and it does not reach the farmer. That type of change would enable one to say honestly that a redirection of the money already spent could do a great deal to improve the situation of farmers.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle) *rose*——

Mr. Gummer: I am sorry, but I shall not give way. I must end because other hon. Members wish to speak.

We are determined to ensure that——

Mr. Martlew: It is important.

Mr. Gummer: There is a great deal that is important, but the hon. Gentleman may catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

In trying to negotiate we must give considerable credence to the particular problem of the most difficult areas. Therefore, I commit myself in the negotiations to support the special financial help for farming in the less-favoured areas. Even though hon. Members disagree on many issues, I believe that the House will agree that I have tried to make that a priority within the narrow band of the 17 or so per cent. of my budget which I control directly. I have tried to do that year in, year out because I believe that in environmental terms—if in no others—keeping people, their sheep and their cattle in the hillsides is essential if the hillsides are to be kept as they should be. I am sure that hon. Members will have noticed that in the recent announcement of environmentally sensitive areas—especially those in the Lake district, Exmoor and Dartmoor—I have clearly taken that view, with regard to not only hillsides but moorland areas. I shall continue to do that.

I also believe that the common agricultural policy must be much more centred on the environment. It is not satisfactory to change a policy such as that which we have at the moment, and to have add-ons for the environment. That is not sensible and I seek to move the Community in the appropriate direction.

In the negotiations, as in so many other matters, the British attitude is in advance of others. We are the most environmentally friendly Agriculture Ministry in Europe and we continue to bring others behind us. They are copying our proposals and schemes. I hope that we shall be increasingly successful.

It would be possible and proper to provide aid for people who are especially disadvantaged by the changes—for example, the very small farmer in Portugal who wants to get out and to join his land to that of his neighbour. I want to help him to do that. I see no reason why we should not have a pension scheme connected to restructuring, but the aid is supposed to affect the very small farms directly. It would obtain to the person who had gone out and not to his heirs and successors and it would involve his going out and someone else taking on his land. That would be a restructuring aid.

It is also important to ensure that attention is paid to other areas. We cannot have a discriminatory system in milk which works so badly against the British dairy industry. We do not need the new cow premium. It would be better to operate on the present system and to get that right than to have a discriminatory cow premium.

It is important to ensure that, whatever happens, it applies throughout the Community. The tobacco regime should be properly restricted. I cannot believe that it is sensible to spend as much as we do at present per hectare on tobacco. I find it odd when it is suggested that it would be better for other people to grow the tobacco and for us to import it—as though that would help the health of the Community. I do not accept that, but we should look more carefully at the way in which we spend money on tobacco.

It is important to ensure that the negotiations take account of the whole Community and not simply the northern products that have been put on the table first. To accept those when we do not have a deal on a range of other things would not be a satisfactory result for those of us in the north.

I wish now to consider the timetable for negotiations. It is difficult to see how a sensible start can be made on the discussions if we do not know the outcome of the GATT round. If we do not know what we have committed ourselves to in the GATT round, it is difficult to know how to decide the reforms.

Signore Goria, the Italian Minister, has shown a remarkable grasp of those issues throughout the debate. He made a powerful intervention claiming that we must know where we are before we can take decisions, or we shall be paying twice—once in respect of the negotiations and then for the GATT round. That would not be satisfactory.

I cannot tell the farming community that this will be a short negotiation. Some Opposition Members might claim that the negotiations have already ended. I would love to have short negotiations because I am deeply conscious of the serious position in which the farming industry finds itself because of its lack of knowledge of where we are going. However, to pick the wrong answer—even if it was a quick answer—would be devastating for British agriculture.

We cannot agree to something which starts off by being so fundamentally discriminatory that, year by year, it becomes even more discriminatory. What begins by looking just a little off parallel might become wildly different. Anyone who considers what has happened with regard to the sugar and milk quotas or to anything else about which we felt that we should have had a different

package but could not achieve it will be aware of how dangerous it is to allow the negotiations to proceed quickly when a longer discussion might result in a better solution.

I do not claim that the outcome will be perfect. However, it is the duty of the United Kingdom Government and the Minister responsible to argue the issues one by one until we reach an acceptable answer. The answer will not be perfect, but it must be acceptable.

I regret that I cannot spell out part by part and line by line exactly what I want to achieve. However, I do not believe that any hon. Member would expect me to do what no other negotiating Minister has done, is doing or will do. Can anyone expect Mr. Kiechle to stand up and explain everything that he is looking for? Would Mr. Mermaz do that? Of course they would not, because just like me they are trying to find an answer that is as close as possible to what is best for their nations and for Europe as a whole.

I hope that the House will support the motion. That would help to show the universal determination of all parties in the House to achieve an answer that will provide a proper future for British agriculture and enable me at least to be able to tell my companions in the negotiations that there are things that matter so much to us that we will sit there until we achieve them, even if it means that we will sit there for many more months to come.

5.14 pm

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): As always, the Minister tried to be statesmanlike, but ended up being his usual partisan self. He accepted very little responsibility for the state of British agriculture. While we would not want him to show his full negotiating hand at this stage, he gave us very little information. The Minister's speech was one of little substance——

Mr. Home Robertson: And of great triviality.

Dr. Clark: Indeed, and one of great triviality, as my hon. Friend has said.

Listening to the Minister today, it was hard to appreciate that the Conservatives have been in government for 13 years. He tried to say that Labour would not negotiate. Tragically, we cannot negotiate at the moment, but that will be put right before too long.

It is rather disingenuous of the Minister to extrapolate the logic that, because someone has described a situation, that means that he necessarily agrees with it. Whether the Minister likes it or not, I believe that it is probable that MacSharry's notions will be accepted. That does not mean that I or the Labour party agree with those proposals. We do not and I hope that the Minister will accept that we have stated repeatedly that we do not believe that the MacSharry proposals are good for British or European agriculture.

Mr. Gummer: If that is the case, would it not have been better for the hon. Gentleman to keep his own counsel when he stated publicly that we were bound to fail in our negotiations? Would it not have helped British farmers if he had said that he was determined to support us and ensure that we succeeded? That is not being disingenuous: that is asking for the kind of conduct that used to be normal on both sides of the House.

Dr. Clark: I made it plain that we oppose the MacSharry proposals. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will accept that. That does not mean that we accept all the Government's negotiating stances. We believe that the negotiating position has not been particularly clever.

Contrary to the Minister's partisan approach, I want to begin by taking a consensus view. British agriculture is in crisis. That is argued by the National Farmers Union, the Farmers Union of Wales, the National Farmers Union for Scotland and all informed farming opinion. The Minister said nothing today that will reassure the farming community.

We need only consider the scene. The Minister avoided all the details. Every day last year, 19 farmers and 14 farm workers left the land. Nineteen farmers voted with their feet every day last year and left their occupation. That is not a happy position. Farmers' incomes are at their lowest level, but the price of food to consumers is not falling.

Modern agriculture requires investment to survive, but investment has fallen by more than half since the Government took office. The Minister made great play of environmental issues. However, the Government's own Institute of Terrestrial Ecology produced figures in October which show that

"hedgerow removal between 1984 and 1990 is greater than that in the period 1978-1984."

In addition, as much as 10 per cent. of our total stock of hedgerows was destroyed between 1984 and 1990.

So, the economy of agriculture is in dire straits and the environment is suffering, but I am afraid that the position on animal health is even more dire. In September the Minister's own chief veterinary officer painted an optimistic scenario of the problem of bovine spongiform encephalopathy, with the result that the farming press ran the banner headline,

"Goodbye to the BSE scourge".

Tragically, I have to wish that that was the case because today's figures do not give us much ground for comfort, but, as long as the Minister continues his present style of trying to hype up and to trivialise every issue, that is what will happen to our agriculture. Far from the BSE scourge easing, exactly the contrary is happening. The number of confirmed cases of BSE until November of this year totalled 15,698, whereas for the whole of last year they amounted only—I use the word "only" relatively—to 14,322. The total number of confirmed cases of BSE is now in excess of 41,000, despite the Government's estimate in 1989 that the cumulative total would peak at 20,000 cases. We still await the peak. It does not do any good to try to run away from reality or to trivialise these issues.

Blue ear disease in pigs has been allowed to run unchecked by the Government who in September closed their veterinary investigation centre in Lincoln, which is where work into that type of disease was carried out.

Sheep dipping has been decontrolled by the Government and self-notification has been introduced. The result is that farmers are not dipping their sheep, Scab will increase.

It is not really surprising that animal diseases are increasing when we consider the Government's deliberate run-down of their veterinary service. In 1979, 580 veterinary officers were employed by the service, but there are now only 337. That is a decline of 42 per cent. As a result, we had to import 402 vets last year. I repeat that, as a result of the Government's policy, we had to import a vet every single day of last year to try to keep on top of animal diseases.

[Dr. Clark]

The legacy for agriculture of 13 years of Tory government is little short of disastrous in the economic, environmental and animal health areas.

"Never have I known a time when farmers were more fearful of the future, and never has that fear been more justified."

I thought that those were wise words when I read them and was delighted to find that they had been written by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) in *The Lake District Herald* only this week. He was right. There has never been a time when our farmers have been more fearful of the future. I found it strange that those words had come from the Parliamentary Secretary because, when I read them, I thought that they had been written by the Labour candidate, John Metcalfe, because there was no other indication that that article had been written by a Minister of the Crown who is responsible for this country's agriculture. When Ministers are faced with such unpalatable facts—and they are facts—they tend to blame the common agricultural policy, but those are domestic decisions. Every one of those decisions affecting British agriculture was taken by the Government.

At the EC level, and after 13 years in power, the Government cannot escape responsibility for the operation of the CAP. After all, the Minister is always returning to the House to tell us what a wonderful deal he has got for the British farmer and consumer. He has done it time and again——

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): Yes, my right hon. Friend has got such deals time and again.

Dr. Clark: I hear mutterings from the Conservative Back Benches to the effect that the Minister does return with good deals, but if one asked the British farmer, that is not the message that one would hear.

Mr. David Nicholson: Before the hon. Gentleman gets stuck into the CAP, on which matter I hope that he will be as robust as my right hon. Friend in defending the interests of the British farmer, may I advise him that I was interested to note that he began his speech by talking about animal diseases and BSE? Does he think that he is helping our farmers in their genuine plight by highlighting such diseases in this debate? Although the beef market is now in a better position, does not the hon. Gentleman realise the damage that he has done to beef consumption and to our farmers in the past year by constantly highlighting that issue on radio and television?

Dr. Clark: We do not solve problems by refusing to acknowledge them. Indeed, if the Government had faced up to the reality of BSE earlier and had accepted the Opposition's proposal for 100 per cent. compensation for suspected cases instead of being dilatory for 18 months, the problem would have been contained much more quickly. I must advise the hon. Gentleman, however, that the phrase in *Big Farm Weekly*,

"Goodbye to the BSE scourge"

was not mine, but that of the chief veterinary officer. If the hon. Gentleman is seeking to make a charge against me, he must make that charge equally against the chief veterinary officer for raising that issue in the first place.

I should appreciate being allowed to return to the issue of the CAP. I begin by reminding hon. Members of the reforms that the Minister has brought back to the House. It is because of those reforms that it is right for us to be sceptical about some of the claims that the right hon. Gentleman has made today. I recall that in February 1988 the then Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), went to Brussels to discuss agriculture and returned to the House trumpeting the reforms that would radically change the CAP. In our debate on that, the hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) challenged me for daring to challenge the Prime Minister about whether the system would work. I expect that not only can the hon. Gentleman remember that, but that he will recall that we warned at that time that the reforms were illusory and would not work. We have been proved right. The reforms have failed. The CAP still takes up two thirds of the EC budget, but only £1 in every £3 gets through to the farmers.

The whole point of those reforms was to get rid of the food mountains. Conservative Ministers told us that they would disappear, but they have not. Indeed, those mountains of food are continuing to grow. At the end of October, there were 494,000 tonnes of skimmed milk powder in intervention; 446,000 tonnes of butter in intervention; 850,000 tonnes of beef in intervention—the amount is growing—and 15·5 million tonnes of cereals in intervention. The overall position now is worse than in 1988, yet we were assured by the Government in 1988 that we should leave it to them. They said, "We have got you a good deal. The problems will be solved." Those problems have not been solved—just as we said that they would not be—because the Government did not take the issue seriously enough and did not press as they should have pressed for the substantial reforms that were needed. Furthermore, the right hon. Member for Finchley had the opportunity to do just that because at that time she had the right of veto. I am afraid that the right hon. Lady sold this country short on that occasion.

Mr. Gummer: How does the hon. Gentleman square his enthusiasm for the right of veto on that occasion with the decision of the leader of his party that he would give way at Maastricht on all the issues that are now being discussed? Is it still true that the hon. Gentleman is an anti-European although his party is now pro-Europe? The House must ask that question, given that the hon. Gentleman is asking about vetoes while his party is in favour of lying down and being rolled over.

Dr. Clark: It is no good the Minister, whenever he is found to be wanting and to be wrong, starting to hurl abuse across the Chamber or making allegations that have absolutely no substance. My right hon. Friend the leader of the Labour party has never said what the right hon. Gentleman has suggested—and the right hon. Gentleman knows that that is the case.

One of the key mechanisms of the Conservative party's CAP reforms was set-aside. At the time we warned that it would not work. It has not worked. When the Minister announced the scheme I described the measures as

"no more than damage limitation measures. They seek merely to tackle the effects of surpluses, not the causes."—[*Official Report*, 4 June 1988; Vol. 135, c. 182.]

That is what the Labour party said in 1988 and we have been proved right.

The mere concept of set-aside is wrong. Even though land has been set aside, production of cereals has increased. It increased by 2 per cent. last year, even though over 131,000 hectares have been set aside in the United Kingdom. The simple reason for that is that farmers put their most marginal and least productive land into set-aside. One has only to travel by train from the north-east of England to see the land which has been set aside, squeezed between the railway lines, to realise what the farmers are doing. Last year in its official report the EEC confirmed the failure of set-aside. It said:

"the land left fallow in almost all Member States was of very low productive level."

Yet, in spite of that, set-aside is one of the key points of the MacSharry proposals.

The operation of set-aside is even worse than the concept. In a parliamentary answer to me the Minister told me that he

"had identified 18 serious irregularities and a number of additional cases involving minor breaches of the scheme rules. Payments were withheld or recovered in full or in part in 39 cases."—[*Official Report*, 18 November 1991, Vol. 199, c. *1*.]

The Minister's Department now concedes that it cannot check every farm in every year. The problem that we identified is only the tip of the iceberg. They were only the cases that have been uncovered. We do not know the extent of the abuse or misuse.

I fully accept the point that the Minister made about *The Sunday Times*. I accept his statement as the word of a right hon. Member of this House. He said that *The Sunday Times* journalist made a fraudulent claim and forged the heading of a Ministry letter. The matter is serious because if one inspects the photocopy of the letter one sees that he forged not only the heading but the "Dear Dr. Rufford".

Mr. Gummer: I made the matter clear and I do not want anyone to misunderstand. I explained exactly what happened. The letter was the standard letter that would have gone out if the claim had been entertained. The letter was prepared but would not have gone out until the land had been seen. Therefore, the letter was on plain paper. What has been added is the heading "Ministry of Agriculture". [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] No, I made it clear. Hon. Gentlemen should be clear about it. I made no claim other than that. It is a serious matter to add a letter heading because it hides the fact that the document was a draft letter which was ready to go out if the claim was entertained. The claim was not entertained. The land could not be inspected because Dr. Rufford did not own it so he made sure that the land was not inspected.

Dr. Clark: I am grateful to the Minister for that intervention. This is a serious issue. I hope that, if there was a fraudulent claim, the Minister will prosecute. If he does not, he will bring the scheme into disrepute. May I check with the Minister his actual words, which I have in front of me? He said:

"That letter was reproduced in *The Sunday Times* under a faked Ministry letterhead."

The Minister agrees that that is what he said. If the letterhead was faked, surely, as he says, not only was the story fabricated but the application was fraudulent. I hope that the Minister will take the necessary legal action. Certainly, the Opposition will be only too pleased to support him in that respect.

The reason why I take such a strong line on the set-aside scheme is not merely that it is right so to do. It worries us that many farmers appear to be paid for doing nothing. The public are worried about that. They regard it as a racket. How can we justify rich landowners taking public handouts while making their farmworkers redundant? It has been estimated that one farmworker loses his job for every 750 acres of set-aside. The farmworker receives only a pittance in pay-off—perhaps £2,000 in redundancy pay—whereas the owner of the land may receive thousands of pounds for several years. That does not seem equitable.

The list of those who receive set-aside payments in *The Sunday Times* article reads like the pages of "Burke's Peerage". Will the Minister confirm that at least one Government Minister receives money from the set-aside scheme? Was *The Sunday Times* right in that assertion? That part of the story, not the fake letters, is the key point.

Many regard set-aside as an alternative form of social security for the landed gentry, yet the workers who are made redundant receive very little. But the problem with set-aside is not only those who receive it or the fact that set-aside does not reduce production. Has the Minister seen the excellent work of the Council for the Protection of Rural England? It uncovered the fact that 60 per cent. of non-agricultural use of land set aside in the EEC is in Britain. Does the Minister have any comment to make on the reference by the CPRE to the EC Commissioners on the issue?

From the Government's own figures, the CPRE seems to have a justifiable case. Does the Minister recall that in an answer to me on 17 January this year he said that 536 undertakings for set-aside related to horse-based activities; 46 were for golf courses; 24 were for sports grounds; and 15 were for recreational facilities including camping sites. That was in only the first two years of the scheme. We worry about farmers getting paid set-aside and then using their land for other commercial activities. That is not fair to other business men who are not farmers.

Many of the non-agricultural uses for set-aside land require planning permission. The Minister is coy on that point. I asked him to clarify how many applicants had applied and obtained planning permission for non-agricultural use. He said:

"Applicants for set-aside are not required to give this information."—[*Official Report*, 1 March 1990; Vol. 168, c. *330*.]

However, the Minister should look at his own form. I have a copy here. Question 3 says:

"Have you applied for or obtained planning permission for this use?"

Yet the Minister will not supply Members of Parliament with the information and says that applicants are not required to give it. The Minister does not even know the details that are requested when people apply for set-aside. He does not want to know because he does not want the public to know the extent of set-aside.

In view of all the publicity, will the Minister carry out an inquiry into the operation of the set-aside scheme? After all, in this financial year he anticipates that he will spend £27 million on it. Will he also recall that in an answer to me this summer he said that he would publish the report by Reading university on set-aside before the end of the year? May I remind him that there are not many weeks of this year left? Will the report be published before the end of the year, as he promised?

The Minister was right to spend some time on set-aside, because it is one of the main planks of the MacSharry proposals. But this time it is to be compulsory and not voluntary. The Minister has made it plain in the past that

[Dr. Clark]

he is not in favour of compulsory set-aside. Is he now prepared to accept compulsory set-aside within the MacSharry regime? MacSharry envisages 4·4 million hectares being set aside in Europe, in spite of the fact that it has been shown not to work.

We have been critical and sceptical of the Government's negotiating position and abilities. Obviously we would not expect the Minister to declare his negotiating hand, so the only way that we can judge his negotiating ability is to look at the record, which is not very good. What has become of the Minister's somewhat bragging statement in the House? He told us:

"the Government have presided over the largest reform there has been in the common agricultural policy, and very much greater reform than anybody thought was possible. There is no doubt that most other countries in the Community have now come to accept what was a United Kingdom initiative —that is, a common agricultural policy increasingly designed to meet supply with demand rather than simply with surplus."—[*Official Report*, 6 February 1990; Vol. 166, c. 792.]

That is what the Minister told the House in 1990 he had achieved in his negotiations. The record has proved him wrong and that is why we have a right to be sceptical about what he is trying to argue for now.

I only hope that the Minister will approach the final stages of negotiations on the MacSharry proposals with a little more objectivity and humility. I admit that the signs this afternoon are not especially good.

Mr. Alan Amos (Hexham): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the alignment of the green pound with the market exchange rate was a tremendous success, against all the odds? Will he give my right hon. Friend the Minister credit for that?

Dr. Clark: The hon. Gentleman is right—the green pound realignment has been a great benefit to the British farmer. We have said so before and I am happy to repeat it now. However, when we are talking about detailed, in-depth reform, about reshaping agricultural support in this country, we have the right to inquire of the Minister and to press him on those issues.

When the MacSharry proposals mark one were published in February 1991, the Minister—in what I can only describe as one of his well-known tantrums in the House—went over the top. He denounced them in graphic terms saying:

"We start by saying that we oppose Mr. MacSharry's proposals. We hate them. We condemn them."—[*Official Report*, 14 February 1991; Vol. 185, c. 1021.]

Strong words which, predictably, have proved somewhat counter effective with MacSharry, for when the mark two proposals were published in July 1991, the Government's protestations had achieved very little.

Two or three weeks later the Minister—quoted in the *Financial Times*—described the new plan as being "biased" against the United Kingdom farmer.

Mr. Paul Marland (Gloucestershire, West): That was right.

Dr. Clark: Absolutely correct. The Parliamentary Secretary, the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border, elaborated on the Government's attitude when he said in the House in July:

"Our objectives for reform can be met only if MacSharry's proposals are modified . . . Reform along the lines that MacSharry proposes would not encourage efficient farming, but would let budget costs go up even further . . . MacSharry is rightly treading the path of reform but he has lost his way and we believe that we should get him back on course."—[*Official Report*, 22 July 1991; Vol. 195, c. 1005.]

The hon. Member was right on that occasion. That is certainly the view of the Labour party.

At the Tory party conference in October the Minister went further in his condemnation of MacSharry's proposals when he said:

"The CAP was never designed to deal with surplus. Indeed until recently I did not think it was possible to produce a system which was worse equipped to deal with new problems of agriculture than the CAP. That was before MacSharry"—strong clear words. Now we know where the Minister stands. He repeated some of those words today. He described the MacSharry plans as "preposterous". He said that the beef regime was "nonsense", and the sheep regime was "unacceptable". Those are the words which he acknowledges that he used.

During the general discussions of three of the six agricultural regimes—I appreciate that they were only general discussions—at the Council of Ministers meetings in October and November it does not appear that the Minister has won many friends. But we shall see.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman must understand that in all those general discussions the spokesmen for other countries supported precisely and specifically the issues which we find acceptable. I know that because I was present. He cannot know it because he was not.

Dr. Clark: We shall await the results of the MacSharry proposals before we find out what the final judgment is and who is correct on those issues.

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman must accept this —by stating what he does not know he undermines the position by suggesting that somehow or other we are not winning the argument when we are. The hon. Gentleman ought to be supporting his country rather than constantly undermining it.

Dr. Clark: That was an interesting intervention. Am I right in my understanding of what the Minister has told the House—that he has won his points on the sheepmeat regime? Has he persuaded his colleagues in the Council of Ministers to support him on the sheepmeat regime?

Mr. Gummer: The hon. Gentleman should have listened carefully to what I said. I said that we are winning the argument. There are now people who support us who did not support us before. I want to continue to win it. We shall not have won it until we have agreed the whole package. In the meantime, it would help the United Kingdom if the official Opposition would stop trying to make small party political points and would get behind Britain's arguments. They are the only opposition party which thinks that it is clever to argue about international negotiations within the European Community—no other opposition party in Europe does that. The Opposition have done that over Maastricht and over the CAP reform and the hon. Gentleman should be ashamed of himself.

Dr. Clark: I do not think that one observer in this country would listen with a straight face to the Minister accusing someone of making petty party political points. That is my only comment on his remarks.

The Parliamentary Secretary acknowledged honestly that the Government had failed to win when he wrote

again this week in *The Lake District Herald* that the MacSharry proposals are "horrendous". He went on to say that the Government

"condemned them because they fail on every count."

That is the Government's position.

We hope that next week at the Council of Ministers meeting the Minister will fight more successfully for British farmers, consumers, taxpayers and for the environment. I emphasise that we think that the MacSharry proposals will be disastrous for all those people in the British economy. We equally believe that the Minister has set himself an uphill task by his refusal to table counter proposals. He has repeatedly told the House that he could not table counter proposals, but other Agriculture Ministers have done so and have also tabled detailed amendments. The Minister denies it, but I have here the proposals tabled by the French Minister of Agriculture.

Mr. Gummer: No proposals have been tabled by the French Minister of Agriculture. There is no mechanism by which proposals can be tabled, and so there cannot be any. The French Minister has made a number of generalised suggestions about these issues, as I have done, and has put them forward around the table, as I have done. The hon. Gentleman does not understand the rules under which the Community operates.

Dr. Clark: I accept that the Minister has made some suggestions, but the French Minister has not only tabled amendments, but circulated them within the Council of Ministers and throughout the Community. Therefore, it is possible to have a detailed debate on those French proposals. I have them here.

The right hon. Gentleman has refused to table such amendments and therefore the debate has centred on the details of the MacSharry proposals, which we believe to be extremely harmful to United Kingdom interests. As a result, the Minister, almost certainly—I hope I am wrong—will lose the battle for our interests. The House should note that the MacSharry proposals are condemned on every count by the Government's declared policy.

The Labour party believes that the reform of the CAP is vital. The Opposition reject the MacSharry proposals because we believe that they do not represent a fundamental reform of the CAP; they are a mere revision. The proposals will fail as surely as did those advocated so strongly by the right hon. Gentleman in 1988. At the very best the MacSharry proposals represent transitional arrangements.

Mr. MacSharry has admitted that his proposals will increase the spending of the CAP for the next seven years at least—the Minister and I are at one on that. We believe that those reforms will not last that long. Mr. MacSharry will still retain intervention boards and export restitutions. Little wonder that the authoritative publication *Agra Europe* shares the Opposition's opinion of those proposals. It states:

"There is a real danger that the Community could end up not only with an expensive new form of support, but also with no real reduction in surplus production and in the need for subsidised exports."

The MacSharry proposals on accompanying measures are just as worrying as they include such important schemes as those on pre-retirement pensions, forestry and environmental protection. The Labour party believes that they are all vital parts of any reform, but MacSharry sees them as bolt-on extras. He does not believe that they represent an integral part of the reform package. As a result, national Governments would have to pay up to half the costs; frankly, certain nations will be unable to do so.

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): The hon. Gentleman is not doing well in countering my right hon. Friend's charge about the national interest—that is what the debate is all about. The hon. Gentleman referred to "bolt-on" extras. One such extra is the ill-treatment of animals because of a loophole in the present law. In a recent case in my constituency the owner of animals, convicted of their ill-treatment, was able to continue ill-treating them after that conviction because of that loophole. I hope that the Labour and Liberal parties will join everyone else in the House to push for that loophole to be closed, because, although the second conviction is coming up on the same person, his animals are still being ill-treated.

Dr. Clark: Obviously we give such support. We believe that Britain should take the lead in Europe on animal welfare. My hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) has done a great deal of work in that respect.

I accept that things have been done, but there is much more to do. I am not seeking to be divisive and I accept that the Government have taken the lead on some of the animal welfare issues. The Labour party has never hidden that fact. However, Conservative Members are sensitive about this because they know that the Minister hypes things up and does not make much progress when it comes to the precise details.

Mr. Gummer: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman might be a little more gracious by acknowledging that we have achieved protection for British horses and ponies in terms of their live export. We have extended the British live export of animals arrangements throughout the Community. We have now got the Community to accept, in advance of Maastricht, a proposal to deal with animal welfare. We have done more than any other British Government to promote animal welfare. However, when the hon. Gentleman was discussing our bad negotiating techniques he did not mention those successes.

Dr. Clark: The Minister's intervention makes my point.

Only today my hon. Friends and I in the Opposition Front-Bench team tabled an early-day motion congratulating the Government on their efforts relating to the export of horses and ponies. That early-day motion is in the Table Office and our support for the Government is in print. The right hon. Gentleman has proved my point, because he lets his mouth override his mind.

The CAP, which is a highly centralised, rigid agricultural support system, is in need of reform. The moneys saved need to be diverted to enhance regional and social funds to aid the rural infrastructure so that it can be improved in a meaningful manner. We should seek value-added components to agriculture. That is the future for advanced societies.

In 1956 we recognised that the CAP had relevance and represented the sole common policy of the EC. Now that we have new common policies relating to the single market, economic and monetary union and environmental and social issues, the symbolism provided by the CAP is no longer required.

The CAP made sense when we had a Community of six, centred around France, but it does not make sense in a

[Dr. Clark]

Community of 12. The problems would be even worse in a Community of 17 or more covering an area from the Arctic circle to north Africa, from Asia Minor to the shores of the Atlantic.

We accept that the agricultural policy must operate within a European framework, but we believe that it should operate in a looser regime of freely traded agricultural goods within the Community. More decisions could be made at national and regional level using the European concept of subsidiarity. In that way countries would be freer to utilise the finances available for agriculture in a way that better reflected the needs of their societies, their farmers and their environment.

We would favour giving support to environmentally sensitive farming in the United Kingdom, but we might wish to give support to other countries in the form of direct income or through other measures designed to support farmers and to keep them on the land.

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central): Is the hon. Gentleman's bottom line that the Labour party would support the complete abandonment of the CAP?

Dr. Clark: I appreciate that it is not always easy to assimilate what is said. No, we believe that there would still need to be a European agricultural regime. The main decisions and guidelines would be issued in Brussels, but, through the use of subsidiarity, more decisions could be taken within the Community framework at the national or regional level. That is the concept we are advocating.

The logic of our argument is now finding friends. Chancellor Kohl of Germany recently referred to the need for more decisions in agriculture to be taken at a regional or Länder level. The average size of farm in the old West Germany was a mere 17·6 hectares, whereas the new Länders of the old East Germany have farms with an average size of 3,700 hectares. No wonder Chancellor Kohl is beginning to appreciate that the policy one might want to apply in Bavaria is not necessarily the same as that which can operate in the new Länder of Mecklenburg.

The debates on the future of agriculture in the United Kingdom are vital for farmers, consumers, taxpayers and the environment. So far, however, the Minister has given a typical display—he did so again today—which is high on hype, but short on application. He appears to have made more newspaper headlines than progress. Those debates, along with those in GATT, are the most important for agriculture in the United Kingdom since we entered the EC. There is little time left. We urge the Minister to go to Brussels and mend a few fences. He should come back with a deal that helps, not hinders, British farming.

5.59 pm

Mr. Paul Marland (Gloucestershire, West): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister on his robust defence of British interests and the way in which he has outlined the need for careful negotiations because, at this stage, we can leave nothing to chance. Like other Conservative Members, I wish him the best of luck in those difficult and protracted negotiations. His speech was in stark contrast to that of the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), who spent nearly 40 minutes whining about the problems in the EC and the common agricultural policy. In the last few seconds of his speech, he glossed over the Labour party's alternatives so quickly that we could hardly even hear them.

Earlier in his speech, the hon. Gentleman spoke about the need for an inquiry into set-aside and for more meat inspectors—I doubt whether that will find its way to the heart of many British farmers—and about the need for a detailed, in-depth reform of the CAP. He had ample opportunity to express the Labour party's views, but we heard nothing except a prize example of his total lack of understanding of how the whole system works. He was wrong to say that the French Minister supported reasonable alternatives and amendments, because those were put forward informally, so he has completely misunderstood the situation. No farmer—with the possible exception of constituents of the hon. Member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson)—would be foolish enough to vote for the policies suggested by the hon. Member for South Shields.

Mr. Home Robertson: Would not farmers in Gloucestershire agree with those in East Lothian that the industry always does better under a Labour Government?

Mr. Marland: We are talking about the common agricultural policy, and I am sure that farmers in Gloucestershire and non-biased farmers in East Lothian will see what an appalling mess the hon. Member for South Shields would make were he allowed anywhere near the negotiating table. It is not true to say that farmers would do better under a Labour Government.

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Marland: No. I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman later.

This debate is most timely, because we are discussing the future of Europe. The only genuine common policy in Europe is the common agricultural policy. However, that policy has now degenerated into a mess and needs to be looked at in considerable detail, and I congratulate my right hon. Friend on taking the serious nature of the problem on board.

As my right hon. Friend said, he controls only 17 per cent. of the United Kingdom's farming budget, while the remaining 83 per cent. is controlled from Brussels. To make changes, my right hon. Friend must have the agreement of the Greek, Italian and Irish Ministers. Our Minister is mightily persuasive, but imagine trying to get Sicilian slaughterhouse owners to agree to adopt European standards when the Italian Government have yet to introduce dairy quotas.

The CAP is now out of control. It is massively expensive, does not achieve what it was designed to do and is riddled with fraud. The case of Dr. Ruffard is merely the tip of the iceberg, for the problem goes much deeper. The CAP no longer achieves the aims for which it was set up and those affected—the British farmers—are fed up with it. They feel discontented and desperate.

I have received four telephone calls from farmers in my constituency today, saying what a desperate situation they find themselves in. Our farmers find that they are disadvantaged as a result of the national animal welfare measures that have been introduced and the high hygiene standards that are insisted on in our slaughterhouses and

elsewhere. Those measures are laudable—I do not knock them—but where we lead others do not follow, with the result that our producers and operators are disadvantaged.

The environmental controls that are introduced with laudable objectives cost our farmers and our industry generally a great deal of money. Other European countries are not following our lead, not only in farming but in other industries. We lead the EC on controls on pollution, noise, smell and other matters.

There are some absurd anomalies that emphasise the position. For example, we determined to stamp out salmonella in eggs. We slaughtered thousands of chickens, and many producers went out of business. But millions of eggs that had not been tested for salmonella flowed in through our ports from Europe. Very few of them were tested for salmonella when they entered this country and many eggs that may have been humming with salmonella found their way into our supermarkets. They were repacked and labelled "Packed in Britain", and unsuspecting housewives bought them thinking that they were salmonella-free. British egg producers want fair treatment.

In slaughterhouses, we implement high Euro-standards and adhere to extensive and frequent veterinary inspections, while others ignore them. A Member of this House has a cottage in France, and his neighbour is a French farmer who kills his own cattle with his own hands in his own buildings. When the hon. Member concerned asked him, "What about the European regulations on slaughtering animals?", the French farmer shrugged his shoulders and said, "Those regulations are only for the British." British farmers want fair treatment.

Lorryloads of British lamb are being held up and burned illegally by French farmers. They put spikes across the roads to stop vehicles loaded with lamb proceeding to their destination. The French police simply stand around with their hands in their pockets shrugging their shoulders. Is that communautaire or fair?

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Minister that careful negotiations are needed to find a way forward. Our over-zealous application of Euro-directives is causing trouble in Ramsgate. Mr. David Pettit, a greengrocer and local councillor in Ramsgate, described his cabbages and peas as "local". Although they were grown locally, officials told him that he could not describe them as such, and he had to change their description. I doubt whether French officials would have bothered to check up on French cabbages described as "local".

The co-responsibility levy and stabilisers on milk and cereals are fatuous taxes that simply make farmers produce more to maintain their margins. We all agree that those should go. A farmer receives £115 on the farmgate price of his cereals, but ultimately receives £100, thanks to the co-responsibility levy and stabiliser. Perhaps the abolition of those levies and stabilisers is part of my right hon. Friend's secret negotiating package—I hope so.

Part of my constituency is the royal forest of Dean, where we have been growing English oaks since time began. We are proud of that history. We are now told that we must grow Euro-oaks approved by the European Parliament. Our British sausage has been under attack, as have prawn cocktail flavoured potato crisps. Even paperboys are now threatened by faceless men from Brussels who say that they must give up that way of earning a few pence before they go to school.

All that builds great resentment of Europe and the faceless men in Brussels. To put it mildly, British farmers are stamping mad with the European Community. They regard themselves as being seriously disadvantaged in Europe. Farmers' incomes have fallen like a stone. Despite the fact that they use their ingenuity to add value and pursue alternatives, many of them are going broke. In the meantime, the money that is meant to help farmers under the CAP is siphoned off by others, often by fraudulent deals and double-dealing. That is a flavour of the confusion and frustration in the CAP.

In the European negotiations, we should use the CAP as an awful example of European co-operation. I am glad that the Government have recognised that fact in their leaflet, "Our Farming Future" and highlighted the mismatch between ever-increasing expenditure on subsidies and declining farm incomes, which demonstrates clearly that the CAP does not operate in the interests of producers, consumers or taxpayers, and that further reform in essential. That is a start—a radical reform is needed.

I shall remind the House of the cost of the CAP. In 1991, the European agricultural budget was £25 billion. In addition, the national budgets for agricultural support amounted to a further £18 billion, giving a total of £43 billion. That means that every acre farmed in the European Community costs EC taxpayers £162 in support. Put another way, had the United Kingdom share of that money been divided equally between the 220,000 British farmers, they would each have received a cheque for £20,445. Despite that vast support, farm incomes are being reduced: and net farm incomes in 1990 were only 42 per cent. of net farm incomes in 1984. The trouble is that the money is not being used to provide agricultural support for the farmers for whom it is intended.

Turning to the future, I like the idea of area payments, which are now being used for oilseed. I believe that that proposal will find favour with a number of farmers. It will reduce the price of the end product, and the deficit will be made up for the farmers through area payments. Lower prices for cereals—if and when area payments are used on cereals—could make the alternative cereal imports much less attractive than they are at present.

The EC grain production surplus amounts to 30 million tonnes, which is the amount of cereal substitutes imported into the EC. Lower cereal prices and lower prices generally may reduce fraud and ensure that the money goes directly to farmers, rather than to fraudsters.

Farmers have lost much purchasing power over the years. In 1964, 100 lambs bought a new medium-powered David Brown tractor. In order to buy the same machine today, the farmer has to sell 600 lambs. Mr. MacSharry's plans have given rise to great concern in this country about quota cuts and limiting flock sizes. That worry is aggravated by the fact that, if farmers cannot make a living at today's prices, and the future offers only a reduction in prices and in the amount that farmers are allowed to produce, there is no hope. Any cuts that are introduced must be fair and equal. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Minister has said that he will have no truck with modulation and reductions in output that are not absolutely fair.

British farmers are always being urged to become more orientated. I believe that the time has come for us to look carefully at European national aids to food processors, because I think that that is where the trouble lies. In the

[Mr. Marland]

United Kingdom, the total amount of national aid given to farmers is just under £1 billion. In Spain, the figure is £1 billion, in Italy it is £2·7 billion, in Germany it is £3·2 billion and in France a massive £8·5 billion is given to food producers and food processors. The different figures are distorting the market.

Competition within Europe now occurs in food and drink processing, which is hugely encouraged through national aids. Food from Britain, under the excellent leadership of Mr. Paul Judge, has highlighted a trade gap in food and drink of £7 billion per annum, which emphasises the need for better marketing.

Page 17 of the booklet "Our Farming Future" shows a graph of how much our agricultural produce is sold through voluntary co-operatives compared with other European countries, and there is no doubt that we lag far behind. The co-operatives are not big enough. If they want to hire decent employees, they must pay them good money. Voluntary co-operatives need a minimum turnover of £10 million a year to be able to attract the right sort of employees. Food from Britain said that we have six representatives in Spain, whereas Food from France has 60 representatives in Spain. Food from Britain has four representatives in Paris, whereas Food from France has 32 representatives in London. There is no doubt that there is a massive imbalance.

Some 80 per cent. of our trade deficit consists of food and drink imports. In 1980, we imported 6,000 tonnes of mushrooms. Today, we import 34,000 tonnes of mushrooms, many of them from southern Ireland. It is difficult to believe that mushroom producers in Ireland are more efficient than those in this country—I cannot believe it. Three years ago, our poultry imports were nil; today, the value of poultry imports is £250 million. The birds are not imported merely as dead carcases, but with substantial value added. Ministers should begin to consider that issue, once they have sorted out Mr. MacSharry. They were right: we hate his proposals, and do not like what he has to offer; we shall probably end up with a derivative of his proposals, but we must ensure that they are fair.

Our farmers do not fear competition from genuine farmers competing with them on the same basis, but we are now being disadvantaged nationally because of the benefits given to farmers of other countries to help them market and add value to their goods. Our farmers are efficient and can compete, but their day-to-day plight is desperate. The current position of United Kingdom farmers is not their fault, but the result of the devious manipulation of the CAP rules by our partners at taxpayers' expense to add value to food once it is outside the farm gate.

I shall finish as I began: I wish our Ministers the best of luck in their negotiations with the dreadful MacSharry proposals. I wish them godspeed.

6.17 pm

Mr. Geraint Howells (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North): I beg to move, to leave out from "legal framework of the Common Agricultural Policy; and" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

'believes the Government should make every effort to restore the confidence, stability and profitability of the British agricultural industry by introducing a ten-year plan for farmers, giving them the opportunity to compete on equal terms with their European counterparts and introducing measures to safeguard the future of the family farm in the United Kingdom'.

I have received many calls during the day from farmers and union leaders in Scotland, Wales and England who are pleased with the amendment. I give the Government and the Minister due warning that, unless they accept the amendment, we shall divide the House later tonight.

My hon. Friends and I believe that today's debate on agriculture is the most important debate that we have had for a long time. I believe that British agriculture is at a crossroads; we face the talks on the general agreement on tariffs and trade and the reform of the common agricultural policy. I know that the Government are about to take heed of what the Liberal Democrats have said over the years. I was delighted that, after I had tabled a question the week before last, the Secretary of State for Wales eventually went to Brussels last week on behalf of Welsh farmers. His action was long overdue, but the pressure is now on.

Like every other Smithfield week, this one has been an excellent time for assessing agriculture. Thousands of farmers and their families have converged on London to visit the show, which is one of the high spots of the farming year. As usual, I have been there to admire the splendid animals, wonder at the gleaming high-tech machinery on display and, above all, to talk freely to farmers from all parts of Britain. The show is excellent, and I recommend anyone who has not already been there to visit it and see the high standards attained by our livestock industry.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Did my hon. Friend win any prizes?

Mr. Howells: I shall deal with that later.

This year, there is something different about the show. There is not the air of cheerful optimism that usually abounds. Could it be that, among farmers, the talk is of rising production costs and very low returns, of huge bank overdrafts and of farms being abandoned? Do I sense an air of quiet desperation on the machinery stands, reflecting perhaps the drop in sales over the past year? I understand that, in Wales, tractor sales have dropped by about 30 per cent. and that, although in Scotland and the east of England there was a smaller drop, no one expects to see a great improvement in the near future.

There is much to worry farmers today. Not only have farm incomes plummeted in the past year by 10 per cent., bringing them to their lowest level since the second world war, but there is a nagging fear about the MacSharry proposals and the GATT negotiations on world trade. The recession has bitten savagely into the industry's viability, and this year alone, about 7,000 farmers and about 5,000 workers are known to have left the land. I am afraid that others will soon follow if present trends continue.

Somehow or other, British agriculture has lost its way. There is no conception of what the long term holds in store. There is no framework in which to make decisions. Many factors contribute to the malaise. The country's general economic climate has not benefited any industry, and farmers, with their heavy capital outlay, have fallen foul of high interest rates and increasing prices.

Although our products are second to none, our marketing has never kept pace with production. We have a market of 380 million people in the EC, and it is time that we adopted a more aggressive approach towards exports as well as selling in the home market. That requires a degree of support from the Government, which to date has

been sadly lacking compared with the efforts of other EC Governments, and a readiness by farmers to co-operate in modern selling practices.

Some of the blame for the uncertainty in the industry can be placed at the door of the Government, whose agricultural policies have been negative to say the least, and whose response to the crisis in the industry has been slow. For example, time and again they have delayed payment of hill livestock compensatory allowances to hard-pressed hill farmers. They have refused to pay the maximum rate of suckler cow premium while other countries in Europe are pressing for increases. They have refused to implement the useful EC outgoers scheme for dairy farmers, which was designed to obtain milk quotas from those who wanted to give them up and redistribute them among the remaining farmers. That has been widely carried out in other EC countries, and has shielded their producers from a 3 per cent. quota cut imposed by Mr. MacSharry.

The Government have shamefully cut research and development. I could give many other examples. One of their latest failings is their blinkered attitude towards reform of the common agricultural policy. Does the Minister think that his total rejection of the MacSharry proposals has benefited our farmers in any way, or does he think that a more measured and thoughtful response could have gained valuable concessions for us? We accept that, as the proposals stand, there are distinct disadvantages for British farmers. But is there not an argument for looking at the principles involved and adapting the details to national circumstances?

It is plain that the CAP must be fundamentally reformed to cope with a situation that has changed beyond all recognition since the CAP was established. It is clear that there is no longer any justification for encouraging production with reference to demand. It is also ridiculous that, while CAP support increases year by year, farm incomes have dropped and look set to deteriorate. It is wrong that, because of the linking of support to the volume of production, those who benefit most are the larger farmers, who on balance have least need of the support.

Liberal Democrats believe that a healthy, prosperous farming industry is absolutely necessary in this country, and we must find a suitable framework within which it can operate. Our farmers, who are probably the most efficient in Europe, deserve our support, because on their well-being depends the health of our rural economy and the natural environment.

Mr. Lord: Perhaps I could put to the hon. Gentleman the question that I put earlier to the Labour spokesman. Is the hon. Gentleman, as the agriculture spokesman for his party, about to present the framework that he suggests should replace the CAP?

Mr. Howells: My colleagues and I have decided to go to Brussels in the near future to meet Mr. MacSharry. I hope that we will be able to persuade him to accept the policies that our party has pursued for the past 10 years. If he does not accept them all, perhaps he will accept some of them. On another day, I might tell the hon. Gentleman our policies.

It is now time to restore the confidence that has been lost during the difficult times of the past few years, and to do that we must first introduce a 10-year programme for agriculture which will ensure that farmers are able to plan ahead without worry. The chopping and changing of policy over the past couple of decades has contributed greatly to the present state of the industry. Whatever our views on the milk quotas, confidence has not been restored since they were introduced in the early 1980s.

It is essential to ensure that the British farmer is allowed to compete on equal terms with his European counterpart at all levels. The Government must fight for our farmers in negotiations and, at the same time, give more practical assistance. An NFU briefing states:

"If British farmers and growers are required to operate within the EC market at a competitive disadvantage, the consequences for our economy and counytryside would be disastrous."

Mr. Marlew: Will the Liberal Democrat proposals cost more than the present policy being pursued in Europe?

Mr. Howells: Times are difficult, but it is important to keep part-time and full-time farmers in the countryside. People must remain there as custodians of the land.

The iniquities resulting from the present system of support should be removed, and financial resources should be redirected to family farms. They are, after all, the background of the rural community, and as such should be actively encouraged to stay in business. The Farmers Union of Wales is forward-looking on agriculture policies, and in response to the European Commission proposals it said:

"The Farmers Union of Wales is fearful that this failure to discuss and negotiate reform of the CAP and to positively discriminate in favour of family farms will result in an intensification of the restrictive price policies of the past few years which clearly will have a much greater impact, in the absence of any compensating direct subsidies, on the family farms that prevail in Wales. In the absence of targeted support and suitable social measures, the current recession in the industry will not only continue but accelerate, accentuate an already deteriorating farm income position and a decline in the rural economy as a whole."

I agree with that conclusion, and believe that it applies not only to Wales but to a large part of the British agricultural economy. There must be a move towards forms of direct support aimed at improving the environment and achieving social goals. Every effort should be made to keep the farmers on the land.

I shall say a few words about sheep farming. I was delighted to hear the Minister say that he is against the MacSharry proposals. The EC proposes to introduce a limit on premium eligibility based on the numbers of ewes in the flock in 1990. In addition to roughlands flock limitation, it is proposed that no premium will be paid for more than the quota of 750 ewes for the less-favoured areas, and 350 ewes elsewhere. If that policy were implemented, it would have a disastrous effect on sheep farmers in Wales, and perhaps an even more disastrous effect on large farms in Northumberland, the border counties and the Scottish highlands. Many farms in the north of England and in Scotland employ six or seven shepherds, so that would have a disastrous effect on the economy of the area.

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnor): Does my hon. Friend agree with me that, as the Minister has said that Britain is responsible for more than a quarter of the sheep production for the entire EC—he gave a figure of 27 per cent.—the right hon. Gentleman must be in a strong

[Mr. Richard Livsey]

negotiating position to change that policy, which discriminates against British sheep farmers? I believe that the limits are far too low, especially for hill farming areas.

Mr. Howells: My hon. Friend has made a worthy point, and I am sure that the Minister will take heed of it.

This afternoon, I received a note from the National Farmers Union of Scotland. That organisation sums up the situation to the best of its ability, and I could not improve on what it says. It sent out a questionnaire; and said:

"On 101 of the 264 Borders farms surveyed, there are 67,000 LFA"—

that is, less favoured area—

"ewes, in excess of the MacSharry 750 ewe proposed limit, which may not receive SAP"—

sheep annual premium—

"and LFA supplement. This could represent a reduction in income on these farms of over £1·3 million."

They are talking about only 101 farms, so, if the policy were pursued, I do not know what effect it would have on the countryside of Scotland and on other parts of the country.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I am sure that my hon. Friend knows that the first effect would be that employed shepherds would cease to be employed. Shepherds are the backbone of much of rural life in Northumberland and the borders, and they have already been put out of work by the effects of headage limits, so if the policy is not changed it will disastrously affect the structure of rural life.

Mr. Howells: In addition, the National Farmers Union of Scotland says:

"123 of the 264 farmers who completed the survey, indicated that, if the MacSharry II proposals are implemented, they would have to make a total of 135 men redundant."

Shepherds will have to be made redundant in the hills of Scotland and in the north of England, which could have a devastating effect on the land and the families involved.

The Government made a big mistake last year, but I am delighted to see that the pressure brought about by the early-day motion on the wool board guarantee tabled by my hon. Friends and myself has been beneficial. I can claim a success for that. I was vice-chairman of the British Wool Board for 11 years and did my utmost to carry on the financial agreement between the Government and the board. Unfortunately, two years ago the Government decided to do away with the guaranteed price. It was a unilateral decision, made without consulting their friends in Europe.

Today, the farmers of Britain receive only 50 per cent. of their wool clip cheque three months after delivery. They have to wait another 12 months for the other 50 per cent. That has a disastrous effect on many hill farms. I hope that the Government will take heed of what I say on behalf of the wool producers of Britain. They could do with that money. They need it, and it is the Government's duty to provide the mechanism whereby farmers will get it when it is due to them.

I could refer to many other aspects of the MacSharry proposals, but now I shall mention the Liberal Democrats' farmers charter. That says it all; it says what should be done, and I hope that my parliamentary colleagues on both sides of the House will listen to it and agree. Hon. Members are aware that we are now winning many rural seats, and that is because of our agriculture policy.

I hope that others will agree with us about

"Reform of CAP so that farmers are paid proper prices for the goods which they produce",

and about

"Government action to ensure that the MacSharry proposals do not discriminate against British farms for being, on average, larger than their European counterparts . . .

Action in the GATT talks to ensure that any reduction in agricultural support which is negotiated does not penalise European farmers".

Our best suggestion to the farmers of this country and to the Government is:

"Well-resourced Countryside Management Agreements, based on whole farm plans and available to all, to encourage sustainability and safeguard wildlife and landscape".

As I said at the beginning of my speech, the farmers of this country need their confidence restored to give them the stability and profitability to enable them to invest in the land. Then we shall ensure that the next generation will stay on the land, will farm and will conserve the countryside for the benefit of others.

6.38 pm

Mr. Michael Alison (Selby): The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) will excuse me if I deviate a little from his constituency. He made a wide-ranging speech on many agricultural topics and products, and I shall want to follow him under one or two of those headings during my short speech.

However, I start by congratulating my right hon. Friend the Minister on the firm, skilful and constructive role that he is playing in the negotiations on the reform of the common agricultural policy. I especially congratulate my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, who was kind enough to send me a note saying that he would have to slip out for a few minutes, on his role in the negotiations. He is a skilful and expert practitioner in the area, and he has a relevant professional background. He spends immense periods with his face locked into the mire of the common agricultural policy in Brussels. We owe him an enormous debt for his work. We can all endorse our objective in the negotiations, which is to save the common agricultural policy from itself and to save the British farmer from the common agricultural policy, if it is branded by the hallmark of the current MacSharry proposals.

A good deal of gloom and doom is forecast for British agriculture. The hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) reflected that in his speech, as did the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) to some extent. It is commonplace in the House that our agriculture is going through a difficult and black period, in terms both of its prospects and of the current restrictions. Agriculture is not helped in that contingency by uncertainty over the general agreement on tariffs and trade and over the reform of the CAP, because it also faces declining prices and there is no sign of its costs going down in the same way.

However, we must be careful not to undermine unnecessarily national confidence or farmers' confidence in agriculture. We all aim to close the gap between our home food production and our home food consumption. We shall not close that gap between what we import and what we produce at home if we all talk about the burial of

British agriculture or about its imminent demise. On the contrary, we all expect it to improve its output, which is the object of every party's policy.

Agriculture is staggeringly successful. About 100 years ago, after the abolition of the corn laws when American agricultural, especially cereal, output rocketed, Britain imported three quarters of all its grain. Today, we are not only the world's sixth largest grain exporter, but the world's second largest exporter of sheepmeat. Viewed in that context, British agriculture is to British industry what German manufacturing is to German industry. We are at the top of the league. Against that background, it is a great mistake to regard British agriculture as a lame duck which is staggering haltingly towards an early demise.

Mr. Martlew: I could not let pass the right hon. Gentleman's comment about German manufacturing industry in comparison with our agriculture. Is not the right hon. Gentleman aware that German manufacturing industry has massive surpluses, whereas we are running a deficit in both food and drink?

Mr. Alison: I have some sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's point that there is a gap that our producers could fill. Agriculture is a tiny sector in terms of the number of people it employs—2·3 per cent. of our total work force. We can be excused for having a modest gap in contrast to what the Germans are able to do with manufacturing. However, we aim to close that gap, and we should all cheer on agriculture as it seeks to do so.

I am a Church Commissioner, and the Church Commission has the second largest agricultural estate in England after the Crown. We have more than 156,000 acres and about 500 farms under tenancy. Our agents tell us that farm incomes generally in our estate are

"holding up reasonably well this year on the back of a good harvest. This has been reflected in our rates which in broad terms have remained level this year. Reductions on some arable farms, especially in Lincolnshire, have been counter-balanced by small rent increases on dairy farms."

On the whole, things are not quite as bad as some might suggest.

In focusing again on the reform of the common agricultural policy, I want to reiterate the objections expressed by hon. Members of all parties to the MacSharry proposals as they now stand, especially with their support for the smaller farmers. There is a double disadvantage in the policy. First, it backs the inefficient small farm unit and does nothing to improve farm structure and output. Secondly, it is grossly unfair in human terms—the very area that MacSharry seeks to magnify. Many British farmers with a far larger acreage than the small units in different parts of the continent about which we have been hearing, such as the 17·6 hectares in west Germany, have as few people running and managing them as the tiny units on the continent have.

If one is trying to help the human dimension, there is no point in tackling that in terms of acreage. With modern farming techniques and conditions, very small numbers operate very large acreages. It is nonsense and illogical, therefore, to focus attention on the small acreage farms, ignoring the numbers of people who operate large acreages with few individuals. Such farms are often family farms, although they are several times bigger than their equivalents on the continent.

Various different formulae have been advanced for real reforms in agriculture. Perhaps we should at least consider taking off the shelf and dusting down our earlier pre-Common Market techniques of agricultural support involving especially the old standard quantities and the associated deficiency payments. Those schemes could be applied transitionally for farms under a certain acreage or a certain level of output.

Such schemes have many advantages. They are progressive in tax terms because they would go directly on to a budgetary Exchequer cost and have no effect on farm prices, thus taking the burden of support off the poor consumer. They would dispense with intervention, support buying and restitution for exports, and they would be an alternative in certain circumstances for large-scale set-aside proposals. Individual farms might be offered the option of a large set-aside or deficiency payments for a standard quantity which would keep everyone employed on the farm, but would make the farm restrict its output to some extent. I hope that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary or my right hon. Friend the Minister will give some consideration to reintroducing those schemes as one of the formulae for reform.

I will pick up a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) about mushrooms. I know that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary has a particular interest in and knowledge of mushroom production. Mushrooms are now the largest of all United Kingdom horticultural crops. Middlebrook Mushrooms in my constituency is the largest individual fresh mushroom producer in Britain. However, it faces the severe competition to which my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucestershire, West referred, especially from Ireland. I believe, as do many involved in British mushroom production, that the foreign competition is unfair. My hon. Friend mentioned the huge increase in imports in the past few years. As much as 53 per cent. of mushrooms is now imported. That is far too high a proportion for a crop which we could produce on a much bigger scale.

I want to draw to the attention of the Parliamentary Secretary what is happening in Ireland. The Republic of Ireland has quite recently considerably enlarged its mushroom production through extensive regional and Government assistance in all sectors of production. The three entrepreneurs involved in the Republic have received aid for compost production, packaging facilities, transport and promotion. They have been accepted within the so-called trading houses scheme, so that they pay only 10 per cent. corporation tax instead of 43 per cent.—a major financial benefit.

British growers can compete, given fair competition. A major concern for the British mushroom industry is compliance with health, hygiene and environmental legislation. The industry has no criticism of the need to introduce protective measures, but they add costs, which affect the competitiveness of the product. In other EC countries, the implementation of the regulations has been delayed, or they may not even be applied. In the United Kingdom, some unfair advantage is gained through the implementation of the regulations being delayed by up to three years in Northern Ireland.

If my hon. Friend is not aware of the distorting supportive measures in the Republic of Ireland and, indeed, Northern Ireland, I hope that he will allow me to submit a memorandum on the topic which he will consider carefully so that he can take whatever steps are necessary to restore a level playing field.

[Mr. Alison]

However, we should be proud of the industry, which has great potential. I am sure that it will close the gap and remain a great leader in British industry.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am sorry to intrude on the debate in this way, but, before the speech of the right hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Alison), the House was addresed by the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells). I believe that it is a convention of the House that, when a Member speaks, he waits to listen to the subsequent speaker. There were five Liberal Democrat Members present, including the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North. Has the Liberal party broken a convention, or was it merely a display of bad manners that they left the Chamber immediately after their spokesman had finished?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): I consider that a genuine point of order. I would have wished that the Liberal Democrats might have remained in their place, especially as their amendment is now before the House for debate. I am pleased that the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Mr. Wareing) has brought the matter to the attention of the House. I hope that it will be noted by those who read the *Official Report* tomorrow.

6.52 pm

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudon): It will probably be understood that I wish to make my remarks in the context of the Scottish agricultural scene. Under the MacSharry proposals Scotland would suffer disproportionately to not only other EC countries but other countries within the United Kingdom. Before I take issue with the quantities on which the subsidies within the MacSharry proposals are based, may I remind the Minister of what farming means generally in Scotland.

The gross output of farming in Scotland in 1990 was £1·5 billion. Around 50,000 people are engaged directly in farming and a further 140,000 work in the support and service sectors of Scottish agriculture. Agriculture accounts for 14 per cent. of the value of Scottish non-oil output and 6 per cent. of employment. Those who know the geography of Scotland will understand that the latter percentage is much higher in rural areas where there is no other employment. The figures show that agriculture represents a major industry for Scotland.

Like all other areas of Great Britain which are involved in agriculture, Scotland has seen a slump of 10 per cent. in farm incomes this year on top of a massive 21 per cent. slump last year. The MacSharry proposals, if implemented in anything like their current form, would decimate Scottish agriculture because Scottish farms are generally well above the average size of farms in the EC and in the rest of the United Kingdom, for historical but mainly geographical reasons.

Compensation is based on the small farmer or the peasant farmer in the EC. To find out how it affects Scottish farmers one need go no further than my constituency. Although Kilmarnock is an industrial area, there is a large rural area in the constituency in the heart of Ayrshire. All hon. Members will know the reputation of the Ayrshire farmer.

About three quarters of dairy herds in EC member states qualify for full compensation. In Ayrshire, with some world-famous herds, the larger farms would receive less than 5 per cent. of the compensation. The same problem applies to the new proposals, which are based on compensating flocks that are far lower than the Scottish average.

The Scottish Agricultural College did a survey to find out what would happen if the MacSharry proposals were to be implemented in the Borders region. The in-depth research programme showed that farm incomes in the region are likely to suffer a direct loss of between £6 million and £6·5 million per annum, depending on how responsive farmers are in meeting the stocking density limits. The table which the college provides shows clearly that half the losses would be experienced by cereal farmers, a quarter by sheep farmers and the rest by farmers with beef, suckler cow and dairy herds.

The grain trade in the Borders region is very important not just for the region itself. The turnover is about £6·5 million per annum. At current prices the cereal farmers will experience a £2 million per annum contraction immediately and there will be a further contraction as farmers reduce output in response to lower prices.

There will be a knock-on effect. United Distillers distils some of the finest whiskies in Scotland and supplies Johnnie Walker whisky to my constituency, where we have the biggest bottling plant in Europe. The whisky is bottled there and dispatched abroad, earning a great deal of money for the coffers of the Chancellor. It is company policy to buy barley in Scotland. It would all be from Scotland if there were sufficient supplies of appropriate barley. The barley which is grown in the Borders is particularly useful to the whisky industry because it has a high starch and low nitrogen content. Its abilities to germinate are exactly those required for the mashing of our marvellous golden liquid. We could not afford to allow the Borders farmers to suffer the terrible experience of stopping farming or reducing drastically their supplies of barley to the whisky industry.

I have read with interest some of the Minister's statements. When the Secretary of State spoke to the House on 14 February he opposed the MacSharry proposals vehemently. On that occasion he used the example of their effect on Welsh farmers. The Minister has told us today that he does not want to let us know what his proposals will be when he goes into negotiations. No poker player will sit with a man at his back or show his hand, but nor will a poker player have a cocky attitude to the game. Sometimes at the Dispatch Box the Minister displays not just a cocky attitude—on occasions I could be accused of that myself—but almost an arrogant attitude. Such an attitude often hardens the attitude of those with whom one negotiates. Sometimes the negotiating game can be played a little more skilfully.

We hope that the Minister will get the best deal that he possibly can to protect our farmers and we would support him in achieving that objective. But the deal must be seen to be fair to all farmers in the United Kingdom because their circumstances vary depending on the country and the area in which they farm. It is important that the negotiations should be successful.

I do not know whether the Minister will come back with the news that the farmers want. As has been said before, there is a general gloom about the farming industry. They have suffered tremendous losses in income. I often speak to

the farmers in my area and they are seriously concerned about whether they can continue. Moreover, their sons are loth to follow their fathers into farming. If they do not go into farming, there is real reason for gloom because it could well mean the end of the Scottish farming industry. Therefore, their spirits must be lifted.

It is not me who distrusts the Minister's ability to negotiate, but the farmers I met today who doubt whether he can deliver the goods. Because of that, the National Farmers Union of Scotland gave me a lengthy and accurate brief. I do not wish to take up much time other than to remind the Minister of the five-point agenda with which the NFU would like him to be armed in the poker games of Europe. It says:

"(1) The British Government must stand by its anti-discrimination pledges—no second thoughts."

There must be no letting up. It goes on:

"(2) The CAP negotiations must build on reasonably broad agreement on the principle of resource withdrawal in the shape of arable set-aside.

(3) The negotiations must also develop constructively the common thread of agreement on the environment, and on the need for permanent measures to compensate for the disadvantages of farming in Less Favoured Areas.

(4) Import policy must not undermine sensible CAP reform. The Minister of Agriculture has said that he is 'not going to have land set-aside in Britain so that the rest of Europe can produce more'. He's right. But the logic must not stop there. Land set aside in the EC must not be the green light for imports from other countries either—whether from countries in the GATT negotiations, or from Eastern Europe.

The Minister has also said that 'it' is no good raising standards here so that our farmers pay the cost—while others use the old methods and flood our markets with crueller but cheaper food'".

I support that. The NFU and the Opposition want action to deal with Britain's £6 million trading deficit in food and drink which, rightly, concerns the Government, the farmers and the British producers and certainly concerns me.

The fifth point says:

"There must be detailed negotiations on how we would be affected by the detailed introduction of new commodity support arrangements."

In other words, farmers must know the results of the negotiations and must not be left to wonder in some kind of vacuum how the negotiations will affect their income. There can be nothing worse for those employed in any industry than to have their incomes drastically reduced for two years on the trot and then be left twirling their thumbs wondering whether at the end of the next year they will still be in business—whether they can continue to be farmers and produce the food that Britain can use. Milk produced throughout Scotland can be consumed in Scotland. Therefore, I agree with the milk producers that there is no need to reduce the production of milk in Scotland.

The Minister of State must make the Minister aware of the state of Scottish agriculture and of its importance to the Scottish economy. I remind him of the disproportionate harm that the MacSharry proposals would cause and seek his assurance that he will bear in mind the Scottish farmers and all those elsewhere in Britain when he represents the interests of the British Government and the British farmer in Europe.

I am as aware as all Scottish farmers that reform is needed. They understand that reform is needed, but they wish to ensure that overproduction is halted and that EC farmers are ready and able to compete in world markets when the Uruguay GATT round is finally resolved. We are also aware of the need to halt the environmental degradation that overproduction brings in its wake.

I understand the desire to protect the small rural communities which rely on agriculture. However, the MacSharry proposals look only in the most narrow, blinkered way for solutions. I offer the Minister the NFU's five-point agenda, of which I hope he has taken note. It will stand him in good stead when he comes to argue against the MacSharry proposals.

7.6 pm

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): I was interested to hear about the state of the Scottish agriculture industry. As a frequent visitor to Scotland I have formed a great admiration for the Scottish farmer's skills, particularly in animal husbandry and the attention that he pays to the production of a crop of whose product I am a not infrequent consumer. I hope that all that goes well.

The problems reflected by the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudon (Mr. McKelvey) are part of the general pattern of agriculture, not only in Britain but elsewhere. The French do not revolt because they have nothing to revolt about. We may not like the fact that they stop exports—they affect some of the exports of my constituency—but they are bloody-minded because they think that they, too, are getting a rotten deal from the CAP. So do we all. That is why during the next few weeks we shall be embarked on considering the extent to which we can change it to the benefit of all.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary on their able work. My right hon. Friend is on the right lines. I mean no disrespect to the hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), but, apart from his whinge against my right hon. Friend's personal qualities, I did not detect that he would do anything fundamentally different were he in my right hon. Friend's shoes. However, as usual when one is in opposition, particularly close to an election, one has to shout and scream trying to pretend that there is a big difference when there is not. We heard nothing particularly constructive. If we were in opposition we would do exactly the same.

I heard the hon. Gentleman at 6 o'clock this morning and he was just as bad then as he was this afternoon. When he was told that what he had said was all very well but a bit negative, he fell back on the 13 wasted years that he has been in opposition. He had not a clue. Agriculture is not like defence—a matter of being privy to private information; it is splattered all over the journals. However, he tried to give as good as he got. He is a fair-minded bloke on occasions—at least he has been to me.

I want to concentrate on my constituency, but before I do I shall make two points. The first concerns something that we can do ourselves. We all recognise that the British farmer is having a rough time. I do not want to dwell on it; we know it to be true. In my constituency we have a sad picture to paint. But there is one thing on which all can agree. There is a tremendous deficit between what we import and what we export.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) paid tribute to Food From Britain. He said that it is doing a good job. I believe that it is. It promotes the idea both in this country and abroad that we should

[Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith]

consume British food, but some people think that what Food From Britain does is enough and that the rest will follow.

No one will buy British food because somebody tells them that it is better than their own. Sometimes they do not believe it and, if they believe it, how can they get hold of it? They would also want to know who markets the food and its price. Twenty five years ago I became the Member of Parliament for East Grinstead. Its name has now been changed to Wealden. At that time I had some interest in advertising and marketing, so I decided to get people I knew in some of the big stores to come down to one of our towns. I managed to get local National Farmers Union branch members to come to listen to what they had to say. Their message, 25 years ago, was the same message as today: "We won't be able to sell your goods unless you market them to us properly." Again and again we hear the cry go up, "We must get down to marketing." Good Lord! How many more years shall we have to wait before we have as up and running and as efficient a marketing system for British products as they have in France, Holland and Denmark?

A few co-operatives have been set up during the last 25 years. Some companies are doing very well. Farmers have got together and specialised, with the result that there are some very good success stories. That is typical of Britain. We hear about good success stories in manufacturing, but I am talking about the broad base. There are not sufficient people who are good enough at organising the sale of their products. I wish my right hon. Friend luck in his negotiations over the common agricultural policy, but I do not believe that if it were modified, as a result of my right hon. Friend's efforts, to suit all our needs, the British farming industry would be able to take sufficient advantage of the improved conditions if its own marketing arrangements had not also been improved. That is one reason why we look forward to some progress being made with the Milk Marketing Board so that it becomes a real marketing institution. I do not believe that that has anything to do with the Government. It has everything to do with farmers and those involved in the food industry.

My right hon. Friend knows that set-aside has been regarded primarily as a restraint on production. That is why it is criticised. People do not like to see land set aside, with someone appearing not to be doing very much with the land set aside and getting paid for it. My right hon. Friend said today that he would like set-aside to be much more environmentally based. I am sure that he is right. The Ministry is due shortly to take over the countryside premium scheme. I hope, therefore, that it will look at the opportunities for expanding the scheme.

The most important problem, however, that set-aside presents us with—I know that my right hon. Friend will relish tackling it—is that Mr. MacSharry must be told that any reform of the common agricultural policy must ensure that set-aside takes environmental factors much more into account. I wish him luck in the negotiations that he will vigorously pursue towards that end.

The ordinary man in the street looks to farmers to combine production of food with care of the countryside. I do not believe that there needs to be any inherent conflict between those aims. I am sure that my right hon. Friend will continue to encourage the reconciliation of agricultural environmental objectives through a combination of advice—which is obviously needed—regulation—which is also needed—and incentives.

However it may be modified, the common agricultural policy will be the biggest single influence on farming practices in Europe. Some of the funds that are now flowing from the CAP—not always put to as good a use as we should like—should encourage rather than discourage environmentally friendly farming. If my right hon. Friend succeeds in gaining enough support for his efforts, the European Community will set up a framework of support and it will be up to individual countries to decide, within that framework, how they wish to use the funds.

My constituency, Wealden, includes the High Weald which extends beyond my constituency eastwards into Kent. Sussex land is heavy; much of it is clay. Sussex is hilly. There are few big fields. There are lots of hedges that need to be clipped. There are copses and woods. It is a heavily wooded county. It provides a great contrast to many other parts of England. Sussex probably has more trees per acre than any other county. It is not, therefore, the easiest land to farm. In the 18th century the trees were used for shipbuilding and in the iron ore industry. Dairy farms predominate. Farmers grow some wheat and barley for their cows. Many of those farmers have gone out of business. I understand why. The quota system did it; there was a milk glut. Other countries have had to face up to that problem.

Some of the farms have been split up into smallholdings. They are used for a bit of horticulture and, increasingly, for a bit of "horseyculture"—and the horses do not half make a mess on the ground! There is also the livestock. Some farmers have beef cattle, some for breeding purposes or for showing purposes. A few wealthy people do that. It is a drain on their resources. Others do it on a very small scale. It is a hobby for local gentleman farmers. That is what they like to do with their few acres and it is of some benefit to us. Many farmers are now engaged in rearing sheep on a commercial basis. I do not know how long that will last.

All this takes place in an area of outstanding natural beauty. Not all of it is beautiful, but the countryside as a whole looks attractive. That has not prevented diversification. The Government have encouraged farmers to diversify. One finds that a barn has been converted into a smart office where a chap is working hard on his word processor; he has a nice set-up with computers.

I visited one farm that obtained permission to convert a barn for use as a place to pack boxes. Voluntary workers help to supervise mentally handicapped people to pack the boxes. That provides them with some work and pocket money. They are extraordinarily good workers. That enlightened policy is much to be welcomed.

As it is an area of outstanding natural beauty, much of the diversification can take place only in limited areas—close to the towns and bigger villages. It is not surprising, therefore, that incomes have dropped severely during the last few years, with the result that we are now beginning to see signs of dereliction. I do not like to see thistles growing in the fields. I do not believe that the people who own that land have set it aside. I think that they have just opted out; they cannot afford to look after their land. That is worrying. The spread of weeds can have a very serious effect on neighbouring farms.

There is an alternative. A nice piece of land could be cleared. People in London want to play golf, but there is

a shortage of golf courses. We have one of the newest and finest championship courses in the land, developed on 250 acres. There are two 18-hole golf courses. I forget how many golf courses there are in my constituency, but there must be about 10. At the last count, 15 planning applications were outstanding. We cannot go on like that. The county has a view about golf courses—that if there is to be such a development it is better for them to be sited not on good farming land, or in naturally beautiful areas, but on the outskirts of towns. There is a limit, therefore, to what can be done in that respect.

We must try to help ourselves to come to terms with the changes in farming, but if the present position persists, farmers in rural areas will not be seen to be working in line with the avowed aim of my right hon. Friend the Minister of a good environmental policy mixed with good farming. Therefore, I should like to make a suggestion, which I know will be regarded as special pleading. The Government recently announced the establishment of a further dozen environmentally sensitive areas, which included one close to my constituency on the south downs. That area is not as tough as areas of Scotland or the Welsh hills but it is hard farming land. My plea is that if the Government want to maintain its environmental quality and ensure that people work it they will consider including the High Weald as an ESA. Such a policy of extensification would avoid food mountains and ensure that our land was properly looked after by farmers who want to work and who expect a reasonable return for their efforts.

I received a letter this morning from a farmer about the MacSharry proposals. He said that there would be preference funding for smallholdings. He believes that the proposals discriminate against the bulk of United Kingdom agriculture. He adds these words, which I ask my right hon. Friend to pass on to our right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer:

"However, there is a recognition that some responsibility for securing fair competition lies with the Chancellor of the Exchequer. To take two examples, the French farmers receive some £90 per acre for set-aside land whilst we receive less than £50. Italian farmers can claim a 50 per cent. grant to buy machinery for conservation uses. Such discrepancies can only be bridged by national funding."

I do not know whether that is the answer but, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr Alison) said, in too many cases the playing field is not level enough.

Finally, I should like to mention my friends on the Milk Marketing Board, to whom I pay tribute for their efforts to reform the board's structure. They have told me about the effect that price cuts can have on the dairy sector. The stocking density hurdle would exclude 30 per cent. of dairy farms in England and Wales from receiving any compensation. Since 1983, we have had to reduce our milk output more than many countries that are far more self-sufficient than we are. We have achieved self-sufficiency of 90 per cent., but other countries have achieved more.

I hope that if my hon. Friend the Minister has time he will deal with those points in replying to the debate. If he cannot do so, perhaps he will drop me a line.

7.22 pm

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I always enjoy listening to agriculture debates and especially to Conservative Members, because that is the only time when we do not hear any free market claptrap. We hear about farm subsidies and the social wage. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) shakes his head. I shall happily give way if he wishes to intervene.

The problem is that Conservatives are not consistent in their policies. I understand that 500 jobs losses have been announced by Bass breweries today. The situation is drastic, but I suspect that we will not hear special pleading for Bass workers from Conservative Members. I accept that we need to keep people on the land. That Conservatives are free-marketeers on everything but agriculture can, at least, be said in their favour.

The milk industry is in a terrible position. We have some of the most efficient dairy farms in not only Europe but probably the world and an effective milk-processing system; so we should have, because we have good climatic conditions and, perhaps with the exception of New Zealand, the best pasture in the world.

Our serious problems have been caused by the deals that have been negotiated by the Government. Milk quotas are not working in the United Kingdom's favour. There has been much debate on the imbalance in food and drink. I think that it was £6 billion last year, or £15 million every day that the Minister has been in office. The United Kingdom is only 86 per cent. self-sufficient in milk and dairy products. We know that the Minister will negotiate another cut in the quota. What will that do to the imbalance? We shall be down to 80 per cent. self-sufficiency, or perhaps less. That will depend on how good he is on the day. I hope that he is better that day than he was today. Milk quotas do not work, and in some ways a bit of market forces might have helped the United Kingdom because we are efficient producers.

Hon. Members have expressed deep concern about the plight of the sheep farmer, especially the hill farmer, on whom milk quotas have a direct effect. A farmer friend —I do have some—said to me, "You realise that as soon as the quota was introduced dairy farmers put more sheep on land that previously was used for cows." We are a major exporter of sheepmeat because of the quota. Hill farmers, who could not change to dairying because their land was unsuitable, are suffering because of such distortions.

I am glad that the Minister does not appear to be accepting a quota system for other products, but how will he deal with our not being self-sufficient? Will we get more milk from France? Previously, the Minister has said that we still have a surplus of dairy products, which is true, but there is not a steady weekly or monthly supply of milk. There is what one calls a flush in the spring—that could upset those who do not understand dairy terminology—which always leads to a surplus. That will be overcome only if the industry has enough confidence to invest in plant to find new milk products to sell.

As there is no confidence in the supply of milk, the dairy processing industry is looking for new ways of selling dairy products. More of our ice cream is being imported from France, not because of the quality of our product but because of the shortage of milk.

When the Minister announced set-aside in June 1988, I accused him of introducing a scheme to pay farmers for watching the grass grow. Little did I know that not only were we paying farmers to watch the grass grow but were paying *The Sunday Times* reporters for watching somebody else's grass grow. At first, the Minister was straightforward in saying how wrong *The Sunday Times* article was, but later he started to flannel a little. I am not

[Mr. Eric Martlew]

suggesting that he would deliberately mislead the House, but I should like to see *The Sunday Times* reply before offering him my wholehearted support. There are ways of interpreting things, and he was becoming a bit shifty.

The failure of the set-aside policy is a cause of great concern. It is not popular with anyone apart from those people who have horses. In urban areas there is often a great demand for somewhere to keep horses and to use them for recreation, as mentioned by the hon. Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith). It might be popular in such areas, but in France I suspect that the horse is an agricultural beast because they eat horses over there.

The set-aside regime will not work and I think that we must accept that. I recently asked the Minister whether he would consider a nitrogen fertiliser set-aside policy, as advocated by Friends of the Earth among others. He turned it down, and I was very concerned that he did so, out of hand. One argument was that it would be hard to police, but the present policy is hard to police if we are to judge by what is happening at the moment. Such a policy would have the advantage of reducing inputs and production and it would prevent the anomaly that exists in some areas whereby nitrogen is getting into drinking water and creating a health hazard. A nitrogen set-aside policy should be considered seriously. It is important and would, I believe, be acceptable to the general public. It is certainly acceptable to the environmentalists, but I accept that it might be difficult to police.

We have talked a great deal today about surpluses, but the reality is that there is not a surplus of food in the world; there is a lack of money. As we cannot get the world's economics right, we are unable to transfer food from the European Community to the areas of the world that need it. There are many problems, because we could undermine farming in some countries, but we must be very careful about reducing production. We must get the world's economics right.

I am deeply concerned about what used to be the Soviet Union. I have not seen the news today—by tonight it may no longer be the Soviet Union. On Friday I shall attend an independence celebration of the Ukranian community in my constituency. That community has been there since the last war and has made a useful contribution to our community. We shall celebrate with it on Friday, but what concerns me is whether the people of the Ukraine and other parts of the Soviet Union will still be celebrating at the end of the winter. I suspect that there will be major food shortages there. I also believe that the Government are doing very little—or nothing at all—to help. It is not a good idea in the short term to send our major retailers there to see how they can set up branches of Tesco and Sainsbury, an idea in which the Government take pride. The way in which those companies make their profits in this country might not be a good idea for the Russian system.

In the short term we must ensure that the Soviet people get through the winter. We must begin to direct food—a lot of food—to that country. We cannot merely talk about it going through Europe. I understand that the Government are putting about £20 million worth of grain into the St. Petersburg—or Leningrad—area to stop the people there killing their animals this winter. That will not be enough. We must launch a major food aid campaign to feed the people of eastern Europe and especially those of the Soviet Union because that would also be enlightened self-interest.

Mr. Frank Cook: Is my hon. Friend aware of the basis on which the west was able to help the eastern bloc countries last year? We learnt on a military tour this year that the basis of food supplies that went from west to east to help to sustain the people throughout the winter was from military stocks that had been stockpiled to feed the armies if they had come westwards. But because the armies were returning to the Soviet Union, we were able to pick up the supplies and send them back. The stocks are no longer there, so the point that my hon. Friend makes is even more starkly visible.

Mr. Martlew: That was a one-off which cannot be repeated. I have been to the Soviet embassy in London to talk over this issue, which is of great concern. I hope that when he replies to the debate the Minister will say that the Government are taking note of the problem. We have massive surpluses and the Soviet Union will have massive shortages. Let us ensure that our surpluses get there.

I understand that some food aid organised through the European Commission was produced in the United Kingdom this summer. When the German haulage company came to collect it, it was told that there was no hurry because the food had a nine-month delivery time scale. I suspect that the food is still in a German warehouse. I hope that the Government will take the issue seriously.

Let us return to the MacSharry proposals and the Government's attitude to them. The Minister told the House what a good deal he has made. Some of us were sceptical and we were right to be so. I wonder whether the Minister carries on in the Council of Europe in the way that he has in the Chamber. If so, he makes me ashamed to be British because of his childish performance of a type that we rarely see. I asked a civil question during the previous agriculture question time about the Milk Marketing Board and he leapt into a tirade of party political propaganda which did not go down very well with the dairy farmers. If he behaves like that, it is little wonder that our farmers are worse off today than they have been at any time since the second world war. The sooner that we replace the Minister with my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) the better—the grasp of the subject that he has shown today and the cool way in which he dealt with the nine or 10 interventions from the petulant Minister would stand us in good stead. I am sure that my hon. Friend could go to Brussels to negotiate a good and sensible deal for the British farmer.

7.36 pm

Mr. Michael Lord (Suffolk, Central): I am pleased to take part in this important debate, and although I shall not take up all the points made by the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew), his concern for the Soviet Union is a matter with which I shall deal in a moment.

I congratulate the Minister on the very tough stance that he has taken on this difficult issue. We know that he is battling hard and that he understands all the problems faced by our farmers. He has our support for all that he is trying to do. Having said that, I believe that the MacSharry proposals are absolutely disastrous. They discriminate against the large and efficient farmers—who,

it has been generally acknowledged today, are our farmers. The proposals promote and preserve the small and the inefficient, and they are totally unacceptable.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Will the hon. Gentleman remember that there are efficient small farmers in Northern Ireland—they are the best in the United Kingdom—and that in any overall settlement they must also be kept in mind?

Mr. Lord: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's point, but there are small farms and small farms. When we talk about small farms in Northern Ireland, we are not talking about the small farms that are being propped up in some parts of the European Community. Many small farms in Northern Ireland would be regarded as quite large by Mr. MacSharry.

We must set the debate in context. As many hon. Members have said, farmers' prices are down and falling even further, but costs are up. Several hon. Members have said that farmers' profit margins are now the lowest since the second world war, and there is absolutely no doubt that the prospect of bankruptcy is very real for many farmers.

The effect of that on our rural economy would be disastrous, not only for the farmer, but for all the other services which depend on them. The providers of fertiliser, the feed and corn merchants, the village shops and the whole rural economy are now in grave danger. My constituency in the east of England has very few large industries and depends enormously for its livelihood on farmers and the farming industry.

The last thing that I want to see is the kind of dereliction about which we often speak, but which many of us do not believe could actually occur. However, I suspect that there are hon. Members in the Chamber today who are older than I and have seen derelict land in this country. Not so very long ago, farms in East Anglia were almost given away and land could be rented for next to nothing. We do not want those bad old times to return.

I feel very strongly about the MacSharry proposals. They are children of the CAP and I believe that the CAP is the real problem. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will battle hard in Europe for us. If he succeeds in defeating many of the proposals that discriminate against our farmers, he will simply succeed in spreading the nonsense more evenly.

I do not believe that the CAP can be reformed sensibly. It is becoming more and more detached from reality. Other hon. Members have referred to the food mountains, storage costs and the problems with set-aside, quotas and Euro-oaks to which my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) referred.

I am quite fond of trees. In fact, I am president of the Arboricultural Association. Although there are many nonsenses in Europe, I can assure the House that our English oaks are not in danger from Europe. Indeed, they are perhaps one of the few things that are not. However, I believe that the CAP must be abandoned and an entirely new system must be devised.

The CAP was never going to work with 12 different nations with different cultures, languages, agricultural systems, markets, climates and soil types. How could one system, one inflexible framework, ever serve all those nations? It is not surprising that we now have grain mountains and wine lakes.

Pursuing the wine analogy for a moment, there is a television programme entitled "The Last of the Summer Wine". Of the three gentlemen who feature in that programme regularly, one is called Compo, another is called Clegg, but I cannot remember the name of the third. [HON. MEMBERS: "Foggy".] Thank you.

I have not watched the programme very often, but, as far as I can recall, those gentlemen specialise in putting together at the beginning of the programme some quite absurd proposal. They then spend the rest of the programme trying to make it work, while the audience dissolves in laughter. That is what is happening in relation to the CAP. We are trying to make the impossible work, and it is now becoming pure farce. Pure farce may be entertaining in the Whitehall theatre, but it is not entertaining for my Suffolk farmers. They have now had enough.

Some people say that the CAP is the flagship of Europe. There are those of us in this place who know what sometimes happens to flagships—*[Interruption.]* That was a joke against myself. There can be little point in continuing the sad and expensive experiment of the CAP, which, as we have heard, is taking up two thirds of the Community's budget.

The hon. Member for Carlisle referred to the problems of the Soviet Union. It would be madness if we tried to impose on our 12 nations the kind of command structure that existed in the east and which was so rigid and created problems for food production and distribution, just when those eastern countries want to participate in our agriculture and trade. How could they join then? How would such a system work? I believe that it would not work very well.

The CAP has now become regimented. Almost all Ireland's production is geared to intervention and not to sensible markets or people's needs. Instead, it is geared to serving the artificial framework that we have created. I am not advocating a totally free market in agricultural products worldwide. That could never happen, because Governments could never reconcile themselves to such a market—nor should they. I also believe that the idea of world food prices is a myth. We often talk about the real or world price of food, but that is nonsense. Governments will always interfere with food production for a variety of reasons, some of which are good and some bad.

Accepting that agricultural prices will always be to some extent artificial, I suggest that we should scrap the CAP in its entirety. We should allow individual nations to deal with their own farmers and agriculture in the way that they see fit. My right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) has already referred to the value of deficiency payments and the way in which we used to do things in this country a few years ago.

We should also construct sensible international agreements for trade in agricultural products between all nations. Finally, we should build into all those agreements the very real need to look after the third world, and that includes its immediate needs in terms of hunger and the longer-term needs of agricultural stability. That is part of the picture.

I am certain that the days of the CAP are numbered. How long will it take for those responsible for it to recognise the truth? I wish my right hon. Friend the Minister well in his negotiations. He knows just how much is at stake for our farmers. He, as Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, should be given back the

[Mr. Lord]

responsibility for our farmers. I urge him to consider the fundamental changes that I have suggested, for the sake of the long-term future and stability of this vital industry.

7.46 pm

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): I listened with great interest to the views of the hon. Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord) about scrapping the CAP. He said that we should allow our Parliament to decide policy for our farmers. However, he must recognise that we are debating the future of the CAP when European integration is to be considered at the intergovernmental conference at Maastricht next week. This is an appropriate time for us to discuss the issue, because our farming industry has long regarded Europe as its marketplace. Since 1973, decisions affecting the industry's future have increasingly been taken on the European stage.

I have no hesitation in claiming that farmers in general are much more knowledgeable about the European debate than any other sector of United Kingdom industry. Farming politics have for so long been dominated by issues such as the green pound differentials, ecus and the merits or otherwise of the European monetary system and monetary compensatory amounts. I remember as far back as 1976, when the debate about whether sheepmeat should come into the Community's sectoral structure, the sophisticated and mature way in which farmers considered the arguments. Whatever the public at large have felt, farmers have never doubted that we needed to be at the heart of Europe. They led the debate in 1973 and in 1976.

Many of the issues that we have debated in the past 20 years have centred not on whether we should be moving towards greater European integration—that has always been understood in agriculture—but on creating a level playing field between farmers in Wales, Scotland, England and Northern Ireland on the one hand and our counterparts on the European mainland on the other. That is why the arguments about the green pound and MCAs were so significant and why eliminating differentials became a dominating issue.

We in Plaid Cymru have always argued, within the European context, that Welsh farmers need a specific and clear voice in negotiations. Our farmers are aware that small countries in the European Community, such as the Republic of Ireland, have a direct voice in the Council of Ministers—the decision-making process—while we have none. They also have many more Members in the European Parliament than we have.

As I said during Welsh questions on Monday, we very much welcome the initiative of the Secretary of State for Wales in going to Brussels to talk to Commissioner MacSharry, but we fear that the ultimate decision about the negotiations will be in the hands of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. It is not possible for the right hon. Gentleman to present with justice the case for the differing and sometimes conflicting interests of the farmers in each country or region of the United Kingdom.

I shall concentrate my remarks on the parlous state of the industry in Wales—even without the cuts proposed by the Commission. Aggregate farming incomes in Wales at current prices dropped by 23 per cent. in 1990. That followed a drop of 18 per cent. in the previous year. The 1990 figure was 25 per cent. below the average for the period 1981-85. Gross profits declined during a period of escalating costs, thus eroding a weak capital base.

Dr. Peter Midmore, of the economics department at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, predicts that, if current trends are not reversed, by the turn of the century 12,000 employment opportunities in Welsh agriculture will be lost and that a further 12,000 jobs will go in the ancillary industries. That is the measure of the catastrophe that faces rural Wales. A disaster of monumental proportions is staring us in the face.

Let us remember that rural Wales dies without agriculture and that agriculture dies without support. The relationship between agriculture and its ancillary and dependent industries on the one hand and our rural communities on the other is profound. This is not about statistics; it is about people, their families, homes, schools, village shops, community centres, youth clubs, rural societies and all the other organisations that comprise rural life and make it such a rich tapestry. All that is under threat. Our whole way of life is in jeopardy. Wales particularly faces a threat to its language and culture. That principle at least—I say "principle" because I shall come to the detail later—is recognised in the Commission's plans. We need to keep people on the land if we are to maintain the fabric of rural society. Unfortunately, that principle was noticeably absent from the Government's response.

Let me make one thing clear. I am not saying that Welsh farmers, any more than any other sector of industry, want state handouts simply to prop up an ailing economy. However, they do say that they are entitled to support to take account of the special difficulties that they face in terms of soil quality and climate. There is a vision of farmers living a life of luxury on handouts from Brussels. That may be true of some, but the vast majority of the farmers whom I and my colleages represent—the small or medium-size family farmer—have faced considerable difficulties in the past two or three years and some even face ruin.

On the hills of Wales, the reality is not of vast profits, but of simply eking a meagre living from shallow soil in an inhospitable climate. On the hills of Wales, there are no alternatives to sheep production and, even on the better land, dairy farmers are disposing of their milk quotas in an effort to improve their cash-flow problems. They are cashing in on a valuable capital asset simply to reduce an ever-increasing overdraft. That can be only a temporary respite.

That is the reality that we bring to this debate—and I make no apology for arguing as strongly as I can, using every line of argument I can muster—that the Secretary of State for Wales has to present the case for Welsh farmers even if that puts him in conflict with his right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The industry expects no less than that tonight.

In the dairy sector, I note that quotas are to remain beyond 1992. It would be helpful if the Commission could tell us how long it envisages the quotas remaining in operation. I am told that they might remain until the year 2000. Perhaps the Minister will deal with that point when he replies. I support plans to ensure that there are no cuts in the quotas of the medium-size and small farmers, provided that the Government establish a fully operational cessation scheme. Any quota cut would also take into account the self-sufficiency in dairy products of each member state.

It is recognised that margins in the beef sector are low. That is an argument for reducing the intervention mechanism and replacing it with a system of more direct support. However, although I am happy that the Minister is prepared to fight the Commission in discussions, I must advise him that if he loses that argument and the price is reduced by 15 per cent., as is envisaged in the current proposals, the phasing-in of stocking rates should follow the phasing-in of compensation payments in support of the beef special premium. As my Liberal Democrat colleague the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) has said, the greatest difficulty is in the sheep sector. The Commission has given a quota figure to qualify for support of 750 for the less favoured areas and of 350 elsewhere, but that is far too low. Those figures discriminate against Welsh and Scottish farmers. They should be increased to at least 1,000 and 500 respectively and should apply to each partner, not per holding. That is the issue that discriminates most against Welsh farmers. It must be changed.

We support the idea that farmers should be given proper retirement schemes to release land for their successors or for use in conservation schemes where appropriate. However, there appears to be some confusion in the Commission's proposals. A literal reading of the text of the proposals suggests that the scheme would assist farmers in retirement only in cases where, if they left land to their successor, that would increase the area of land that the successor would take over. That seems clear enough —the holding would have to be amalgamated with another before the retiring farmer could benefit. However, when the Commission was asked to explain the rationale behind that, it claimed that the scheme would operate in cases where members of the family took over the existing holding.

I ask the Minister to seek clarification on the point because it is vital that the scheme operates for the benefit of families in the way I have just described. The scheme should not apply only where there is amalgamation. Far too many farms in Wales have been amalgamated in recent years. We want to maintain the fabric of our rural society and our small and medium-size farms, provided, of course, that they are viable units, because that means that we can keep more families on the land.

We also support the environmental action programme which encourages farmers to use production methods that do not affect the environment. That is important in Wales where stocking ratios have to be reduced. In that regard, I renew my plea to the Secretary of State for Wales that the whole of my constituency should be designated an environmentally sensitive area, given its unique network of wetlands, marsh and other wildlife habitats. I know that the Secretary of State has included Ynys Môn on his short list and I urge him to include us in his final selection.

I hope that my short speech has demonstrated what is really at stake for Welsh agriculture in this debate. We are talking about sustaining a viable industry in rural Wales that cannot survive without support. We fear that the Government regard the whole exercise as one of cutting support across the board—that has been the thrust of the Minister's attitude to reform from the outset—but that would damage the interests of the farmers I represent and the communities in which they live.

I remind the Minister of his speech to the annual conference of the National Farmers Union earlier this year when he said:

"We must stop these proposals in their tracks".

The right hon. Gentleman has failed to do that and a second round of proposals is now on the table. I cannot imagine that they will be torn up so that we can start again. We are not in that position. We want the Minister to enter the negotiations positively and to take his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales with him if necessary. If the Government fail to do that, they will not only pay a heavy electoral price, but the interests of the communities that we represent will be damaged.

7.58 pm

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): One point on which I agree with the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) is that farmers, whether Welsh, English, Scottish or Northern Irish, are extremely well-informed about all things European as they affect the agriculture industry. I think back to the days when I was first a Member of the European Parliament some 12 years ago. I could get away with murder when I spoke to local National Farmers Union branches. I certainly cannot do so now. When I speak to my NFU branch this Friday I shall be well aware that I shall have to be careful of the facts as I present them and the views that I express. As the hon. Gentleman said, farmers are now extremely well informed, and that is all to their credit.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) spoke on behalf of the Liberal party. I draw attention to the amendment that he and several of his hon. Friends have tabled and particularly to the idea of a 10-year plan. The amendment says that the Liberal Democrats want to look 10 year ahead so that farmers can approach those 10 years without worry. O that it were so easy! The hon. Gentleman has great Welsh charm, but he will not con the agriculture industry in Wales, England or Scotland with such a simple solution.

Mr. Geraint Howells *rose*——

Mr. Harris: I see that the hon. Gentleman is anxious to intervene, so with the greatest pleasure I will allow him to do so.

Mr. Howells: With respect, does the hon. Gentleman agree that the majority of farmers in his constituency and mine and in the rest of Britain would like to have their confidence restored? Does he accept that one way in which that can be done is to produce a 10-year plan to ensure that the industry knows exactly which way it is going?

Mr. Harris: Of course, the hon. Gentleman's farmers, my farmers and the farmers of every right hon. and hon. Member would love to have their confidence restored. I agree that there is a lack of confidence. But what on earth does the hon. Gentleman suggest should be the basis of that 10-year plan? A few moments ago the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) said that he did not know what the position in the Soviet Union would be by the end of the week. None of us does. Can anyone build a 10-year plan that has any meaning whatever without knowing, for example, what the structure of the European Community will be at the end of the decade?

The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North does not have a clue what the structure or mechanisms of the European Community will be by the end of the decade. Of course he does not. Yet those are vital ingredients in planning the future. Does the hon.

[Mr. Harris]

Gentleman really want a 10-year plan such as the Soviet Union used in its approach to agriculture? I doubt it. The hon. Gentleman shakes his head. Of course, he does not. The amendment is a bit of Liberal Democrat connery. I do not think for one moment that his farmers or those of any other hon. Member will be taken in by it.

However, the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North is right to say that there is a lack of confidence in the future. Despite the difficulties in foreseeing the future, the Government must do something to restore confidence. I, or any hon. Member, would be a fool if we tried to pretend that everything was wonderful in agriculture. We know that all our farmers are going through one of the most difficult periods that the industry has faced, certainly within the memory of most hon. Members in the Chamber today. The difficulties are enormous. We all know about the pressure on incomes. Farmers are leaving the industry. Oh that they were not! But any party which holds out the prospect, as the Liberal Democrats seek to do, that no one would leave the industry in the next few years if this or that panacea, a 10-year plan or whatever, were implemented, is not being honest with farmers. Above all else, we must be honest with the members of the industry.

In these changed circumstances, I was heartened to read in the current edition of the NFU magazine *British Farmer* an article by the President, David Naish. It said:

"Traditionally the NFU has devoted its efforts largely to maintaining UK and EC support for our members as producers. Now, with the launch of our 'Food from the Countryside' initiative, we are looking increasingly to promote your interests"—

that is the farmers' interests—

"as sellers in the market-place.

This is an important change of emphasis."

The NFU was right to make that change of emphasis. Although better marketing is not a panacea, it is undoubtedly a contribution to helping our farmers. That has been a recurrent theme in the debate.

I was delighted with the Ministry of Agriculture's document "Our Farming Future", which was published a few weeks ago. I was particularly pleased with the pledge that

"the Government intends to offer Group Formation Grants to encourage the establishment of producer marketing groups".

As we know, some £5·4 million will be allocated for that purpose over the next three years. I hope that there is a good take-up of that money. Indeed, it is one way in which we can give back some confidence to the industry.

Another recurring theme of the debate has been environmentally sensitive areas. The hon. Member for Ynys Môn wanted the whole of his constituency to be designated an ESA. Some years ago I served on the Standing Committee which considered the Bill that introduced the concept of ESAs and I was quick to realise the potential that they offered.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The hon. Member has gone already.

Mr. Harris: Yes, indeed, he has gone already.

I was anxious that part of my constituency, Penwith moors, should be designated an ESA and I was delighted that it was part of the first wave. There is a proposal to extend that ESA and I hope that it will be considered sympathetically by the Government. I understand that extensions of existing ESAs are to be decided in the near future. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to give us some information on the timescale. I am talking about not the creation of new ESAs but the extension of existing ones.

However, I will speak about the creation of new ESAs. The Isles of Scilly, which are also in my constituency, have made a case to be designated an ESA. The interest that is being shown in the concept is a tribute to the Minister, who pioneered the idea of ESAs and persuaded the European Community to adopt it. It is interesting that so many areas now see designation as an important aid in correcting the present position in agriculture.

The impact of imports from eastern Europe was touched on briefly during the debate. I have dropped a note to my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) telling him that I intended to make a passing reference to him if I was able to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In his speech in the historic two-day debate on the European Community before Maastricht my right hon. Friend said:

"The Community should be devoting much more attention to what it can do to open its markets to the produce of those countries,"—

he was referring to eastern Europe—

"especially their farm produce."—[*Official Report*, 21 November 1991; Vol. 199, c. 468.]

I nudged my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman). She immediately took the cue and, being a bolder person than I, interrupted our distinguished colleague and took him to task.

Of course we must help the countries of eastern Europe —they are in a desperate state. However, it should not be done at the expense of our farmers. I feel very strongly —the hon. Member for Carlisle mentioned this—that the right way to approach the issue is to make aid available from the European Community and partly from this country, so that the countries of eastern Europe can help feed themselves and help feed the Soviet Union. Opening our doors to eastern European agricultural products would be wrong and would be to the detriment of our hard-pressed farmers. I hope that the Government will take that message to heart.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: There has never been a flow of goods from eastern Europe to us—the flow of goods has always been to Russia. However, eastern European countries are so short of hard currency that they cannot sell food to Russia, which has no hard currency. If we supply them with hard currency they can send food to Russia and our farmers will not be harmed.

Mr. Harris: I could not agree more.

Finally, I join all those hon. Members who have congratulated the Minister on his approach to MacSharry. When one strips away all the flummery from the other side, there is little difference between us in our support for his approach on that issue.

Like other hon. Members, I came with a list of issues provided by my local NFU branch. I do not need to go through them because my right hon. Friend the Minister dealt with them in his opening speech. I was especially reassured about what he said regarding the so-called partnership rules.

8.11 pm

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South-West): About two weeks ago I attended the annual general meeting of the Cymdeithas Defaid Mynydd Cymreig Dinbych—the Denbigh Welsh Mountain Sheep Society—held in Pentrefoelas in my constituency. They naturally took the opportunity to voice their concerns about the present state of farming generally, but especially about the problems of livestock farming in the difficult conditions of the Welsh hills, and I know of those problems. I am sure that other hon. Members will also be aware of the loss of the sheep variable premium and the problems with interest rates and prices.

Since 1980 farm incomes have fallen overall by 39 per cent. It is fair to say that farmers in constituencies such as mine have borne the brunt of such falls. In markets serving north Wales, recent prices for sheep were the same as they were 10 years ago and therefore do not allow for inflation.

I have here two British Wool Marketing Board payment advice slips for one of my farmers—one from 1980 and one from 1990. For every grade of wool the pence per kilo figure is higher in 1980 than in 1990. If we take total inflation into account, it should not be surprising that farmers are going bust and that six farmers and 16 farm workers have left the industry every day since the Government took office.

Farmers would not be quite so annoyed if they did not find the lamb that they received perhaps £15 for being retailed in a local supermarket at £80, albeit in nice, neat, little packages. It is hardly surprising that they should be unhappy at other problems such as the delay in paying ewe premium—which in my area is undoubtedly due to the closure of the Ruthin Welsh Office agricultural department—the redefinition of the less favoured areas, the increase in the MLC levy and, last but not least, the MacSharry proposals for the reform of the common agricultural policy. It is generally acknowledged that the CAP desperately needs reformation—65 per cent. of all EC funds are spent on it and, of the money spent, most is spent on the richest farmers or on storage and export restitution.

What are the Government doing to reform the situation? In the Orders of the Day the take—note motion purports to suggest that the Government have an

"intention to seek reform of the Common Agricultural Policy which will make Community agriculture more market-orientated and efficient"

putting more emphasis on environmental care and reducing the cost—words with which I cannot disagree. However, is not the reality somewhat different?

How can we stand any chance of changing the system without tabling alternative proposals—a suggestion turned down by the Government in their evidence to the Select Committee of the other place? Surely we should be giving specific alternatives to the proposals—changes to MacSharry—for example, to the headage limits proposal which is terribly damaging to farmers in my constituency.

Perhaps the Minister has the priority to remove discrimination but the important question is how. Why does he not propose a fundamental change? Why not argue for repatriation of substantial parts of the policy within overall production control targets?

Many of my Welsh mountain farmers thought that the MacSharry proposals would help them. They considered themselves to be small farmers. It is fair to say that they now realise that in EC terms they are not small. They are not small in hectarage or in headage terms, but they are very small in profit and they are desperate for a change which would allow them and their families to farm and to have a future in farming.

Other hon. Members have already referred to the meeting of the Select Committee this morning. We heard about the horrendous balance of trade deficit that this country has, not in manufactured goods, but in food that we can grow ourselves, such as eggs. For example, we heard that mushroom imports have increased from 6,000 tonnes to 34,000 tonnes in the past five years.

We need a level playing field and support for our producers. The Minister pretends that he cannot reveal his hand in the negotiations but it is not playing into the hands of other negotiators to reveal alternatives. This evening we have heard about mushrooms. The Minister is treating our farmers to the mushroom system—keeping them in the dark and dropping them in the manure.

Our EC partners do not seem to worry about giving alternatives. France is putting its views to other members. We should tell the Community that the "common" should be dropped from a CAP policy which cannot possibly cope with agriculture as diverse as that of Sweden and the almost subsistence agriculture in eastern Turkey.

If we took the "common" out of the CAP, we could ensure that our farmers would not be penalised but would be protected and would have a level playing field and a future.

8.17 pm

Mr. Malcolm Moss (Cambridgeshire, North-East): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones), with his beautiful constituency. He has the mountains and hills of north Wales and I have the flattest part of Europe if not the flattest place between here and the Urals.

Farming has faced many challenges and never more than the list that we have heard today. Like any industry, agriculture must take account of international developments in this rapidly changing world. Markets are growing more dynamic, more demanding and less protected. They will become even more influential in what has been a rather over-managed sector of the economy.

There are three elements of the international dimension, some of which have already been touched on in the debate: the general agreement on tariffs and trade round of negotiations; the problem of produce from eastern Europe, which my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) brought to the attention of the House; and reform of the common agricultural policy, the subject of tonight's debate.

In my opinion, GATT must come first. I was delighted that the Minister took the same line in his excellent speech. There are two reasons. First, GATT is a more comprehensive negotiation than MacSharry, because it takes into account the products of southern Europe which are not covered by the MacSharry proposals. Secondly, it is believed that we are more likely to get a reduction in support price, which is closer to our model and not that of MacSharry.

It is recognised by the House, the people—certainly those involved in agriculture—and by the EEC that reform of the CAP is necessary. The United Kingdom contributes £3·5 billion to the CAP and we are somewhat puzzled when our farmers ask us what they get in return. There is no ready answer. It is certainly not "common" in the sense

[Mr. Malcolm Moss]

that it applies equally everywhere. My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) drew attention to the huge subsidy of £8·5 billion provided in France. In Germany that subsidy is worth £3·2 billion. Those figures compare with the support provided in the United Kingdom of just under £1 billion.

The CAP is full of hidden national subsidies and my farmers may well ask where is the so-called level playing field. We heard the amusing story about mushroom production in Ireland—there was a hint of a hidden subsidy behind that production. Given the figures of national support for agriculture in different countries, it is not surprising that our farmers sometimes attempt to battle on an uneven playing field.

It is also important to consider the various factors at work in the United Kingdom, for example, cost recovery, which is expected by the Treasury. On poultry, the full cost recovery for salmonella inspections and the inspections of abattoirs is required under our rules, but not in any other Community country.

Through our negotiations we must not impose on agriculture a structure that reduces the ability of farmers to compete effectively. That might mean large increases in the CAP expenditure and could increase the probability of trade disputes.

The MacSharry proposals have been debated at length today. They are utterly opposed by the Conservative party and by my farmers in north-east Cambridgeshire. Those proposals are anti-economic because they penalise the larger and more efficient farm. The average size of a farm in this country is 69 hectares; in Cambridgeshire it is 80 hectares. There are about 6·8 million farmers in Europe, but the average farm is only a paltry 16·5 hectares. The MacSharry proposals will discriminate against British farmers, and certainly against the farmers of my constituency.

The proposal for set-aside presumes three size bands —up to 20 hectares, 20 to 50 hectares and more than 50 hectares. The set-aside limit will be 15 per cent., which is the rate of the existing scheme. That means that, on average, my farmers will have to set aside 4·5 hectares, for which they will receive no compensation. The exemption from set-aside on cereal holdings works out at 5 per cent. throughout the United Kingdom as against 40 per cent. in the Community. Uncompensated set-aside for cereals works out at 54 per cent. for the United Kingdom and 27 per cent. for the Community, and the cereal area to be set aside amounts to 14 per cent. of the farmed area in the United Kingdom as opposed to 9 per cent. in the Community.

The MacSharry proposals will hit north European farmers, not those of the south, because products such as wine, olive oil and cotton are not involved. MacSharry also proposes to create a class of farm pensioners, technically in receipt of social security, in order to maintain existing social and economic structures. Those proposals would cost a fortune—about 4·5 billion ecu a year more than the present overblown budget. They do not establish a clear link between support and environmental enhancement.

The arable farmers of north-east Cambridgeshire expect the Minister to negotiate CAP reform so that they are not discriminated against. They also want set-aside to be voluntary. It makes little sense to set aside some of the best-quality land in the whole of Europe if we want to retain that land in production for many years to come. They want a progressive reduction in the level of prices and other support at a pace which will enable efficient farmers to adjust. They also believe that the targeting of direct aid should be selective and they want transitional compensation.

The developments on GATT and CAP reform will increasingly force farmers here and elsewhere to be aware of, and knowledgeable about, market conditions. The negotiations on CAP reform should resist policies that place unnecessary constraints on the industry.

Many producers are exploring new ways in which to organise and co-operate. They are helping to build better ties with customers and they are looking to add value to their produce. However, as has been said, EC farmers are already competing successfully for our home market. The imports of temperate foodstuffs significantly exceed our exports of such products to EC partners.

The most forward-looking farmers are already responding to changing market needs by providing quality, volume and continuity of supply. However, one fundamental difference, which was highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucestershire, West, between this country and our EC partners is the small percentage of United Kingdom farm production that is marketed through co-operative and other types of collaborative organisations.

I was encouraged to read in the publication "Our Farming Future" that the Ministry has set up a market task force to help to define and identify product areas for new and expanding opportunities. My hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives mentioned the group formation grants—about £5·5 million will be set aside—and they will help farmers get into groups to consider their marketing practice. That is extremely welcome and those grants will be readily taken up by farmers, certainly by those in my constituency.

Whenever I speak in a debate on agriculture I always refer to the vexed question of the potato industry. I am grateful to the Parliamentary Secretary for the tremendous help he has provided to my farmers in the past 18 months by ensuring that the seed potato industry produces products of quality that farmers will continue to want to buy in the future.

The potato industry is big business in this country. Cambridgeshire produces 9 per cent. of the total crop. In the United Kingdom 98 per cent. of households eat potatoes. Production is worth £500 million at the farm gate and with added value potatoes are worth £2·5 billion in retail sales.

Unfortunately, there are still misconceptions about the role of the Potato Marketing Board. It operates a commercially free market. There are no restrictions on imports from the Community, but the board maintains a high level of home market penetration, and that has helped to keep imports down. It is also argued, however, that far too much money is siphoned off to the producer and not passed on to the consumer by cost savings. The producer share of the final retail price on loose potatoes is 33 per cent., on pre-packed potatoes it is 28 per cent. and for frozen and chipped potatoes the share is 10·5 per cent. and 2 per cent. The import penetration of processed potatoes

is not due to the United Kingdom price of potatoes, since the potato itself represents a small percentage of the final price.

Processors sometimes criticise the Potato Marketing Board because they believe that it places them at a disadvantage. They argue that if there were no supply management there would be surpluses and lower market prices. However, would the retail price to the consumer differ? If we had a lower market price the people who would suffer would be the farmers of my constituency.

The Government keep a close eye on the Potato Marketing Board. They set down three conditions that the board had to implement by the 1990s. First, they asked for non-growers representation in market management decisions. That has been brought about by the joint consultative committee, which has proved effective. Secondly, the Government asked for more flexibility in supply management to assist the development of new market opportunities and, through the introduction of the leasing system and research and development, to expand the market. That, too, has been honoured by the board. Thirdly, the board was asked to reduce its administration costs, which it has done by more than £1 million.

Do we need an EC regime for potatoes? The publication, "Our Farming Future", says that the Commission has said that it would like common arrangements in place by the end of 1992. However, it goes on to say:

"It is understood to favour a light regime to primarily establish common competition arrangements with no intervention. Such a regime would have no place for acreage quota controls or support buying functions as at present operated by the PMB".

Those words have struck fear into the hearts of farmers in my constituency, who often rely on potatoes as their main cash crop.

Is the change absolutely necessary given that we already have free trade in potatoes, if we accept that potato markets differ from country to country—nowhere else in Europe consumes the same volume as we do—and if the Committee on Professional Agricultural Organisations principles put forward by our European partners have been accepted by our board? The present system in this country has worked remarkably well for both consumer and producer interests. I hope that, in his negotiations on CAP reform, the Minister will fight strongly for the board and the potato producers of this country.

8.31 pm

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): The hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) has just delivered a thoughtful and wide-ranging speech. I agree with his starting point about the three swords that now hang over our agriculture: GATT, CAP, and the potential threat of eastern European imports. However, I differ from him in thinking that the CAP rather than GATT comes first. I hope that, when the Government make their decisions, they will do so in the best interests of agriculture rather than because they have been pressed or forced to adopt a timetable brought on by the need to agree CAP before GATT. The quality of the end product, rather than the pressure of timetables, is crucial.

I am only too well aware that the future of agriculture and, even more than that, of our rural areas is at stake. If we get it right, the quality and ability of our agricultural industry will allow the industry to take on, compete and beat any of its rivals. But if we get it wrong, there will be a clearance of people from the upland hill and rural areas of this country.

I cannot stress too much the importance of agriculture for Scotland. Its annual gross turnover is some £1·5 billion, it represents more than 14 per cent. of Scotland's non-oil revenue output, and it is a major employer. It has a massive knock-on effect on transport and ancillary industries, spilling over into schools, the provision of shops and the infrastructure of rural areas. I know how a Scottish Minister would negotiate in Europe, and I deeply regret the fact that, sadly, the future of agriculture and our country are in the hands and at the mercy of others who may not realise the importance of agriculture to Scotland's economy.

What do the Government want of agriculture? Where is their plan for its future structure? What future and desired structure do they envisage as the industry approaches the year 2000? Where are the Government's medium and long-term plans toward which the industry is being directed? I look in vain, and see only an industry that faces uncertainty through a maze of short-term, unstructured negotiating stances as we move toward the CAP negotiations.

I certainly do not want the industry to be restructured through bankruptcy. Through its own record, agriculture has shown that it will do what Governments ask it to do. It is about time that we had sensible long-term planning, given the nature of an industry that cannot be turned on and off like a tap. It has enough unknown factors to deal with without the added complexity of a Government with no long or medium-term plans for its future.

Agriculture faces the uncertainties of CAP, GATT and eastern European imports at a time of crisis and weakness. Farm incomes are at their lowest levels in real terms since the war, and are now at half their level of the early 1980s. I am told that farm investment is now half its level of 10 years ago. In allowing that to happen, we are simply storing up problems for the future. Income problems are spread across the whole industry, and every sector is affected. The hills, uplands and lowlands have seen input costs and borrowing levels rise at a time of high interest rates and falling incomes.

That is the background against which the CAP and GATT negotiations are taking place. It places an even heavier obligation on the Minister to negotiate suitable and favourable agreements. It is obvious that the CAP must be reformed, but MacSharry's current proposals are completely unacceptable and must be rejected. Under the proposals, the size, efficiency, success and strength of Scottish agriculture will lead to massive discrimination against Scottish farmers.

The National Farmers Union has detailed just how catastrophic the proposals would be. On cereals, 78 per cent. of the land set aside in Scotland would receive no compensation, compared with 27 per cent. in the rest of the European Community. More than 40 per cent. of the EC's 12 cereals area would qualify for full compensation for price cuts without participation in set-aside, whereas the figure is a mere 7 per cent. in Scotland.

Furthermore, 55 per cent. of European beef herds will have full access to special beef premiums, for all qualifying animals, under the 90 head per annum limit, yet less than 10 per cent. of Scottish herds will have access to the

[Mr. Andrew Welsh]

premium. The picture is building up of the massive problems that those proposals will cause in discriminating against Scotland.

There is a new limitation of 90 head per annum on suckler cow premiums and the application of the new stocking density limits. Moreover, 27 per cent. of hitherto eligible animals in Scotland will no longer qualify if those are implemented, whereas, in the EC, the figure would be a mere 8 per cent. The imposition of a limit of 750 head per holding on payment of annual ewe premiums would disqualify 16 per cent. of all ewes in Scotland, yet there would be virtually no impact anywhere else in the Common Market.

All sectors are affected. For example, 72·6 per cent. of EC dairy herds would qualify for full compensation for price and quota cuts, yet in Scotland the figure falls to a tiny 5·8 per cent.

Those examples clearly show that the MacSharry proposals would have a devastating effect on Scottish agriculture, individual farm incomes and the competitive position of our industry. The Minister has given no figures or details whatsoever of how he will negotiate, but he can rest assured that he will be judged on how he delivers on his previous anti-discrimination pledges. The proof of the pudding will be what he delivers in Europe.

Because of Scotland's large herd and flock sizes, together with the proposed stocking density levels, the proposals of 90-head limits would exclude 25 per cent. of male beef cattle and 27 per cent. of suckler cows from premiums. Because of the structure of Scotland's industry, it will be hit much harder than any other part of the United Kingdom. What estimates does the Minister have of the impact of the MacSharry proposals, or even of his own proposals in the document, "Our Farming Future"?

We have a right to know—the Minister should have those figures. He has civil servants to back him up, and the figures should be available. If he does not have them, it is quite disgraceful—*[Interruption.]*—even though the hon. Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) makes clucking noises. If the Government do not have the figures, the NFU certainly does. The NFU has clearly shown the devastating effect on our industry of the MacSharry proposals.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The hon. Gentleman rudely referred to "clucking noises". I was merely expressing my astonishment. If the hon. Gentleman had listened to what my hon. Friend the Minister said, he would know that my hon. Friend made it absolutely clear that he is fighting the proposals hard, but he cannot possibly say at this stage what the result will ultimately be. He made it abundantly clear—and has done throughout—that he is fighting tooth and nail.

Mr. Welsh: It is the ultimate result that worries the living daylights out of me, especially if the Parliamentary Secretary is arguing for us. He could tell us the background effects of the MacSharry proposals and the Government's estimates of those effects on the industry. On that matter, we have had a devastating silence. If the Minister cannot tell us, the NFU, which is doing the Minister's work for him, can. It has carried out a Borders survey and found that the ewe premium would result in an income reduction of £1·3 million from the pockets of Borders farmers. The survey found that there would be a loss of £400,000 on the annual sheep premium. Could not the Government tell us that?

Mr. Salmond: I ask my hon. Friend to think of any reason why detailing the savage discrimination of the MacSharry proposals and their impact on Scottish agriculture would weaken the Minister's hand when negotiating. I should have thought that detailing the effects would have strengthened his hand. How on earth would it affect his negotiating position if he were to give the net farm income figures on the impact of his own proposals set out in "Our Farming Future"?

Mr. Welsh: My hon. Friend sets out the reasons why I wish we were negotiating in Europe, not the Government. If the Minister were to detail the matters, he would strengthen his position in Europe by showing the massive discrimination and harm that would be done to the Scottish agricultural industry. I should have thought that, given the clear unfairness involved, that would strengthen his case when arguing for improvements in Europe. However, the Minister's silence is ominous and unfair on our farmers.

If the Minister does not know the details, I direct him to the NFU survey on the Borders. It showed that the £90 limit would lead to a loss of £250,000 income and the compulsory cereal set-aside proposals would lead to a £2·8 million loss. Does he not know that? Can he not tell us that? Outlining those figures in Europe would strengthen his negotiating hand. The NFU survey shows the devastating loss of a total of £6 million to our agriculture as a direct result of the MacSharry proposals. They would lead to an estimated 135 redundancies among farms in the Borders alone.

The Minister does not know the figures, but I shall tell him what farmers in Orkney found when they made simple inquiries. They found that the proposals would result in net farming incomes falling by an estimated £11,000 or £12,000. They expect that overdrafts would rise an average of about £15,500 upwards. Those are the figures that the NFU found on making simple inquiries. Why do we not hear of the Government's estimates, even of their own proposals, never mind the MacSharry proposals?

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry): I have never heard anything as pathetic as this form of statistical necrophilia. The farmers want to know that we are fighting the proposals. It serves no earthly use to recapitulate the damage that they do, and which we know they do. We have as many figures as we need to prove that to Brussels, and we are doing so. The hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) is merely parading the great terror in front of the farmers for his own purposes. I have never heard anything so irresponsible and silly; he does a great disservice to farmers, who rightly put their confidence in the Government, not him, to get it right.

Mr. Welsh: The Minister has brought the matter into the open. He is accusing the farmers of being irresponsible and silly, because the figures I have given are the farmers'. If the Minister had bothered to listen to the submissions made to him or if he cared one iota for the industry, he would know that the figures come from the farmers. I hope that, from up in the Gallery, farmers will notice how little the Government care.

The Minister's talk of statistical necrophilia shows that the Government document is not about our farming future but sadly, in many cases, our lack of farming future because of his lack of action. The proof of the pudding will lie in the deal that he wins in Europe. If he argues there as he does in the House, heaven help our farmers.

The final deal must take into account every sector of an all-industry package, because every sector of the industry is affected. The package must treat the hills, uplands and lowlands as an integrated unit—one complete industry. I look for medium and long-term planning, not the short-termism that we have seen too often, and I shall happily support the amendment.

The Scottish larger herd and flock size must be paramount. Employment and keeping people on the land, in rural districts and in family farms must be paramount in the negotiations. I want us to achieve increased secondary value for existing products, not to lose any of our market share. When we have a £6 million food and drink deficit, it is no use reducing Scottish production to replace it with cheap imports form eastern Europe. There is no sense in helping eastern European farmers while reducing and destroying our own industry.

There should be no major reconstruction of the industry while we are in the middle of a recession, which is the worst time for such a reconstruction. All we would do is transfer people from rural districts to the ranks of the unemployed in urban ones. I do not wish to see reconstruction through bankruptcies. Our environmental goals should be an opportunity for us, not a hindrance. We should not rely simply on price mechanism alone, but reduce output and link it to markets to balance supply and demand. Scottish farmers have shown the Minister how he should negotiate. I hope that he will listen to their submissions, and, for once, do something. I have seen the results that he has achieved on fishing, and I am disgusted by them—I hope that they do not set a precedent.

There is no single solution, no quick fix; we need a balanced package of measures across the whole of agriculture. The future of our agricultural and rural districts is at stake; we simply must get it right this time.

Mr. Geraint Howells: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Earlier in the debate, I was rightly pulled up by Madam Deputy Speaker because I left the Chamber after moving the amendment. I apologise to her, to the Chair and to all hon. Members.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): I thank the hon. Gentleman for that apology.

8.47 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): I suspect that I am not the only hon. Member in the Chamber with a sense of déjà vu when we debate European affairs. We have setpiece debates on the European Community budget—we had one in only 90 minutes last week, which worked out at a rate of about half a billion pounds per minute of our debate. The extraordinary factor in such debates is that at the end of them we get the feeling that there is little that we can actually do to alter the course of events. We receive the Court of Auditors' report—a well-presented and well-documented publication—and all sorts of platitudinous noises are made about it, but little action results.

Tonight we are having another ritual debate on the common agricultural policy. We also have many other futile debates on directives and regulations. At all times we have a sense of not being able to achieve any change of direction on how the European Community conducts its affairs. More and more, hon. Members will have responsibility for these matters without the direct authority to do anything about them. Is that the shape of things to come? If we advance to a single currency and monetary and political union, will we, as Members of Parliament directly answerable to the electorate, have responsibility without authority? Perhaps some hon. Members will be quite content to say to their constituents that they understand their problems and sympathise, but that there is nothing that they can do about them as the matter is out of their hands. That prospect does not appeal to me. I entirely reject it because I want to be able to help my constituents to achieve their natural and legitimate aspirations. Above all, I want to help my farmer constituents towards a prosperous future.

Such a prosperous future will not be possible under the common agricultural policy, which is fundamentally flawed and incapable of the satisfactory reform that the Government would like to see. I can certainly see no future prosperity while there is intervention and absurd support for beef under the special beef premium scheme, which is simply a further incentive to produce what the market does not want, either in quantity or quality. There can be no progress while for sheep there are headage payments which simply prop up our less efficient competitors in mainland Europe. Milk quotas which deny Britain the opportunity to be self-sufficient in milk and dairy products are also a hindrance, as are FEOGA grants which accelerate the progress towards overcapacity.

I had hoped that there was some special significance in holding the debate in Advent. It is usually held in October or November and I thought that holding it today perhaps heralded better news or that we were on the brink of a breakthrough or a decision. I was quite sad to hear my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food say that he was prepared to sit in the negotiations for months. My concern about that prospect is the effect that it will have on our erstwhile healthy, prosperous and progressive British agriculture. That period of uncertainty and the postponement of decisions that are vital to farmers will have a debilitating effect on United Kingdom agriculture.

On a more positive note, I remind the House that my right hon. Friend said that he sought the redirection of money and that available funds should be much more centred on the environment. The objective must be to achieve a solution that satisfies the public about the way in which the countryside is preserved and maintained. It must enable farmers to continue to do the job that they are trained and best qualified to do, which is producing essential food for the nation, at a price that the taxpayer is prepared to pay.

I should like to hark back to a comment by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) who instanced how, in other European nations, the amount of money provided by the national Government to domestic agriculture was very much greater than in this country. He gave the amounts per annum, which were: France £8·5 billion; Germany £3·2 billion; and the United Kingdom somewhere below £1 billion per annum.

I welcome the Minister's recent announcement about a new environmentally sensitive area in my constituency

[Mr. Christopher Gill]

which will be known as Shropshire hills. It will be greatly welcomed by farmers and the general public. It holds out worthwhile prospects in that lovely part of Shropshire.

I urge my right hon. Friend to study the interesting proposals by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. They cover the whole spectrum of agriculture and forestry and deal with the necessity to arrive at a situation where we no longer talk about a common agricultural policy but a common rural policy. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord) about the common agricultural policy. The CAP cannot survive because it is totally unrelated to the realities of a free market. I am sure that Opposition Members will be delighted to hear me speak about the free market because they were in some doubt about whether it would be possible for Conservative Members to mention that. I am proud to do so, because it holds out very much more opportunity for resolving our problems than the centralist control of which the Opposition are so fond.

The second reason why the CAP cannot survive is that all practical considerations are subordinated to political expediency. The regime is abstract in concept, political in intent and largely insensitive to practical consequences in a highly practical industry.

8.56 pm

Mr. Alan W. Williams (Carmarthen): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill), who launched a scathing attack on the common agricultural policy. I noted that several hon. Members, not only Opposition Members, were highly critical of the CAP and called for urgent reform. We all know about the crisis in agriculture which has been well described by many hon. Members. Yesterday's issue of *The Guardian* stated:

"farmers saw their incomes in real terms plummet 21 per cent in 1990 to their lowest position for 50 years. Yesterday, the NFU warned that 1990 figures would reveal a fresh 10 per cent. cut."

I do not follow *The Guardian's* statement about farm incomes being at their lowest for 50 years, because many farmers whom I know now have two cars, quite tidy houses and a reasonable lifestyle. However, during the past three or four years there has been a gross deterioration in farmers' incomes. It has occurred at a time when expenditure on the CAP is again almost out of control and increasing all the time. It poses an appalling dilemma for us all, because more and more money is spent on the CAP but the people at the receiving end do not seem to be any better off. It is a black hole into which the consumer, the taxpayer, is pouring more and more money.

I am glad that, under the pressure of the GATT negotiations, there is now serious talk of fundamental reform of the CAP. We believe in trade. Britain invented world trade when we had an empire 100 or 200 years ago. We were the big trading nation, and even today we are the second largest by way of the percentage of GDP exported and imported—we are second only to West Germany. We believe in trade and in the aims of the GATT negotiations.

If it is possible to free trade in agricultural produce we must strongly support the negotiations. The side effects of the CAP in its present form include the dumping of surpluses on third-world countries, which undermines their economies. Let us hope that we can bring that to an end through GATT.

Under the pressure of the GATT negotiations, the MacSharry proposals have been produced. They have been severely criticised by almost all hon. Members during the debate. I am not quite so hostile to them as other hon. Members are. They have some good features, especially the principle that in dire straits, where there is hardship and cuts are to be made, the broadest backs should carry the greatest burden. The cuts under the MacSharry proposals would fall most heavily upon the very big millionaire farmers—we do not have those in Wales. Furthermore, there would be protection for small farms. That principle is right, for social and environmental reasons, because small farms are more environmentally friendly.

My main criticism of the proposals is that the reforms that they suggest are far too complacent and conservative. I understand that at the GATT negotiations, for example, we may eventually settle for a 30 per cent. cut in export subsidies. The United States initially demanded 90 per cent. If we are to move towards freer trade, all those export subsidies must go, yet in the negotiations we are compromising. The reform is not sufficiently dramatic.

The other aspect of the MacSharry proposals is that the compensation terms are incredibly generous. It is amazing that, although agriculture in general faces cuts, if the proposals were adopted the CAP could cost more over the next seven years than it does now. That is an appalling position.

I do not know whether fundamental reform of the CAP will ever come about. We need to change its structure and I agree with the hon. Member for Ludlow about the need for fundamental reform—indeed, there was a strong contribution to that effect from another Conservative Member. There are too many vested interests among the 12 countries. Perhaps the Franco-German axis is too strong for us on this issue. We must start thinking in terms of reform for Britain—national and regional variations on the best way forward. The interests of Britain are different from those of France, Germany and Italy, and even more different from those of the southern European states such as Spain, Greece and Turkey, which are joining as the Community expands.

Agriculture is different from making videos, cars or whatever. Manufacturers of those can build their factories in Portugal, south Wales or Germany, and the product will be the same. But in agriculture, because the climate, crops and farm sizes are different, we should think in terms of national variations of the MacSharry plan—a national and regional flavour to any reforms.

In our proposals we mention subsidiarity. That is an important principle in all our discussions in Europe—at Maastricht, and so on. We pass on only the powers that need to be passed on. We keep as much power as we can in Britain and we devolve as much of that as we can to our regions. The interests of Wales, Scotland and other regions are different because our geography, the nature of our agriculture and the size of our farms are different.

The principle of subsidiarity means that we should build into the reform of the CAP a large dimension of national freedom. As the hon. Member for Ludlow said earlier, in France and Germany there is substantial national support for their systems of agriculture. We do not have that in Britain and we need to build it into any changes.

The other major factor in reform of the CAP must be the environment. We now realise the importance of

hedgerows, of small fields, of clean rivers and of less intensive agriculture. We must move towards environmentally friendly agriculture. Over the next 10 years, we need to move away from a production-based support mechanism to a mechanism that supports environmental protection. If the support for farmers—£2 billion or £3 billion a year or whatever we need—went to finance green premiums, to help the environment or to help less intensive agriculture, the consumer would support it. The British people are willing to pay something towards preserving an attractive landscape.

I want the size of holdings in Britain to be preserved in their present form. The amalgamation of farms has gone much too far in Britain—much further than it has in any other European country. We need to preserve our present structure and ensure that it is viable. Support mechanisms should be based on environmental protection rather than on production.

9.5 pm

Mr. Alan Amos (Hexham): There is no doubt that agriculture is going through a difficult transition period, continually hampered by a serious lack of direction and strategy from Brussels. The incomes of my hill livestock farmers are under real pressure.

British farmers are the victims of their own success. They are the most efficient in Europe, and they supply good quality produce and make a large contribution of £3·5 billion to the balance of payments. We are 75 per cent. self-sufficient. Food prices have consistently risen less than the retail prices index. Farmers' activities, which are the backbone of the rural economy, are vital to the survival of whole communities. However, there are now real problems and the solutions to them can no longer be delayed or fudged.

The CAP budget, already two thirds of the total EEC budget, is again about to breach its strict guidelines. The application of technology and over-generous subsidies, together with a decline in demand for some commodities, such as red meat, have led to levels of surplus whose financial and structural consequences for EEC farmers must now be addressed.

There is a need for a number of immediate short-term palliatives, as well as for a radical and bold long-term solution. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on fighting his corner with such determination, vigour and success for British farmers.

Let us consider what he has achieved, for example, for my farmers in the less-favoured areas. First, the green pound has been aligned with our market exchange rate. The elimination of the green pound and the absurdity of monetary compensatory amounts, which tax our exports and subsidise our imports, was a major achievement which brought considerable financial advantages to my farmers. No longer will Northumberland farmers be at an artificial competitive or financial disadvantage.

Secondly, the level of the suckler cow premium was raised to the maximum allowable under EEC rules. That money goes directly into farmers' pockets. Thirdly, there is strong support for the hill livestock compensatory allowances, amounting to £142 million in a full year. Again, that money goes directly into the farmers' pockets.

Fourthly, for the second year running, there have been two advance payments of the annual ewe premium, including the whole of the 4 ecu per ewe supplement which is worth £39 million in the less-favoured areas to help farmers' cash flows.

Fifthly, there is marketing. The Select Committee on Agriculture, of which I am a member, is about to launch a major inquiry into Britain's food trade gap, which is estimated to be about £6 billion. Over half of that can be eliminated by buying British, so marketing can produce considerable improvement and it takes on a new and dramatic urgency. The high level of import penetration of high value added products, such as Danish bacon, can be halted and reversed.

At a recent meeting with some of my local farmers, I was most encouraged to see that they gave a far higher priority to and had a greater awareness of the need for better marketing. Their role is wider than just being producers of good-quality meat. They have to widen their skills to sell and market their produce.

The market is one of growing complexity, dynamism and openness. The industry must become more responsive to consumer needs. We need an imaginative and flexible response in a situation where there are few automatic markets left for British produce. Therefore, the Government's recent announcement of £5·4 million of new grants to encourage the formation of producer marketing groups to help them get closer to the market, and the establishment in the Ministry of Agriculture of a new market task force, are to be warmly welcomed. In that regard we must ensure that food labelling throughout the food chain from the farm gate to the supermarket contains the country of origin so that British consumers can buy British.

Sixthly, on environmental controls, I congratulate the Government on their more sensible and practical approach. Unlike the Liberal and Labour parties, which would suffocate my farmers to extinction with an endless stream of unnecessary and unreasonable controls over every aspect of production, thereby putting many of them out of business, the Conservative Government have appreciated the need to protect the environment while giving proper priority to the needs of the agricultural community to remain economically viable.

Payments to upland livestock farmers through hill livestock compensatory amounts and proposals for an improved farm woodland scheme are two examples of the Government's common-sense approach. If society is to impose extra burdens on farmers' costs of production in order to preserve or go back to an idyllic view of the countryside, which may never have existed anyway, it must pay for it. As always, the Liberals try to have it both ways, but they are up against canny farmers. They will have to choose between pretending to be friends of the farmer and lackeys of the environmentalist.

There are areas that deserve further consideration, in particular, the problem of fallen stock, the costs of which are falling heavily and unfairly on farmers. The problem might be covered by environmental grants. Also, with the present demographic structure of farmers, together with their greater willingness to consider such matters, an early retirement or outgoers scheme would address the problem of over-supply, as well as allowing for mobility within the industry, and would encourage more young people to enter farming.

On the maintenance of a flexible and dynamic industry, reform of the agricultural tenancy legislation is overdue. In Northumberland, half the farmers are tenant farmers and

[Mr. Alan Amos]

we need a greater supply of land for rent to ensure the continued prosperity of the tenanted sector, with new entrants being able to come into agriculture. The farm business tenancy is a helpful way forward.

Of course, a number of measures must be taken while more long-term structural reform is implemented. For example, assistance might be given for diversification into tourism, to which Northumberland is ideally suited, as tourism is dispersed, small-scale, labour-intensive industry. The farm and conservation grant scheme and the farm diversification grant scheme are both helpful measures, as is the new farm woodland premium scheme. Equally, if farmers are to be more subject to market forces, the planning system must be flexible and sensitive enough to enable farmers to diversify. The planning process must not be used to stifle sensible development.

Another important aspect of diversification is the need for retraining in which the agricultural training board has a dynamic role to play. Extensification also has a limited role and the pilot beef and sheep extensification scheme is a useful start. Set-aside schemes must be voluntary and must facilitate the entry of young people into the industry. No scheme will be worth much if farmers are allowed merely to give over their least productive land. Quotas by definition rigidify and distort the market, so we must resist absurdities such as nitrogen and other input quotas which merely serve to raise the cost of production and undermine our ability to compete. Our job is to harness technology, not to prevent farmers from being able to sell their products.

No discussion of reform of the CAP can ignore the likely outcome of the GATT talks which may involve price cuts of at least 30 per cent. Nor should we ignore the fact that in the not-too-distant future eastern Europe and Russia will be able to realise their massive agricultural potantial once they have become fully harnessed to a market economy. Reform of the CAP will be difficult, but there must be reform.

The Government's policy statement "Our Farming Future" is a serious attempt to outline the ingredients of a prosperous British agriculture industry, which is part of the United Kingdom economy and the United Kingdom way of life. Successful reform will include elements of continuity and change. Only fundamental and radical reform of the CAP can stem its rising and unjustifiable cost. Any system that costs the British taxpayer more than £2·5 billion, only half of which reaches farmers, is an absurdity and must be abolished.

However, the aim of the reform must include four key elements. First, EEC agriculture must be made more efficient and competitive, with the objective being to get down as near as possible to the marketplace and world prices, however they are defined. We must face up to the harsh fact that the present social and economic pattern of farming in the EEC can no longer be maintained.

Although many people do not like talk of market forces, the plain fact is that in the real world we simply cannot ignore them. It is precisely because market forces have in the long run caught up with the operation of the CAP, as they inevitably would, that we are in such trouble. Only an agriculture industry set free within the framework of market forces operating more closely to supply and demand will have a secure and prosperous future. The GATT talks make that abundantly clear. We can neither perpetuate excessive levels of support, nor penalise the most efficient producers. The CAP costs the taxpayer and the consumer more than it need, through excessively high taxes and prices. It does not protect the farmers since so many are now in difficulties and the long-term trend has been for many to leave agriculture altogether. CAP reform must cut costs and prices and encourage structural rationalisation.

The fundamental problem with the CAP is that, in an attempt to keep farmers on the land, the price mechanism has become so distorted that none of its objectives is now being realised, and at a high cost. There is still gross confusion in the pursuit of the CAP's conflicting objectives. We must clearly separate the CAP's economic, social and environmental aspects.

On the economic side, there is no doubt that price support must be reduced to nearer world levels. On the social side, the desire to keep farmers on the land should be dealt with via a direct income support or other aid measures, such as voluntary set aside, which do not distort the price mechanism, for a transition period.

Other measures such as nitrate quotas would badly undermine competition. Quotas would only ever be properly and legally enforced by the United Kingdom and, again, would interfere with our competitiveness on world markets. Both should be fiercely resisted. We must give the small, inefficient, part-time continental farmers an option to leave the industry, not a subsidy to produce.

The fundamental point is that, although the cost of buying and storing surplus output is high, the largest item is the unbearable burden of export subsidies or refunds. Therefore, the nearer that we can get to world prices, the lower will be the cost of those export subsidies, and hence the cost of the total CAP.

It is precisely because British farmers have a competitive advantage in the production of sheepmeat, beef, cereals, dairy and other produce that it is in our interests to have a truly and genuinely single free and open common market in the EEC in agriculture produce.

The strength of our comparative advantage is shown by the fact that 75 per cent. of British lamb exports go to France. The abolition of the clawback will enhance our position and 1992 must become a reality of fair competition and free movement of goods without any artificial restrictions. We must abolish the green currency system and the MCAs altogether. That is not something that my farmers need fear, but rather a challenge and an opportunity to be welcomed and grasped. If the EEC is to compete in post-GATT world markets, it is not the number of farmers which matters but rather the quality of their output.

Limitations on the output of the most efficient will prevent them from taking advantage of technology and size, thereby inhibiting further productivity gains. The only effect of that would be to raise the costs of the CAP and prices. Therefore, headage limits must be fiercely opposed as they are particularly anti-British. The MacSharry package would reduce headage limits for ewe premiums in less-favoured areas from 1,000 to 750 ewes. In the United Kingdom it would mean that in the LFAs 10 per cent. of holdings would be affected and up to 15 per cent. of eligible ewes would be excluded from payment. They discriminate against extensive farms on poor lands.

If farmers are unfairly forced out of business in the less-favoured areas, the social objectives, let alone the

economic objectives, of the common agricultural policy cannot be met. The whole concept of quotas should be abandoned because of the economic damage that they cause by preventing the proper and flexible use of farmers' resources and assets and by preventing technological innovation.

The burden of reform must be borne fairly throughout the Community, both between and within member states, regardless of size and location, bearing in mind the paramount need to ensure the survival of the most efficient producers. The MacSharry proposals, which discriminate against the larger and more efficient British farmer, are totally unacceptable and must be firmly and unequivocally rejected. The MacSharry package will hit specifically those farmers most able to compete on the world market. At an average of 163 acres, British farms are five times bigger than European Community farms, at 33 acres. Specialist sheep producers in the less-favoured areas would be particularly badly hit by the package.

Reductions in support levels should be carried out at a pace that gives efficient farmers time to adjust and diversify. I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's commitment to continue financial support for the less-favoured areas in general and the hill livestock compensatory allowances in particular, where there are fewest opportunities for diversification.

Finally, farmers must be encouraged to get closer to the marketplace and be market oriented. One of the problems with the MacSharry proposals is that, instead of bringing agriculture closer to the market, they will perpetuate existing excessive levels of support for the majority of farmers. The cost of the common agricultural policy would go up, not down, so taxpayers, consumers and farmers would all lose out. We must establish a dynamic industry that is readily able to adapt to changes in the market.

Reform of the common agricultural policy is vital for farmers, consumers and taxpayers, but the proposals as they stand are not acceptable. While we must get closer to the market, the proposals continue to ignore the reality of market forces in a misguided attempt to solve undesirable social objectives. In the post-GATT world of liberalised trade we must encourage our efficient producers to compete in a more open world trading system. We want a developing, dynamic and flexible rural economy, not some stagnant, idealised rustic world—which has never existed—stifled by environmental controls. We do not want fossilised museum pieces of countryside but communities with jobs and a living, dynamic and healthy social fabric. Reform must be fair to all, equally applied by all.

9.22 pm

Mr. Frank Cook (Stockton, North): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Amos) on the vitriolic quality of his criticism of the common agricultural policy. I commend his appreciation of the need for a social dimension in any reforms that may take place. I commend his outlook to the House when we discuss issues relating to the social charter. Acceptance of a social charter might lead more easily to the achievement of the goals to which the hon. Member referred.

I apologise for the fact that I heard only about 40 minutes of the Minister of Agriculture's speech. I had to leave the Chamber to attend a Select Committee and did not return here until halfway through the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey). I may therefore not have heard points made to which I wish to refer.

The Minister made a robust speech, in which he outlined his support for and his defence of the British farmer. I heard no reference to the industries that support the British farmer, in particular the fertiliser industry. It will surprise no hon. Member to learn of my interest in fertilisers. ICI plants are to be found in my patch. Brunner-Mond came to Billingham for the anhydride deposits which it could process into nitrates. The company has been there ever since—thank God, in view of the employment that it has created in the area. To that extent, I declare a vested interest.

I have received representations from Mr. Higgs, the director general of the Fertiliser Manufacturers Association. He makes some valid points that I should like to bring to the House's attention. The FMA maintains:

"The CAP is too costly and is producing no winners: not farmers, not consumers and tax payers, and not those, such as us, who supply agriculture. Food surpluses beyond those necessary to maintain strategic reserves are a nonsense and we fully accept that reduced agricultural output will mean reduced fertiliser sales . . . The important part to be played by the market is well recognised by most people as is the need to safeguard small producers and to protect rural communities and our landscape and environment. What is often not appreciated is the need also to provide a stable and profitable agriculture that can support the infrastructure it needs . . . There is a danger that farmers will not be given adequate incentives to grow produce efficiently and environmentally responsibly. They may either be discouraged from having to care about the quantity or quality of what they produce, as their income will be guaranteed regardless or, conversely, they may be less concerned about the quality of the inputs they use, or the agricultural practices they employ, because they will be driven to compete on price in the market against imports dumped or produced to lower environmental standards . . . If the EC demands higher environmental and animal husbandry standards than elsewhere, it must not 'export' its problems by importing produce from these sources. Similarly, there must be also a risk that some imports of agricultural inputs (such as fertilisers) will be cheap because they too are either being dumped or produced without due regard for the environment: those from Eastern Europe already pose a particular threat."

Those threats have been highlighted in the debate.

The FMA maintains that cross-compliance in the environmental standards of production is essential. It concludes:

"If sustained improved economic performance is not achieved there is no prospect of existing nitrogen fertiliser manufacturing capacity being replaced.

We"—

the country—

"would then gradually become totally dependent on imported fertilisers with very serious consequences for both EC balance of payments and EC food security."

I entreat the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to take those points with him to the negotiations.

Mr. Gummer *indicated assent.*

Mr. Cook: He indicates his attention by nodding his head. In my experience, which is considerable, negotiation is based on an ability to heed, hear and respond, not abrasively but with some charm and intelligence, which is not always apparent from Ministers.

Will the Minister also make representations on this side of the water? I am referring to other hidebound attitudes that cripple some producers, and I am referring specifically to ICI. The world market in fertilisers is changing. The world is producing food more efficiently and is feeding itself better. Fertilisers are more effective, so fewer are

[Mr. Cook]

necessary. The environmental groups have also launched effective campaigns against the level of nitrates in water tables, so ICI's position in the world market is somewhat difficult.

However, in seeking to preserve its production centre in Billingham in my constituency—and thereby to preserve the jobs involved—ICI came to an agreement with Kimera which, I concede, is a Finnish-based company. It agreed that Kimera should take over the unit as a productive concern and keep it going, thus maintaining jobs for the British workers and a share for British-manufactured fertilisers within a world market—because Kimera has a major market share.

That agreement was effectively scuppered by the Minister's colleague—the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—who, on the basis that Kimera was a state-owned company, would not allow the agreement to stand. Such a doctrinaire attitude prejudices not only the jobs of my constituents but the market share that could come to a United Kingdom-based production unit. I ask the Minister to make representations on that basis to his colleagues.

I leave the Minister with a thought—my "finally", if I may use that term—on the common European currency which has already received attention. It might interest the Minister to know that ICI estimates its costs each year for the negotiation of fiscal exchanges to be as much as £60 million, and probably as much as £80 million. If that is the cost to ICI, the cost to other British industries—regardless of the merits or demerits in other aspects—will be considerable.

9.31 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): The Government spokesman who will be replying to the debate tonight knows Europe very well because he served as a member of the European Parliament, was chairman of the European Agriculture Committee and now serves on the Council of Ministers. He knows exactly what Europe is about and what is being done in Europe.

It would be a good thing if this debate were to be settled in Europe on the merits of agriculture, on the merits of farmers' needs and on the merits of establishing a viable agriculture industry across the whole of Europe. However, if anybody in the House believes that that is how it will be settled, he is living in a fantasy world. It will be pure politics that will settle this matter in Europe and all the arguments—however credible—will not alter political decisions that have already been taken. In introducing his proposals Mr. MacSharry seems to have very strong backing from the Commission and, at the end of the day, is really a spokesman for it.

The common agricultural policy lends itself to gigantic unfairness and colossal fraud. The House would do well to realise the amount of money that is squandered and lost to the Community because of colossal frauds. There has been an exposure in the Irish Republic which has shaken even the Government and has put into question the future of the Taoiseach. I refer to the Goodman controversy.

The *Meat Trades Journal* refers to the record of a Goodman accountant called Patrick McGuinness. The journal reports that

"he told the inquiry into the Irish beef processing industry that he had gone public with his allegations of irregularities to save the company from further financial difficulty."

That is an amazing confession. The report continued:

"He claimed that because of its reliance on intervention abuses, the company had lost focus in dealing with the business in a commercial sense."

It was no longer a commercial propostion. It was guided by the need to manipulate the structures of intervention to make vast profits.

Mr. McGuinness said that a group known as the "A-team" was employed illegally to re-box intervention beef and aids to private storage. It seems that Larry Goodman's beef undertaking in the Irish Republic has a system of re-boxing intervention beef and aids to private storage beef. That says something about how the structure lends itself to fraud.

Mr. McGuinness also pointed out that tax-free payments of IR£3 million were made to the employees in one year. How can that occur without some Government winking at what is happening?

Sir John Farr (Harborough): What is the equivalent of IR£3 million in sterling?

Rev. Ian Paisley: The punt is not as valuable as the pound. However, as I come from a part of the United Kingdom, I do not really know, but I think that the punt is worth perhaps 90p or 98p. It is not far from the pound sterling.

Mr. McGuinness also said that accounts were kept from the company's auditors to hide those payments to the employees. Bogus stamps were used to upgrade carcases and increase their value. Weights on intervention documents were increased and decreased to record required yields after deboning. Larry Goodman, the chief executive, was present at one meeting when the practice of altering weights was discussed. It was accepted that that was the thing to do.

That is a colossal fraud in the Irish Republic under the CAP. It is so serious that one must conclude that there must have been some connivance with the officials who should have been monitoring the position.

Mr. Gill: There is a strong body of opinion in the House that, to prevent such massive abuse and fraud in the system, we should appoint more inspectors and accountants to check on the details. Does my hon. Friend believe that that is the right way to proceed, or does he believe that the system is impossible to control and should be abandoned?

Rev. Ian Paisley: My conviction is that that is impossible to control. It is a fact that when that fraud was being carried out at the Goodman-owned air-freeze coldstore in Dublin in 1988, the supervisor admitted that no one from the Department of Agriculture was present. The officer who should have been there was conveniently absent. As I said, that looks like connivance.

I have a large meat producer in my European constituency. When I visited that firm to see its operations some time ago, I noticed a group of men standing around. I asked who they were and was told, "Those are the veterinary men. We must have them here to look after Common Market interests." I believe that there were six of them in one room. I wondered how many veterinary officers I would find if I went to France. When I was in France the other day, I was told that there are none at all

in some French factories and that they do not even know of their existence. When that type of thing is going on, how can we have any faith in the common agricultural policy?

National Governments are supposed to deal with fraud, but if they have neither the ability nor the will to deal with it, how can we ever have a common agricultural policy that is acceptable to us all?

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has an impossible task. If he was in charge of agriculture and answerable to this House, he could take care of the different regions that make up the United Kingdom. One hon. Member tonight said that he represents the flatlands. He spoke of the difficulties facing his farmers. We have also heard hon. Members representing Welsh constituencies talking about the uplands and their difficulties. We then heard a voice from Scotland underscoring the peculiar difficulties of farmers there. I am a voice from Northern Ireland and say simply that our farming operations are also greatly different—for example, we do not have tenant farmers. On the point about small farms, I advise the House that Ulster has always had family farming units. I know that the continent has what are called "small farms", but they are pocket farms located in back gardens. They are not really farms.

I should like to put my worries about agriculture in Northern Ireland to the Minister. Perhaps he will tell the House how many times he has met the Minister from the Northern Ireland Office who is responsible for the interests of Northern Ireland's farmers. How many times when negotiations are taking place has the Minister had serious discussions with his colleague about the specific needs of Northern Ireland's farmers? As hon. Members representing Scotland and Wales have said, there is a fear that the voices of the different parts of the United Kingdom are not being heard.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is in an impossible position because he is not master in his own house. Indeed, this House is not master of the situation and never will be, given the present set-up. That is why it is difficult to achieve a settlement that will help our farming communities.

The tragedy is that farming in Northern Ireland has suffered such a cut because of the common agricultural policy. Northern Ireland has intensive pig and poultry farming. The pig industry has been cut to almost a third of what it was. The laying flock has been reduced by millions of laying hens. We are being cut back simply because we could not buy feedstuffs on the world market as reasonable prices.

Those reductions took place, but the farming community took up the struggle and did everything that the Government told it to do. It was encouraged to borrow money at the bank and concentrate its efforts on beef and milk. It did that so well, that we now have surpluses. Now it is told, "You did it too well so we will fine you." The alarming proposal, made from some sections of the House, is that in some way the farmer is to be punished.

If the farming community must ease off from farming, it must have proper compensation. If farming is to have some regularity and viability, we must take that easing off at a reasonable pace. The farmers must be cushioned against serious financial pressure. I have farmers going out of business every week. I have talked to bank managers who encouraged those farmers to go ahead and do this, that and the other thing. Now that the dark day has come, farmers are being pushed off the homesteads which had been in their families for generations. The House has a responsibility to those people. Where do we put them? Where do they go? We do not have employment for them in Northern Ireland. No part of the United Kingdom has employment for them. The position is difficult and such factors must be kept in mind when we are discussing it.

The farmers in Northern Ireland have been efficient and have the best record in animal health of any part of the United Kingdom. They have worked hard and carried a heavy load. I make a plea tonight on their behalf and I trust that their case will not be forgotten in the negotiations.

I happen to believe that there should be a plan for farming. We cannot sit here and say, "All the difficulties are so great that we cannot make any plan." The Government should have aims and objectives and should tell us what they are. We should aim for the achievement of those objectives, no matter how difficult. I trust that the Minister will give some encouragement to the farming community. It needs encouragement and something to give it hope in this dark night on which it cannot see any stars. I trust that the Government will be a star to it to guide it to a better daybreak, if that is possible. I see great disbelief on the faces of the Scottish contingent tonight.

9.48 pm

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): It is a privilege to be called in a debate in which so many speeches have been made. One of the notable features of the debate has been the agreement between Back-Bench Members on both sides of the House. Another feature is that up to six Welsh Members of Parliament, representing the Labour party, Plaid Cymru and the Liberal party, have spoken but not one Conservative Welsh Member has spoken.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Are there any?

Mr. Edwards: There are now only six as a result of the famous by-election victory last May in Monmouth. It is significant that the Welsh farmers can no longer look to the Welsh Conservative party to represent their interests.

I have the privilege to represent a beautiful area of south-east Wales which has a fine agricultural tradition. Not only is the Monmouth constituency a beautiful area but it contains within it one of the designated areas of outstanding natural beauty to which several other hon. Members have drawn attention.

The aims of an area of outstanding natural beauty are to ensure that the environment is protected and enhanced. Protection of the environment takes precedence over development. I hope that hon. Members from both sides of the House will be keen to support the early-day motion that I have tabled to protect areas of outstanding natural beauty and to draw people's attention to their significance.

The area of outstanding natural beauty in my constituency is beautiful for one reason—because of the role of farming. We owe a special debt to the farming community in all constituencies where the environment is beautiful as a result of their work.

Most of us object to MacSharry's proposals and when discussing those and reform of the common agricultural policy we should consider new forms of support for farming, which will protect and enhance the natural environment and will reward farmers for their vital work in maintaining the countryside—for which they get little recognition and scant reward.

[Mr. Edwards]

We cannot discuss the CAP without referring to the Government's economic policy. Agriculture policy is inextricably linked to economic policy. The problems that farmers face are inextricably linked to the fact that they have been the victims of the Government's inept economic management in recent years.

Farmers are worried about potential loss of income under the MacSharry proposals, which will exacerbate the loss in income that they have suffered due to the Government's economic policies.

In recent years Welsh Office Ministers have boasted about an economic miracle in Wales—it was short lived. There was an economic miracle in manufacturing and new technology for a short while, but it never benefited the Welsh farming community.

The state of Welsh farming has been clearly spelt out in recent publications. Research by the department of agricultural economics at University college, Aberystwyth shows the significance of agriculture as a form of employment in rural Wales. It states:

"In many parts of rural Wales between a third and a half of the economically active population depend at least partly on the farm community for their incomes."

But it also says:

"Total farm incomes in Wales have fallen by 17 per cent. between 1977 and 1990 when all costs including wages, rent and debt servicing are taken into account."

According to Peter Midmore of University college, Aberystwyth:

"The main reason for the acute fall in total farm incomes has been high interest rates",

which were imposed by the Government. Interest rates may have decreased in recent months, but that does not alter the fact that many farmers are in trouble because of the Government's absurd policy of increasing interest rates for so long.

The farming labour force in Britain has declined from 71,000 to 67,000. The number employed full time in agriculture has declined by 13 per cent., but there has been an increase in the number of part-time workers, who now constitute 55 per cent. of the farming work force. That trend may be inevitable because of changes in farming, but it has worrying implications for the future, for example, for the social security and pension entitlements of people who only earn their living on a part-time basis.

The MacSharry proposals have been widely criticised in the House. They aim to reduce agricultural support, yet protect smaller farmers. As hon. Members have said, farms in this country are likely to lose out because they are generally "too large" in MacSharry's terms.

The Commission's proposals will discriminate against efficient family farms in Monmouth. I acknowledge the findings of the National Farmers Union, which estimates that the proposals will cause farm incomes to fall by 30 per cent.

Farmers in Monmouth believe that it is essential that the limits on milk and beef quotas are removed. Farmers in my constituency do not benefit from less-favoured area payments—the average farm size is much larger than the size that will be protected under the MacSharry proposals. It is always sad to hear from farmers or members of their families about the dim prospects that they now envisage for their industry and their family businesses. That applies not only to the sons of farmers, but to their daughters, many of whom would like to maintain the farming tradition. It is sad that there is little prospect of their being able to do so.

Even if many people are unable to continue directly in farming, they would like to continue to make their livelihood in the countryside. There is a tremendous challenge to redirect resources into training and away from direct agriculture to countryside management and environmental protection. The training and enterprise councils and educational institutions face the challenge of offering young people new employment and educational opportunities in the countryside.

Labour's proposals to introduce green premiums to reward farmers for their vital work in countryside management will greatly help to encourage diversification. Farmers tell us that they are usually better off under a Labour Government. In a few months' time we will have that Labour Government and the farmers in my constituency will welcome that.

9.55 pm

Mr. Ron Davies (Caerphilly): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards). He came to the House as a result of a by-election in June, and this is the first time that we have had an opportunity to debate agriculture. During the by-election campaign, I know that my hon. Friend worked hard to secure the confidence of the agricultural community of Monmouth. I am pleased to note that he is determined to represent it in debates. I am sure that, when the general election comes, he will find that his rural community repays the work that he has put in and that he will be returned as the Member for Monmouth.

My hon. friend the Member for Monmouth was right to say that there has been a great deal of agreement in the debate. Central to it is opposition to the MacSharry proposals. We oppose them because they discriminate against the United Kingdom and damage our interests.

We accept in good faith that both Ministers will negotiate to the best of their abilities in Brussels. We accept that they will do their best to secure the best interests of Britain and Britain's farmers. The final judgment will be given once we know the outcome of those negotiations. I am sure that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will co-operate to ensure that we have an opportunity to debate those proposals, when agreed. That debate will provide a sharper examination of them and the negotiations.

I was interested at the way in which the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells) moved the amendment on behalf of the Liberal Democrats. I have a great deal of sympathy with the spirit behind his speech because he speaks as a true representative of farming interests in his constituency and throughout Wales.

I believe that the Liberal Democrats have made an error in the way in which they have framed the amendment. Their amendment would delete the last five lines of the Government motion, which means that all references to environmental care would be removed. However, there is no reference in the Liberal Democrat amendment to providing payment or support for farmers in respect of their work in caring for the environment.

We must try to square a circle, because we must decide how to provide support for farmers without encouraging

over-production. No one has suggested the means of doing that other than by making environmental payments. I do not know whether the Liberal Democrats made an error when drafting their amendment or whether it represents an oversight. Perhaps they are trying to have it both ways.

I believe that the Liberal Democrats would serve the interests of the House well if they recognised the error of their ways and withdrew the amendment without pushing it to a vote, because I accept what the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food said. He felt that if we were to show opposition to his stance we would somehow weaken his negotiating position. The Opposition are not prepared to take any action that would weaken the Minister's negotiating position, so if the amendment is pressed to the vote, we shall join the Government in defeating it. We shall take whatever course of action is necessary to ensure that we demonstrate our support for the Government to strengthen their negotiating position.

My hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth referred to the fact that no Conservative Members representing either the Principality or Scotland were present in the debate. The debate has shown that there is now a considerable malaise within the Tory party. Tory Members have been thin on the ground in this debate, and I was particularly saddened to note that no Welsh Office Minister has been present throughout the debate. Their sole representative of Scottish interests was the hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth), who drifted in and drifted out again without even listening to the debate.

There has been not a single contribution from a Scottish or Welsh Conservative Member. For most of the evening, there have been more Opposition Members present than Members on the Government Benches, which shows that the Conservative party no longer represents farming interests in the House of Commons.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth said, there have been speeches from the Labour party, the Liberal Democrats, Plaid Cymru, the Scottish National party and the Democratic Unionist party, but we have heard no voice from the Tory party representing the far-flung reaches of the United Kingdom.

The hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) was the first to speak in the debate. He refused to give way to me, which I understand and for which I do not bear him any malice or ill will——

Dr. David Clark: Why not?

Mr. Davies: Because I think that he is a jolly nice chap —an opinion that I formed a long time ago. He fought the parliamentary seat of Bedwellty in 1970 and lost by only 23,000 votes, but he believed that he would come back and win it at the next election. Since then, he has always had a spirit of optimism and, to do him credit, he was looking on the bright side tonight. He used to be the Minister's Parliamentary Private Secretary, and I sincerely hope that he gets his job back—I mean no disrespect to the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway).

The sterling qualities of the hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West are that he is even-tempered and good-natured. If he were sitting behind the Minister, some of those qualities might flow over the Benches. We might then find that the Minister is less irascible than he was tonight.

Before I do the hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West too much good, may I tell the Minister that he missed the hon. Gentleman's concluding remarks. The hon. Gentleman is very close to the farming community, and he said that he accepted that we shall end up with a MacSharry derivative. However strongly the Minister intends to oppose the MacSharry proposals, he has not yet convinced the former PPS to the Minister for Agriculture that we shall end up with anything other than a MacSharry derivative.

The hon. Gentleman also said that the farmers in his constituency were very angry. I know they are, because they rang me today and asked me to address a meeting in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. I am going along to it next Tuesday. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that farmers in his constituency are angry now, he should wait until Wednesday morning, when they will be even angrier. If the hon. Gentleman is free next Tuesday, I extend an invitation to him to come along. If he is short of a pair, I shall have a word with my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) and we can make a mutual arrangement so that the hon. Gentleman and I can pair and discuss agriculture in his constituency.

The farmers in the constituency of the hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West are angry, and they have every reason to be so, because farm incomes in Britain have fallen to an all-time low. Confidence and investment in the industry have almost collapsed. Our agricultural infrastructure has been undermined, our markets have been exposed to European competition, and precious little has been done to equip us to compete with them for our and their main markets.

Agriculture now faces a perilous future given the uncertainty caused by the CAP reform, talks on the general agreement on tariffs and trade and the productive potential of the former eastern bloc. The man almost uniquely responsible for that state of affairs, the present Minister, has excelled himself tonight in the complacency with which he approached the debate. During the past 10 years, when he took time off from his post as chairman of the Conservative party, this man was the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, and Minister of State, MAFF, and, for the past couple of years, he has been Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. If there are any deficiencies in the state of British agriculture, and if there is one person to blame for its decline in the past 10 years, the Minister certainly cannot excuse himself.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North referred to the Smithfield show. On Monday, the president of the National Farmers Union said at the show:

> "We are limping into fiercer competition which lies ahead —with potentially disastrous effects on the efforts we are making to reduce the present adverse trade gap in food."

I think that we can accept that, in those circumstances, the president spoke with authority. Of course, he does not do so when he speaks as the Conservative candidate for the local county council—but the Minister will have to take up that matter with him.

Mr. David Naish, the president, said that the NFU estimates suggested that, for the second consecutive year, farming incomes had fallen in real terms to a new post-war low and were now less than half those of the early 1980s. He said that that fact ruled out an early recovery in farm investment, which had sunk to half the level of 10 years ago. That lack of investment is inflicting long-term damage on the ability of Britain's farming and the food industries to compete. Faced with economic difficulties and

[Mr. Davies]

uncertainty about the industry's future, farmers are unable to plan ahead, at a time when investment and new initiatives are crucial to survival. The Government's inaction has caused the representatives of the industry to cry out for leadership. It is a matter of much regret that the Minister has not shown such leadership this evening.

The reorganisation of the CAP was inevitable; we have advocated and welcomed it. We do not expect the Minister to take sole responsibility for the drop in farm incomes that resulted. Only last February, at the annual general meeting of the NFU, the Minister said:

"we must spell out how we want to reform the CAP."

We are still waiting for him to do so, and we have asked him about it tonight. Month after month, we have asked him to spell out how he intends to reform the CAP, but we are still waiting.

At the heart of the matter lies our gross contribution in 1991 of £2·4 billion to the CAP. Some £1·6 billion was returned—that averages £9,000 for each British farmer, although not every one of them received that amount. The Government have failed to manage the change, give coherence to Britain's agricultural strategy or ensure value for money.

We should have common objectives in the House. We are agreed on the need to ensure the continuation of the family farm, maintain efficiency in the industry, protect the environment, ensure food quality and maintain the structure of family farming intact. On all those tests, by any objective standards, the Government have failed farming during the past 10 years. According to the NFU, for the second consecutive year farming's real income will fall significantly this year. The industry's income is now at its lowest level in the post-war period and is about half the average that it was in the period 1980-85. The NFU president speaks of the industry's "bleeding to death", with the cost of inputs continuing to rise and the value of agricultural products standing still or falling.

Using 100 reached in 1985 as the constant enables us to see the dramatic fall in real terms in British farm incomes compared with those of France and Germany. These are valid comparisons, because farmers all over the country ask me what is so unique about Britain's representatives. They say that it is always British industry that gets the rough end of the stick, while French and German representatives can protect their interests.

British farm income has dropped from 118·8 in 1984 to 93 in 1990—a fall of 18·8. In France, income has increased from 100 in 1984 to 107·5 in 1990, an increase of 7·5. In Germany, farm income has increased from 102·5 in 1984 to 115 in 1990, an increase of 12·7. Our farmers have been suffering and going out of business while those of our main competitor countries have been making hay at our expense, if I may use that expression.

Anyone who doubts that agriculture is moving deeper into recession should consider the number of people leaving the industry. Over the 10 years to 1990, the industry has cut its whole-time hired labour force by 30 per cent.—a loss of about 43,000 rural jobs. The June census conducted by the Ministry confirmed another large loss in farm employment this year. The national farm is losing full-time jobs at the rate of 1,200 per month.

While farming income and jobs are decreasing, food prices and supermarket profits are increasing. In real terms, using 100 reached in 1985 as the constant, British food prices have increased from 100 in 1985 to 125 in 1990. In France, the increase has been 16·2 per cent., but in west Germany it was only 4·9 per cent. Britain has averaged an increase of 4·7 per cent. a year in food prices over the past six years, France has averaged 3 per cent. and west Germany has averaged 1 per cent. However, unlike French and German farmers, our farmers have not had any increase in income over the past five years. They have been losing income.

We are entitled to ask who is benefiting from these quite dramatic food price increases, and the answer must be the supermarkets, whose owners have been described by one of my hon. Friends as the law-breakers, the people that the Government refuse to make comply with the law of the land.

Mr. Alison: If the hon. Gentleman's figure of 3 per cent. a year for France is correct, it adds up to a higher figure than the total increase that he has just quoted.

Mr. Davies: If the right hon. Gentleman looks at the figures that I quoted, he will see that that is not the case.

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): Add them up.

Mr. Davies: I have added them up, and I spent a great deal of time today carefully working them out. If the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) wishes to take issue with me on that, I am prepared to give way to him.

The supermarkets have benefited at the expense of agriculture. Let us examine Sainsbury. Sainsbury's profits have increased from £45 million in 1980 to £787 million in 1990. In that time, it has increased its profit margin from 3·7 per cent. to 9·6 per cent. Who is being squeezed for that tripling of profit? The answer is the private producers. The people being squeezed are the farmers who see the prices of their products at auction being driven down by the supermarket buyers. The same applies to Tesco, whose profit margin has doubled, while Argyll's profit margin has tripled.

As I have said, reorganisation of the CAP was inevitable, but the way in which British farmers have been failed in so many other ways, especially the way in which the Government have neglected the rural and agricultural infrastructure, was not inevitable.

To be successful in the modern competitive world, all industries have to research and develop new products and techniques. Agriculture is no exception, yet, as a conscious act of public policy, the Government set about cutting the resources devoted to agricultural research and development. The money spent on R and D at the Agricultural and Food Research Council has declined by 30 per cent. in real terms since 1979, with a cut of more than 1,200 AFRC scientists in the past decade. The Government have halved the number of scientists employed at the Institute of Food Research since 1986.

Over the past year, in the run-up to the single market, with all the pressures of competition, the need for new product lines, the new demands for animal welfare and the continued demand for greater efficiency and environmental awareness, the research budget has been cut yet again.

The twin pressures of declining incomes and a reduction in public support for the infrastructure have been responsible for the great insecurity and uncertainty that face our farming industry.

The sheep sector illustrates the difficulties experienced over the past 10 years. It was mentioned by my hon. Friend

the Member for Clwyd South-West (Mr. Jones) and is close to the heart of the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North, who moved the amendment.

In 1981, the auction price of new season lamb was £1·81 per kilo, and the equivalent joint in Sainsbury's would have cost £3·35 per kilo. Last week at auction, the average price was £1·44 per kilo—83p at 1981 prices—while at Sainsbury's this week the price was £5·25 per kilo. Not only has the auction price for lamb decreased in both cash terms and real terms, but Sainsbury's has increased its retail leg price from 85 per cent. above the wholesale price in 1981 to a massive 264 per cent. higher than the market price. That is a clear sign of how the return to farmers has been depressed and the supermarkets are making profits directly at their expense. The Government have sat idly by and watched that exploitation happen. It is about time that they started examining the role played by supermarkets in the food chain as a whole.

I shall finish soon, as I understand that Ministers are becoming a little restless. I shall consider not so much the views that have been expressed in the House—destructive though those are of the Government's reputation—as the comments made by other people about the Secretary of State and the way that he runs his Department.

The right hon. Gentleman was a little upset about *The Sunday Times* earlier in the debate. I can understand why he has something of a vendetta against the media, because they do not think very highly of him. I am not sure whether he and his hon. Friends have seen the quotation in *Farming News* on 20 September 1991, but an article under the name of Jim Padfield, about the Secretary of State's cricket box, makes interesting reading:

"Now, many of you might have missed this—it's a busy time of year—but apparently John Gummer does have, in his office, a filing cabinet containing all his policies. This is indeed known, in civil servant circles, as John's cricket box. However, I have been assured that this designation has not arisen because it contains balls, as rudely suggested by the media."

I can understand why the Minister is a little upset—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] I am referring to cricket balls, and I hope that hon. Members were not suggesting anything else.

Their Lordships are upset by the Minister. The Duke of Westminster attacked the Tory attitude. An article says:

"The Duke of Westminster took a swipe at the government during a prestigious farm awards ceremony this week over its attitude to the farming industry. 'Perhaps our Government is simply not aware how serious the problems are that are facing our industry, the landscape and the people working in it', he told guests at the NatWest NFU Venturecash award ceremony in London on Monday.

The comment appeared to be a taste of things to come in the Duke's report on rural businesses".

The Tories are not very happy with the Minister. I was delighted to read in an edition of *Countryweek* on 28 November the views of Lord McAlpine, a distinguished former treasurer of the Tory party. I know that many farmers are concerned that the Minister of Agriculture says one thing in public and negotiates another in private. Lord McAlpine was the treasurer of the Conservative party when the Minister was the chairman of the Tory party. Lord McAlpine says, talking about the removal of the former Prime Minister—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] This is very relevant. Lord McAlpine says:

"Mr. Selwyn Gummer—why did he behave like this, first plotting the downfall of Mrs. Thatcher, then crying all over the place after the event"——

[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] I am quoting the words of Lord McAlpine. They are relevant to the Minister's attitude in the agriculture debate.

Sir Hal Miller (Bromsgrove): Does the hon. Gentleman recall that I was vice-chairman of the Conservative party at the time to which he refers? I assure him that Lord McAlpine spent almost no time at No. 32 Smith square, and could therefore have had only extremely scant knowledge of what went on.

Mr. Davies: That may be. As my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) said, all this demonstrates the deep divisions within the Conservative party. I refer to Lord McAlpine's account, because it gives a clear insight into the Minister's negotiating techniques. He is involved in delicate negotiations at this moment. The quotation is brief, and I have already read half of it, so I hope that I shall be allowed to finish.

Mr. Marland *rose*——

Mr. Davies: One sees how confused the Conservative party is.

Mr. Speaker: Order. May we have the brief quotation? It does not seem to be very relevant. I have no doubt that the hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) may then wish to comment.

Mr. Davies: That is sensible, and I am happy to follow your guidance, Mr. Speaker.

Lord McAlpine says:

"Mr. Selwyn Gummer—why did he behave like this, first plotting the downfall of Mrs. Thatcher, then crying all over the place after the event? This seems to me entirely within the parameters of his character as I know him. I remember his dealings in the downfall of Cecil Parkinson and how he treated Cecil at that moment"—

[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] I am about to come to the punch line.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This has nothing to do with the subject of the debate. It does not seem to be very relevant.

Mr. Davies: When I give the punch line, Mr. Speaker, you will see precisely how relevant it is.

The punch line is:

"Entirely typical of the chap. Mr. Major, do not go for a walk in St. James's Park with this man, let alone the jungle."

One can understand why the farmers are upset.

Mr. Marland: The hon. Gentleman told the House that he had a special invitation earlier this evening to speak to farmers in my constituency. I beg that, when he goes to my constituency, he makes a speech exactly the same as the speech he is making now, so that my return to this place after the next election will be guaranteed.

Mr. Davies: I am delighted that the prospect has crossed the hon. Gentleman's mind that he might lose his seat and one day might have to revert to doing an honest day's work.

Mr. Martlew: Is it not a fact that, on one occasion, the hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) said in the House that salmonella was a dangerous orgasm, and that we should not take too much notice of what he says?

Mr. Davies: I think that I had better stick to my own speech rather than be led down these attractive by-ways.

[Mr. Davies]

The Government have lost the confidence of the British farming industry. We can see the depth of the divisions within the Conservative party. We can see that the Minister of Agriculture is not capable of adopting a tone and a method of argument to unite the House to strengthen his negotiating position. Their Lordships are throwing up their hands in distress at the actions of the Minister of Agriculture. The media are turning against him.

The National Farmers Union disapproves totally of the way in which the Minister of Agriculture is conducting his affairs. I refer briefly to an article in *Big Farm Weekly* of 17 October 1991. It is headed "Naish opposes calls to snub John Gummer." Naish of course, is the president of the National Farmers Union. The article said:

"John Gummer should not be invited to address the NFU AGM, say many of the union's council delegates. . . . One council delegate said that people must be blind and stupid not to see through Mr. Gummer's 'weasel words'."

I suspect that that anonymous NFU delegate speaks for many farmers in Britain in 1991.

10.26 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry): I shall do my best to say twice as much in half the time. I do not think that that should prove too difficult a task. For a minute I thought that the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) was going to rise to the occasion. He said that he opposed Mr. MacSharry's proposals in that they were discriminatory. He said that he trusted my right hon. Friend and myself to negotiate to get the best in the interests of British farmers and he said that he would vote with us tonight. We are grateful for that. It is important that a message goes from the whole House and we shall count carefully to see how many have stayed to take part in the vote.

Having got to the big moment, the hon. Gentleman collapsed in a heap. We then had an irrelevant knock-around for 20 minutes which I hope will be read by the farming community so that farmers may see what constructive proposals were put forward about the prospects they would face in the unfortunate event of there being a Labour Government.

The hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) never fails to disappoint. He remained true today. He repeated that the essence of MacSharry would be accepted. I wonder whether in his heart he would like it to be accepted because that would make his political task so much easier. He repeated his horror story about all the things we cannot eat, about meat and BSE. In every speech he talks about the disasters in that area. Farmers know that he is a great disaster-monger.

I keep a note of all the Opposition's spending promises. The hon. Member for South Shields reproached us for not checking every farm every year for set-aside. There are 3,500 farms. I take it that it would be Labour policy to check every farm every year. I would be interested to know the cost and the number of officials who would be required to do that. I wonder whether farmers would welcome that increase in the burden of bureaucracy.

The hon. Gentleman then attacked the best part of the set-aside programme, the conversion and diversification schemes. It must make sense to do our best to get land more permanently out of production, remembering that technology always endows us with an underlying yield increase of 2 per cent. per year.

The hon. Gentleman accused my right hon. Friend of aggression and later of irascibility. The hon. Gentleman offers his own alternative—a farmer-friendly, animal-friendly, environment-friendly, consumer-friendly, Euro-friendly, Uncle-Tom-Cobbleigh-friendly alternative—anonymity. He is the Doctor Who of the Labour Front Bench.

If the hon. Member for South Shields failed to rise to the occasion, I was genuinely disappointed by the remarks of the hon. Member for Ceredigion and Pembroke, North (Mr. Howells). I give him credit for being genuinely concerned about these matters. Where he has felt that the Government have performed well he has never failed to give us credit for it, and we are indebted to him for that. I know how genuine is his concern that we should be able to give farmers some signposts. We all recognise that they live in a world in which uncertainty appears to be compounded by uncertainty.

But a 10-year plan is not a realistic option. What assumptions can be built into it? What assumptions should be built in about how many member states there will be in the EC; the GATT outcome; the situation in eastern Europe and the level of liberalisation for imports into the Community; the development of biotechnology, one of the greatest developments in agriculture; and dietary and consumption trends? A 10-year plan cannot be anything other than a wholly speculative document.

But better was to come. The hon. Gentleman said that he would take his hon. Friends to Brussels to persuade Mr. MacSharry to adopt his party's proposals. One of my hon. Friends asked what they were. I listened carefully to the response because we were all anxious to know. He said: "At another day I might inform the hon. Gentleman what our policies are". That is a reassuring statement. We are all deeply reassured to know that at another day we will know what are the Liberal Democrats' policies. That is what is known as precision.

Mr. Geraint Howells: It is unbelievable that history is repeating itself in the House. The two major parties are defending each other's policies against the wishes of the Liberal Democrats and the majority of British farmers who want confidence to be restored, stability in agriculture and a 10-year plan. If the Government do not look after the interests of the agriculture community, we will do so.

Mr. Curry: I should have thought that if the Liberal Democrats wished to restore farmers' confidence, it should seize the occasion of what is virtually the annual agriculture debate in the main debating forum in the land to reveal their policy. But the hon. Gentleman did not do that. When the hon. Gentleman was challenged by Labour Members on the cost, he said, "It is very difficult". That is the summary. We shall find out what the Liberal Democrats' policy is later and it is difficult to give the cost. That is a song to sing in the valleys and I shall make sure that it is known fairly far and wide.

It is curious that from a party which proclaims its adherence to the federal principle we get the great exposition of the disaster story which is MacSharry. If there was a party which should be predisposed to accept those proposals it is the Liberal Democrats. For them the F-word is "fraud".

I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Alison) for his kind remarks. As he knows, we have been concerned about the fate of the mushroom industry in his constituency. I shall devote my attention to that in future. I realise that it is an important matter and I note that he will send me some information on it which I undertake to examine immediately I receive it.

The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) mentioned the whisky industry. He listed the Scottish NFU's five points, with which we agree. There is no dispute between us on that and I know the importance of the excellent beverage to which he alluded.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Sir G. Johnson Smith) made an important point about marketing. He will know that we have introduced a marketing scheme. The idea is to tell farmers to get away from the idea that somehow they must be turned into French farmers, to co-operate in a French style. We are looking for something different, for something British. We are looking for something that does not have the overtones of the French-style co-operatives. We do not want them to be retailers or processors; we want them to be more efficient farmers by farming for the market. That is the entire message of the marketing initiative, which has received an extremely good response. I am delighted that the NFU has complementary proposals, which will enable us to marry our ideas to their ideas and to get a response from farmers on this important matter.

I noticed that the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) winced when one of my hon. Friends mentioned the damage that horses do to fields because I think that he has a family interest in horses. Once again, he defended the present status of the Milk Marketing Board. It is indefensible in its present form and the board knows it. It is the board which initiated the process of reform. If we said that we were going to defend the status quo, it would deeply damage farmers' interests. Therefore, we are saying to the board, "You must promote the change and we shall help you to do so, but it is your industry and you must decide what you want to do with it." What farmers do not want to do is to hold it back.

My hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Central (Mr. Lord) said that he would like to repatriate the common agricultural policy. That is not what the debate is about. If the United Kingdom is to be at the heart of the debate, there is no point in espousing ideas that immediately put us on the margins of the debate. We had that trouble in the past. We do not intend to repeat it. That does not mean that we accept the CAP, despite all its blemishes; it means that we must negotiate our way to a better system. There is no effective alternative.

As for the speech of the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones), we defend the interests of Welsh, Northern Ireland, Scottish and English farmers. We do not stand for any sectional interest; we stand entirely for the interests of British agriculture. That is our sole purpose in the negotiations. I give a clear undertaking that we make no distinction between farmers in fighting to defend their interests against proposals which we feel damage them universally. There is no sector of British agriculture which has been miraculously insulated from the effects of the proposals.

My hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) mentioned the importance of environmentally sensitive areas. I take note of what he said. I recognise, too, the concern about eastern Europe. We cannot say to eastern Europe, "Sorry, go away." It is important to us that we should give them a helping hand. Trade liberalisation is the most economically sensible way to go about it. It would be foolish to pretend otherwise. However, we must ensure that it is done in a sensible, orderly and measured way, since it is important to ensure that we create a fair marketplace.

The hon. Member for Clwyd, South-West (Mr. Jones) referred to repatriating the common agricultural policy. He made the sensible point that the small Welsh farmer was not excluded and that the CAP would adversely affect him.

The hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh) made the sort of remarks that I would expect from a member of his party. He wanted me to go round the country telling farmers how awful the MacSharry proposals are. They know how awful they are. What they want is an assurance that we are going to fight them, improve them and ensure that we obtain a package that is acceptable to farmers. That is our message to farmers and it is just as true for Scottish farmers as for any other farmer in the United Kingdom. We shall defend their interests with as much vigour as we defend the interest of any other farmers in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Andrew Welsh: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Curry: No, because I have nearly finished my speech.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) said that the common agricultural policy could not survive and that we should get rid of it. The conclusion that I draw from that is how mistaken it is to arrive late. If we had been members of the Community earlier, we should not have the CAP as it is now. The conclusion which I draw is that if the Community were to propose other exciting ventures that would have an enormous influence on how the Community develops, it would be very sensible for the United Kingdom to be in at the beginning, otherwise the penalties for this country might be very great.

The hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) referred to the millionaire farmers who would have to bear the burden of MacSharry. I will take him to meet the millionaire farmers in my constituency and throughout the country. We shall spend a long time looking for them. They no longer exist. I should be delighted to let him just talk to them——

Mr. Martlew: How can he, if they no longer exist?

Mr. Curry: —so that they can tell him how well they are going to do under the MacSharry proposals, which is what he said. The hon. Member for Carmarthen is misleading the farmers in his constituency if he thinks that the small farmer is insulated. That is not the case. Small farmers will suffer just as much as anyone else.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Amos) referred to tenancy reform. That is crucial. As my hon. Friend knows, we have got that matter in hand. He mentioned its importance to the whole of the rural community. We all say amen to that.

The hon. Member for Stockton, North (Mr. Cook) said that industry depends on agriculture. It is an important issue. We are just as mindful of that as we are of agriculture as a whole.

[Mr. Curry]

The hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley) referred to the Goodman case. It is being investigated in the Republic and I do not intend to comment upon it.

The hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards) referred to discrimination and corrected what his hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen said. He talked about the family tradition of countryside livelihoods. With my constituency, I cannot but share his very real concern.

Farmers must face up to three interlocking negotiations —the eastern European negotiations, the MacSharry negotiations and the GATT negotiations. They touch on each other and sometimes they ricochet off each other. They are all crucial to this country, to the future of the European Community and to the world trading system.

My right hon. Friend and I have made it absolutely clear that in all the negotiations we shall defend the British farmer and we shall not relinquish that task.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 28, Noes 152.

Division No. 22] **[10.39 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Beggs, Roy
Beith, A. J.
Bellotti, David
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carr, Michael
Cryer, Bob
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fearn, Ronald
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Kennedy, Charles
Livsey, Richard
Loyden, Eddie
Maclennan, Robert
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Stephen, Nicol
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and
Mr. Alex Carlile.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Bottomley, Peter
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burt, Alistair
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Dixon, Don
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dunn, Bob
Dykes, Hugh
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fishburn, John Dudley
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Franks, Cecil
French, Douglas
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gill, Christopher
Golding, Mrs Llin
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Haynes, Frank
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Illsley, Eric
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lightbown, David
Lord, Michael
McAvoy, Thomas
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Martlew, Eric
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Monro, Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shelton, Sir William
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stott, Roger
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thurnham, Peter
Trippier, David
Waller, Gary
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Wells, Bowen
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tim Boswell and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 8356/90, relating to agricultural production methods, 7570/91, and the Supplementary Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 13th November 1991, relating to the development and future of the Common Agricultural Policy, and 8886/91+COR 1,8950/91 and 9136/91, relating to amendments to the legal framework of the Common Agricultural Policy; and supports the Government's intention to seek reform of the Common Agricultural Policy which will make Community agriculture more market-orientated and efficient, will put more emphasis on environmental care, will reduce the cost of that Policy and will apply fairly throughout the Community.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &C.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(5) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

HOUSING

That the draft Waltham Forest Housing Action Trust (Area and Constitution) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 18th October, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

Question agreed to.

WELSH GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That, during the proceedings on the Matter of the Urban and Rural Regeneration of Wales, the Welsh Grand Committee have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it shall meet; and that, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 88 (Meetings of standing committees), the second such sitting shall not commence before Four o'clock nor continue after the Committee has considered the Matter for two hours at that sitting.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

Disabled People (Northern Ireland)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

10.51 pm

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and South Armagh): Most people welcome the opportunity to have an Adjournment debate on matters of great importance. In this instance, I do not particularly welcome this debate, because I regret having to make these points tonight in this way.

I have made it clear to the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham), that in general terms I have every sympathy with the people in the Housing Executive and the Department of Health's occupational therapy department whom, in effect, I shall be criticising. I must also criticise a system that puts them in a position in which problems occur.

My debate is about the way in which grants are paid from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to disabled people to improve their environments in their own homes. They fall into two categories: people who own their own houses, the vast majority of whom have purchased their homes recently from the Housing Executive, and people who are Housing Executive tenants and require special adaptations.

The problem has been exacerbated by recent stringent cuts. The most recent cut of 16·5 per cent. in the Housing Executive's budget was announced on 28 November. That is estimated to cause a shortfall of £50 million over the next three years, which will eventually and inevitably make the problem worse.

I raise this matter also because my constituency has a high percentage of unfit housing. Although I am sure that these remarks will apply to all constituencies in the north of Ireland, I can judge only what is happening in the one that I know best, which is my own, where 3,344 houses have been deemed "unfit", as the Minister confirmed to me in a written answer in 1988. That is the background to this debate.

I shall raise four main issues, leaving aside the financial strictures and the policy itself, because such matters cannot be dealt with simply in an Adjournment debate. I refer to the problems in the system which I believe could be avoided. I repeat that I have sympathy with the staff of the Housing Executive and the Department of Health's occupational therapy department, but there are great problems that we must face.

The first is the average length of time between first receipt of an application and a visit. Most such applications come from people who, because of physical disabilities that are mostly associated with age, can no longer cope in their homes as currently structured. Most of the applicants require the provision of downstairs toilets and showers. A written reply last week confirmed that the average waiting time between the making of an application and the first visit or inspection is about nine weeks. If that is the average, we can take it that many will take longer than that. That is bad, but it could be dealt with. I cannot see any reason why that process cannot be speeded up within the system.

The second main problem relates to the delay in the occupational therapist's visit to assess the application. The applications cannot be processed by the Housing Executive unless they have been assessed by occupational

[Mr. Seamus Mallon]

therapists from the Department of Health and unless recommendations are made by the occupational therapy department. Again a written reply last week stated that, in the Southern health board region, it took an average of four or five months before the occupational therapist gave an assessment, but in Belfast and in the Western board's region the delays were 11 months, with some being "very substantially longer".

We are talking about a system in which, on the admission of that written answer, a year can go by before that essential part of the process is undertaken. If one adds that delay to the average of about three months before the first visit is made, one is talking about a possible delay of one year and three months before the application starts to receive the attention that is required before it can proceed.

That in itself is bad enough. However, I tabled a written question some time ago about increasing the number of occupational therapists in Northern Ireland and was assured that that would happen. I know that it has happened in some regions, but that is certainly not evident in the areas of which I am most aware, where the problem seems great. Great difficulties arise if an aged person, who has probably just been released from hospital and who is very ill, cannot manage in what is usually a two-storey house where the facilities are upstairs, and has to wait 13 months before the application for downstairs facilities is even sanctioned. Those difficulties must be addressed.

Of course, there are exceptions and occasions when the process happens much more quickly—and others where it happens much more slowly—but I wish to outline the case of my constituent, Mrs. Patterson of 126 Dromalane Park, Newry, who received the Housing Executive's reply to her application on 2 October 1989, but was visited by an occupational therapist only last week. Almost two years elapsed before even the initial visit was made, making the applicant think that her application had been turned down. There can be no excuse for that. Something in the system must have gone very wrong. If that were the only such delay of which I knew, I would accept that there had simply been an oversight, but I am afraid that, in the circumstances, I cannot accept that.

Disabled people should be a priority in the system. They cannot be a priority if applications are so heavily burdened with bureaucratic requirements. There are not enough occupational therapists to do the job. Those who are doing it are grossly overworked. They have far too big an area to cover and far too many applications to deal with. The only way in which the position can be improved is to increase the number of occupational therapists.

The third problem is the Housing Executive's requirement under its warranted contractor scheme, which was introduced in 1987, that people who receive grants for this type of improvement employ a warranted contractor. Yet there is the anomaly that the Housing Executive employs contractors who are not warranted on major jobs. People naturally assume that a contractor employed by the Housing Executive is the firm to get, but then find that the contractor is not warranted. That is causing enormous delays. I know of several cases in which the proposals were sent in, the occupational therapist's assessment was given and everything was in order except that an unwarranted contractor had been chosen.

The people who make applications are not in a position to know who is warranted and who is not. The Housing Executive has the list in its offices. I should have thought that as a matter of course, when it sent out its communications to the applicant, it would include the list. The net result is that the lack of that information results in the application being delayed for many months. The application of Mr. and Mrs. Collins was delayed for 12 months on this score without the Housing Executive giving any idea of the reason for the delay. The application of another lady, a Mrs. Nan Lavell, who was very ill indeed, was delayed a matter of months for that same reason, without the Housing Executive giving any reason for the delay. That procedure should be streamlined as a matter of urgency.

People in such situations are reaching the age when they cannot cope physically or with the bureaucracy. Is not there a means of creating a one-stop application in such circumstances? The work does not involve major adaptations or renovation. By any standards the jobs are small, yet people have to make available three sets of plans for the planning department, three for the building control department, three for the Housing Executive and three for the occupational therapists department. If things are not just right, they have to go through that process all over again.

I have a case of a constituent in Newry, Mrs. Freda Williams, who has had two strokes and is bedridden. She very much needs the facilities that she has requested. After 12 months the relevant authorities are still asking for more copies of the plans that were submitted about nine months ago. There is something wrong there. That process could be speeded up substantially. I strongly request that the Minister consider a way in which a one-stop application could be made in such cases.

The fourth problem is delays in the payments for adaptations carried out. Perchance I was speaking by telephone this afternoon to a building contractor who specialises in this type of work. He mentioned to me several cases that were outstanding and told me that he and other contractors are stopping doing work involving a Housing Executive grant because they have to wait anything up to three months to wait for payment after the work has been done. Either the applicant must take out a bridging loan for that period—most are not in a position to do so—or the contractor goes without payment. That is the difficulty. Contractors will reluctantly say, "No, we simply cannot do your work because we cannot afford to be out of the money for that period."

In the cases that I have mentioned everything is in order —all the forms have been filled in and returned by the contractor, the work has been completed satisfactorily—but it is a long time before the cheque is processed and the contractor paid. In the present economic climate, he cannot cope with that situation.

There are a substantial number of cases before the Housing Executive concerning homes where major adaptations are required. I refer especially to the case of a constituent, a boy who cannot walk, talk, feed himself or do anything for himself, and will never be any different, as a result of meningitis at the age of three. He has to be carried everywhere by his mother and there are another five children in the house. That family has applied for a renovation grant on an old building. They were turned down because it did not fit the criteria.

As a result of advice from me and from others, the family has applied for a new replacement grant on the same building. However, as the criteria have still not been given by the Department to the Housing Executive, that case, among others, is waiting. Those criteria should be sent to the Housing Executive immediately so that it can begin to process such cases.

Will the Minister ensure that his Department study the criteria carefully? I know of no set of criteria that could be drawn up to include such a tragic case. It is impossible to write such criteria. Yet if there is no leeway within the system a tragic family like that will suffer most.

I should have preferred not to have to raise this matter in an Adjournment debate. I recognise that substantial staffing problems exist within the grants department of the Housing Executive, and I recognise the problems that that creates. I also recognise the fact that there are simply not enough occupational therapists. However, while I accept all those things and I have sympathy with those staff in the workload that they have to deal with, there are many ways that we could start to speed up the system. I have taken this opportunity to point them out to the Minister and I hope that something good will come of it.

11.7 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Richard Needham): I welcome the opportunity to reply to the debate. The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) has raised issues of considerable importance to disabled people in his constituency and to all those affected by disability in Northern Ireland, who look to the grant scheme to work efficiently and speedily for them.

The hon. Gentleman said that he did not wish to criticise the personnel involved in the administration of the schemes. However, in some of the cases that he mentioned it appears that there must have been some error, or they would have been dealt with more promptly.

In 1989-90 the total amount of grant was £33·8 million, in 1990-91 it was £31·2 million and for 1991-92 it is £29·7 million. In the region which covers the Newry and Armagh constituency, the grant was £4·85 million in 1989-90, £4·43 million in 1990-91 and £4·3 million this year. I accept that the figures are slightly down, but not enormously so. I hope that the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh, and other hon. Members who represent Northern Ireland, will agree that one of the absolute keys is to ensure that the money we spend gets to the people who most deserve and need it as quickly as possible. We had hoped to announce the new scheme for consultation today, but that has been delayed until tomorrow or perhaps the end of the week.

The present scheme must operate a priority list. I believe that the Housing Executive ensures that those who most need the grants are put at the top of the list. The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh will be aware from his constituency that there have been problems with the preliminary investigations. Those problems were one cause of the delay that the hon. Gentleman described, but I have been told that the wait for that preliminary investigation is now down from six months to three months—the average in Northern Ireland. That time scale compares well with the rest of the country.

The length of the time that the occupational therapists take to complete their investigations is also down to about three months. In 1987, there were 28 occupational therapists in the hon. Gentleman's constituency; now, there are 47. That is a significant increase. The total number of occupational therapists in Northern Ireland has increased from 206 to 277.

The hon. Gentleman might be interested to know that, in his constituency, 12·5 per cent. of the grants given to the disabled are dealt with by the Craigavon and Newry offices. Two years ago, the maximum limit on the grants went from £10,200 to £12,600. Furthermore, my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) has added £2·6 million to this year's budget for occupational therapy, and about £500,000 has been made available to the Newry and Craigavon area.

Some of the delay is inevitably due to the way in which the applicant, having been through the preliminary investigation and the visit from the occupational therapist, considers the scheme proposed for him before proceeding to the formal application stage. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman appreciates that that takes some time.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that every conceivable thing that can be done should be done to ensure that the applicant—the hon. Gentleman was right to say that he may be old and slightly confused—is assisted in filling out the forms. The hon. Gentleman spoke about approved contractors—that application form clearly states the need for such an approved contractor.

Mr. Mallon: It does not say who they are.

Mr. Needham: No, because there are about 900 of them. Many more are coming on to the list.

The applicant can contact the Housing Executive or the grant officer to discover who is on the list. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that an approved contractor is important, because the grant is paid to the applicant. Nothing would be more serious than to have unapproved contractors receiving the grant. However, I shall study the issue that the hon. Gentleman has raised about the length of time it takes for the grant to get to the applicant and then back to the contractor. The last thing we want is approved contractors having to wait too long for their money. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees that it is crucial that approved contractors are used to ensure that the work is done to the highest possible standard.

The new scheme is important. We will go out for consultation on the draft order in the next few days. The new scheme will allow specific grants up to the full cost of the work. At present, the maximum amount is 90 per cent. and it can be and often is 75 per cent., depending on someone's resources. There will be a grant of up to 100 per cent. of the total of what is required, following a test of resources. That is an important step forward. Naturally, I appreciate that it will mean that there will be gainers and losers, but the gainers will be the poorest and the losers will be those most able to afford a contribution toward what is required.

Nevertheless, I fully accept the points that the hon. Gentleman made about the need to be as quick as possible. The grant officer's job is specialised and needs someone who will look, particularly on major adaptations, at what is required. In addition, the occupational therapist needs to go into the appropriate scheme for the disabled person to ensure that the work is right for his or her requirements. I accept that, if there are unnecessary bureaucratic rules or

[Mr. Needham]

regulations or ways to get forms filled out singly rather than in triplicate, we shall do everything we can to speed up the process.

In the hon. Gentleman's constituency, the time taken is being reduced, although it has not been reduced as fast as we should like. There are more occupational therapists, and the time that they are taking is also being reduced. Some delays are inevitable, and it is often difficult to get round them, but that is no one's fault.

The Government take the matter extremely seriously and want to ensure that grants go to those who most need them. I assure the hon. Gentleman that my hon. Friend and I give the matter a high priority. I shall take up the individual cases that the hon. Gentleman has brought to my attention and give as detailed an answer on them as possible.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at sixteen minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 5 December 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

KING'S CROSS RAILWAYS BILL *(By Order)*
Order for consideration, as amended, read.
To be considered on Thursday 12 December.

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

South Yorkshire Police

1. **Sir Patrick Duffy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on current manning levels in the South Yorkshire police.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, (Mr. Peter Lloyd): At the end of September there were 2,998 officers in the South Yorkshire police—an increase of 438 officers or 17 per cent. since 1979. Eighteen additional police posts were approved with effect from 1 October 1991 and a further 15 posts from 1 April 1992.

Sir Patrick Duffy: Is the Minister aware that 21 years of casework in Attercliffe have left me wholly admiring of, and grateful to, the South Yorkshire police? I am confident that they could make the streets of South Yorkshire safer if they could expand their manpower levels just that little bit more, but within the scope of the present standard spending assessment. Will he ask his right hon. Friends the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for the Environment to bring that home to the support services and the district decision-takers in South Yorkshire and to urge on them the prior claim of South Yorkshire police at this time?

Mr. Lloyd: I agree that the South Yorkshire police have a good record. Crime is lower in their area than it is nationally and the clear-up rate is higher. The hon. Gentleman asked me about future numbers. South Yorkshire police have asked for 17 posts for the coming year; they have been given 16. The SSA is up by 17·4 per cent., which enables them to increase the precept by 15 per cent. They should have no difficulty in paying for those extra officers.

Northumbria Police Authority

2. **Mr. Clelland:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he next expects to meet the chairman of Northumbria police authority to discuss resources in the area.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Kenneth Baker): I met the chairman of Northumbria police authority on 1 November when I visited Tyneside. Northumbria has received a generous increase in standard spending assessment of 17·3 per cent. In addition, it will be eligible for up to £3·66 million under the urban crime fund initiative that I announced on 26 November. Both the SSA increase and the experimental urban crime fund demonstrate clearly the Government's continuing commitment to a high level of police funding. The police authority has been facing serious difficulty in meeting the additional costs arising from the disturbances in Tyneside in September, so I am pleased to announce today that the Government will make a special payment towards those costs, at a rate of 95 per cent.

Mr. Clelland: That news will come as a welcome relief to the authority, which has been waiting for more than three months for a reply from the Home Secretary. Will he confirm that the 5 per cent. that the authority must now find from its budget is on top of the £4 million shortfall and the 116-officer shortfall in an area with rising crime? When will he get together with the Secretary of State for the Environment to put an end to the nonsense of capping, which is squeezing resources at a time of rapidly rising crime?

Mr. Baker: I do not agree with what the hon. Gentleman has said. I ask him to reflect on my answer. The increase this year in the Northumbria police SSA is 17 per cent. In addition, there is the experimental urban crime fund, from which Northumbria can benefit by £3·66 million. The 95 per cent. figure is the highest level that we have granted for any riot expenditure, and could involve a sum of between £5 million and £7 million, depending on the claims. That is a very generous, but correctly generous, settlement for Northumbria.

Mr. Devlin: I am sure that the people of Northumbria will welcome the excellent news that my right hon. Friend has given the House. Will he reflect on the fact that one of the most unpleasant duties of the Northumbria police is having to drag the mangled bodies of motorists from cars that have gone into ditches alongside the A1 while on their way to Scotland? The sooner that that road undergoes a major programme of improvement, with it possibly increased to motorway status, the better. Will he make the appropriate representations to his colleagues at the Department of Transport?

Mr. Baker: That question goes rather wide of the main question. I have driven along that road to Scotland many times and I know that beyond my hon. Friend's constituency it is not so good. I will draw my hon. Friend's suggestions to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Mr. Sheerman: Can I put the Home Secretary back on the right road by telling him that the reason why morale in the Northumbria police force is low and why chief constables generally despair is not because the right hon. Gentleman suddenly makes a generous offer of help in a

crisis, but because all chief constables, including the new chief constable of Northumbria, want consistency of funding so that they can be sure that they will get the officers and resources they require over a number of years? This year it has been impossible to plan policing in Northumbria because the force has 112 fewer officers than last year. That is not the way to run a police force, and that is why police morale is low. When will the right hon. Gentleman give that consistency and leadership to the police and back them for a change?

Mr. Baker: I remind the hon. Gentleman that since we have been in office there has been an increase of 693 officers in Northumbria's police strength. I approved an additional 26 posts from 1 October of this year, with a further 27 from 1 April of next year. The hon. Gentleman talks of the need for consistency, but the only consistency under Labour was in cutting the numbers of police—and at that time the hon. Gentleman was a member of the Cabinet.

Mr. Beith: Will the Home Secretary bear in mind that the rural areas of Northumberland have been especially difficult to police while the urban areas have been under great pressure and there has been a shortage of officers? Will he encourage the chief constable in the task that he has set himself of increasing the number of officers available for normal duties within the community?

Mr. Baker: I could not agree more with the hon. Gentleman. There is a very high proportion of police officers on the beat, although it varies from force to force. I should like about 80 per cent. of a force to be on the beat. I have spoken to the new chief constable of Northumbria and he is a most impressive officer. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has met him. We discussed the problems of policing rural Northumbria as well as the towns and cities. The hon. Gentleman's points are well made and I am sure that he will draw them to the attention of the chief constable.

Passport Agency

3. **Mr. Robert B. Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures will be taken by the United Kingdom Passport Agency to raise its standards of service.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Passport Agency has been very successful this year in speeding up the processing of passport applications. It has recently completed a major computerisation programme which will enable it to improve its service to the customer still further.

Mr. Jones: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that answer. The Passport Agency deserves our congratulations on the improvements that it has already achieved. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is time for the public to play their part? As the vast majority of applications occur in the same peak period, should not people try to spread them so that there is not the same concentration? To that end, would it be a good idea to impose a surcharge on passport applications in the peak period and give a discount in off-peak periods, so providing an incentive?

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend is right to say that there has been an enormous improvement. The average turnround for a passport application in the last year has been six working days. I agree that many applications come in the holiday period and that that makes it difficult to maintain that average. The Passport Agency is using advertisements to suggest that people renew their passports at other times of the year. It is for the agency to consider whether it would be sensible to alter the price for a passport depending on the time of year and then to make any recommendations to the Home Office.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell: Will the Minister consider establishing a passport office in the north-east, because at present people must travel to Liverpool or Glasgow to find the nearest office?

Mr. Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman might suggest that his constituents make their applications by post, as most other people do. It is an efficient service and it causes the customer much less trouble.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Does the Minister agree that his decision to retain the passport office in Belfast was a good one? He made that decision having listened to representations from hon. Members from Northern Ireland. Will he commend the Belfast office for being at the top of the league of all passport offices for getting passports out quickly for the people of Northern Ireland?

Mr. Lloyd: We listened to the representations of hon. Members from Northern Ireland, but, more particularly, we observed the great efficiency of the passport office. We not merely retained it but expanded it, and it has fully justified our confidence. I pay tribute to it.

Car Thefts

4. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received about his proposal to introduce a Bill to address problems of youngsters under 17 years stealing cars.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): My right hon. Friend introduced a Bill last week to strengthen the law against those who criminally take other people's vehicles. We had numerous written and oral representations from hon. and right hon. Members and from members of the public. I am happy to report that they were all in support of an early change in the law.

Mr. Battle: I welcome the Bill, but will the Minister take seriously the views of the chief constable of West Yorkshire, whose recent report on vehicle theft—which has reached 85 per cent. in Leeds and 53 per cent. in West Yorkshire—stresses the need for preventive measures to identify potential offenders at an early stage, rather than wait for tragedies to occur? Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of those measures could be a Government publicity campaign to warn youngsters that car stealing is as dangerous as alcohol or drug abuse?

Mr. Patten: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman is in favour of more Government publicity campaigns and I shall listen to his advice on that. I have not read the report of the chief constable of West Yorkshire, but I shall do so. Yesterday I was in Salford in the metropolitan police area and I went to a crime prevention scheme that endeavours to divert youngsters from continuing with or getting into car crime. It is an excellent scheme and such schemes should be developed more generally.

Mr. Lawrence: Does my right hon. Friend agree that if more people locked their cars fewer 17-year-olds would get into them? If car manufacturers treated alarm systems as standard, there would be even fewer. Will the Government look into a way to encourage car manufacturers to install alarm systems as standard equipment?

Mr. Patten: I agree with my hon. and learned Friend. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and I shall see British car manufacturers again in the near future to urge them speedily to incorporate immobilisation devices into cars. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is doing all that he can within Europe to achieve the speedy adoption of a Europewide directive, on which Great Britain has been in the lead, to get our Western European car manufacturing colleagues to do exactly the same.

Mr. Trimble: I welcome the Government's moves in that matter. Does the Minister agree that, although the problem in English cities is bad—I do not wish to underplay the tragedies that have occurred there—the problem in Northern Ireland, especially in West Belfast, is much worse? Many more tragic and fatal accidents have occurred there. Should not the Government act with similar urgency to remedy that situation?

Mr. Patten: I understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is considering whether to change the law in Northern Ireland to meet the ends to which the hon. Gentleman referred. While noting that what the hon. Gentleman says about west Belfast is right, we should also note that, setting terrorism aside, Northern Ireland is the most law-abiding part of the United Kingdom. Long may it remain so.

Sir Michael Neubert: If my right hon. Friend is looking for ways to cut down car crime, will he have a word with the producers of "Inspector Morse". That police officer habitually, at the end of each episode, parks his red Jaguar unlocked and then strolls off—not into the sunset but into the nearest pub. What sort of an example is that?

Mr. Patten: I am happy to inform my hon. Friend that that excellent series is filmed in my constituency. However, Inspector Morse's behaviour in not locking his car and in drinking heavily before driving is utterly disgraceful.

Miss Lestor: I agree with what the Minister said. May I add that the promotion of fast cars and reckless driving by the media is not good for the youngsters attracted by such aspects? I refer the Minister to his reference earlier to a scheme in Salford, where my constituency is. Surveys have shown that of 4,500 youngsters on diversion schemes to stop them stealing cars, only about 100 have reoffended. Bearing in mind their success, does the Minister support such schemes, as many of us do, and will resources be forthcoming to finance them and make them viable?

Mr. Patten: On the hon. Lady's first point, it is disappointing that car manufacturers advertise maximum speeds and acceleration more than security devices. In a period when car crime is a problem, I hope that manufacturers will begin to advertise cars using better security as a selling point.

On the hon. Lady's second point, yes, I entirely support such schemes. They are an important part of our twin-track approach so that we not only come down hard on offenders who commit the crime of taking vehicles, but we do all we can to prevent youngsters from offending. More resources will be made available through the safer cities scheme, which is funded by the Home Office.

Mr. Marlow: Can we use a bit of common sense on this vexed problem? Is it not true that giving 17-year-olds fines does not work and sending them to prison is counterproductive? Could we arrange for such offenders to have a sound thrashing? Will my right hon. Friend do something about it?—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has every right to express his views.

Mr. Patten: As you know, Mr. Speaker, I often turn to my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) for common sense advice. However, I deplore the way in which he is becoming increasingly moderate. This week he urges a sound thrashing; last month he recommended immediate castration.

Immigration and Nationality

5. **Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has held recently with Ministers in European Community countries about immigration and nationality questions.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I attended meetings of European Community Ministers concerned with immigration matters at Berlin on 30 and 31 October, and at The Hague on 20 November. The Minister of State—my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten)—attended a meeting on my behalf at The Hague on 2 and 3 December this year. In addition, I have had a number of informal bilateral discussions with European Community colleagues.

Mr. Maclennan: As those matters are clearly occupying the time of Ministers in the European Community, and as interest in the issue is bound to deepen with the removal of internal border controls, does the Home Secretary accept the proposed draft treaty article A arrangements recognising the common interest of Community countries in such matters? Does he accept that there should be Community competence in that sphere? What will be the Commission's role in it in future?

Mr. Baker: The draft treaty on immigration, which is to be discussed at Maastricht next week, contains a series of proposals starting with article A. That proposes that immigration and asylum matters, together with certain police, fraud and drugs issues, should not come under the competence of the treaty of Rome, but should be dealt with on an intergovernmental basis—a view with which the Government completely agree. Article K allows for those matters to fall within the competence of the treaty only after a double lock—first, the unanimity of Ministers, and secondly, the specific approval of the House. The Government support that position and do not believe that immigration and asylum matters should fall within the competence of the treaty of Rome.

Mr. Robert G. Hughes: Does my right hon. Friend agree that while Jean-Marie Le Pen is legally entitled to come to this country, his obnoxious views on racism, immigration and nationality mean that he is simply not welcome in this country? His racist views will be rejected by all the people in this country regardless of party. Does

my right hon. Friend share my view that those people who may wish to have a dialogue with Mr. Le Pen are simply selling short their country and their countrymen? Will my right hon. Friend say how unwelcome Mr. Le Pen and his views are?

Mr. Baker: I am sure that Mr. Le Pen's views are racially and politically unacceptable. I was asked as Home Secretary to consider whether I should ban his entry. I decided not to do so. I see that a former Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees), agrees with that decision. I think that it is correct. Apart from anything else, Mr. Le Pen is a Member of the European Parliament. However, I want to make it clear that, by allowing him to come to Britain, neither I nor any Conservative Member has any agreement whatever with the racialist views that he is peddling, and I am sure that that is true of Opposition Members as well.

Mr. Winnick: On reflection, does the Home Secretary consider that if someone is due to come to Britain with the sole purpose of inciting race hatred there is no reason why he should be allowed in, and that Le Pen should have been excluded? I welcome the view of the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) that Le Pen—a person whose only claim to fame is the manner in which in France he has agitated to poison race relations and incite hatred—is completely unwelcome in Britain and should not have been allowed in. Is it true that Le Pen is to meet a number of Tory Members and, if so, will the Home Secretary make it clear that that would be wrong?

Mr. Baker: The best way of dealing with poisonous views is to expose and destroy them, and that is what free speech does. Le Pen will have few converts in Britain. The views that he is peddling in France exploit the anxieties of many people in a ruthless and unacceptable way. We want none of his ideas here and I am sure that they will not become established.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: Will my right hon. Friend consider the remarks of the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), who suggested that we were moving towards a cross-border liberalisation and liberation? Can my right hon. Friend explain why the hon. Gentleman's party suggests that we should increase the differences between those of us who live north and south of the border in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Baker: If these matters were to pass into European competence in the way that the Liberal Democrats want, there would be an inevitable weakening of our controls and our frontier controls, which I am not prepared to accept. We need greater co-operation in Europe in these matters, because immigration and asylum flows are a major political concern, as we have just noted from the exchanges about Le Pen and the way in which people are feeding upon his visit. However, that comes best through the co-operation of European countries rather than through competence under the European treaty.

Mr. Darling: I welcome what the Home Secretary said about Le Pen's visit to Britain, but will he go a little further and dissociate himself from those of his colleagues who are seeking to meet that man?

Mr. Baker: I have no information on who is meeting Le Pen. I have made my views clear—[HON. MEMBERS: "Come on."] I do not know who is meeting Le Pen and I have made my views clear. I regard Le Pen's views as totally and utterly unacceptable, and I have made that clear.

Neighbourhood Watch

6. **Mr. Lee:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many neighbourhood watch schemes are now in place.

Mr. John Patten: At the end of December 1990 there were estimated to be more than 92,000 neighbourhood watch schemes in England and Wales, covering nearly 5 million households. They are multiplying fast.

Mr. Lee: I am sure that my right hon. Friend will be pleased to know that my Pendle constituency has 96 of these excellent neighbourhood watch schemes involving almost 20,500 households. Does he agree that not only do those excellent schemes make a positive contribution towards crime prevention, but they build bridges between the police and the community?

Mr. Patten: As my hon. Friend says, the schemes are valuable in building bridges between the police and the community. I was particularly interested to note that in the Whitefield area of Nelson in my hon. Friend's constituency, largely occupied by ethnic minority households, a neighbourhood watch scheme has recently been set up and is helping to build bridges between the ethnic minority residents and the police.

Mr. Vaz: I, too, welcome the growth of the neighbourhood watch schemes. However, does the Minister realise that the schemes place a great burden on individual residents in a particular area and that they depend on the co-operation of the police? In Leicestershire, the police are spending a great deal of their valuable time assisting neighbourhood watch schemes. What additional resources can be provided to local police forces in order to make the schemes even more efficient than they are?

Mr. Patten: Neighbourhood watch schemes are by their nature genuine voluntary organisations, although they receive Government support, in that substantial resources are devoted to them through the funding of the police, who themselves assist neighbourhood watch schemes.

While I am on my feet, perhaps I may apologise for referring in an earlier answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North when I meant my hon. Friend the Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens), who made the suggestion.

Mr. Malins: Neighbourhood watch schemes are very strong in my constituency and are a good example of the police and public working together in helping to beat crime. In the Croydon area, where neighbourhood watch schemes are strong, burglaries are down. Does not that show that public co-operation and awareness are major factors in reducing crime in our cities?

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That pattern is the same whether one is speaking of reasonably affluent, suburban Croydon, the outer estates of Luton, or the council house areas of Wythenshawe. Where there is sustained development of neighbourhood watch schemes, there is a sustained decrease in the number of burglaries.

Mr. Randall: Does the Minister agree that not only crime but anti-social behaviour are causing immense alarm and distress throughout almost all of Britain? Does he accept that the overall effectiveness of the various schemes and agencies that contribute to crime prevention, including neighbourhood watch, is seriously impaired by the lack of co-ordination between them? Will he consider encouraging local authorities to formulate local strategies aimed at preventing crime and anti-social behaviour which are based on far greater co-ordination between the various agencies involved?

Mr. Patten: We are consulting further on a recent report on those issues. Suffice it to say that no one owns neighbourhood watch schemes, except those who belong to them and who have helped to make them a success. The schemes are not in the ownership of the police, local authorities, any political party or any business. They are in the ownership of their communities, which we should support in their endeavours—not try to take over something that they started only in 1982, when the first neighbourhood watch began. There are now 92,000 such schemes, entirely due to the endeavours of individual active citizens and communities.

Mr. Dunn: Will my right hon. Friend take time today to congratulate those who are running successful neighbourhood watch schemes in Dartford? Does he agree that neighbourhood watches can be deemed only an aid to proper policing, in terms of numbers and police efficiency? Will my right hon. Friend intervene with the chairman of Kent police authority to ensure that Dartford has its fair share of the new allocation of extra manpower for the county of Kent?

Mr. Patten: I will certainly consult my noble Friend Earl Ferrers, who is directly responsible for those matters, and will draw my hon. Friend's remarks to his attention. The additional 1,000 police recently announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be largely devoted to beat policing. My right hon. Friend has rightly ensured that 80 out of every 100 additional officers provided will go straight back on the beat, in Dartford and elsewhere.

Derek Bentley

7. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now announce the results of his consideration of the case for the posthumous pardon of Derek Bentley.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The representations made on behalf of Mr. Derek Bentley are still under consideration. I have asked the police to make inquiries and when I have the results of those inquiries I will be in a position to decide whether any action on my part is appropriate.

Mr. Hughes: The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that the case for pardoning Derek Bentley was supported by his trial jury, which recommended mercy in 1952; by the Lord Chief Justice of the day; by the trial judge, who said subsequently that he believed that Bentley would not hang; a subsequent Lord Chancellor, Lord Hailsham; by many members of another place; by many right hon. and hon. Members of this House—nearly one third of whom signed a recent early-day motion; and by millions of our fellow citizens. On the face of it, the case for a pardon is overwhelming. Will the Home Secretary expedite his consideration and either grant a posthumous pardon or at least instigate a public inquiry, so that what is regarded as the greatest injustice of our post-war criminal justice system left unremedied will be put right before the last member of the Bentley family dies without knowing the result?

Mr. Baker: I know of the hon. Gentleman's interest in and concern about this; they are shared by many others. The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has been asked to look at the allegations and to arrange for certain persons who are said to be able to shed new light on the case to be interviewed. When I get his report, I shall, of course, examine it carefully and examine the full details of the case. Until I get that report, I will not get immersed in the details. I think it is right for me to receive the report and then to examine it.

Mr. Alexander: Will my right hon. Friend, on the other hand, bear in mind the fact that when Bentley was apprehended and before PC Miles was shot, Bentley said to the police:

"He's got a gun and it's loaded"?

Will he bear in mind the fact that at no time did Bentley discourage Craig verbally from firing that gun, that he brought a 16-year-old accomplice, armed, to commit a robbery and that the Lord Chief Justice had every justification for what he did?

Mr. Baker: These are the sorts of considerations that I shall have to take into account. I am quite clear that I shall have to go into the evidence very carefully when the police report is available to me. I hear what my hon. Friend says, as I hear all representations on this matter.

Mr. Cryer: Will the Home Secretary acknowledge that fresh evidence was presented to him in the summer and that his review is long overdue? Will he acknowledge that this is an outrageous case of injustice? Derek Bentley could not have taken anybody anywhere; he could barely get himself around. He had a mental age of 11, although in body he was 19, and evidence of his mental incapacity was never produced during the trial. In view of that, will the Home Secretary make sure that he examines the evidence as rapidly as possible? Will he also acknowledge the sterling campaign carried out by the sister of Derek Bentley, Iris Bentley, in making sure that that grave injustice and wrong is righted as rapidly as possible?

Mr. Baker: No one could accuse me of delaying consideration of allegations of miscarriage of justice when they have been presented to me. I have dealt with them very promptly, as, indeed, a Home Secretary should. I am awaiting further analysis of the evidence and I assure the hon. Gentleman that, when I get it, I will examine the whole case again.

Ram-raiding

8. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding increases in the incidence of ram-raiding.

Mr. John Patten: I have received representations from the London and Provincial Antique Dealers Association and from Sir Stanley Bailey, the former chief constable of Northumbria police.

Mr. Paice: Despite the short list that my right hon. Friend read out, he will be aware that the problem of ram-raiding is increasing substantially in parts of the country. The difficulty with that type of crime is that, because of the speed with which it is executed, burglar alarms and security systems are relatively ineffective. The only way to protect property is by the construction of bollards and barriers, but that requires the consent of landlords and planning authorities. Will my right hon. Friend do all that he can to open a dialogue with representatives of landlords and planning authorities so that they can encourage and enable retailers to erect something to protect their property?

Mr. Patten: That is a very constructive suggestion and I will certainly discuss it with my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning. I know that in some parts of the country, notably in the north-east, one or two local authorities have made it rather difficult for protective street furniture to be erected along the sides of roads where there has been ram-raiding. In my hon. Friend's own area in Cambridgeshire there have been no recent incidents. There have been many more incidents in the north-east, in particular, and that is why the recent transfer of Mr. J. A. Stevens from being deputy chief constable of Cambridgeshire will doubtless be welcomed in Northumbria. Cambridgeshire's loss is Northumbria's gain.

Mr. Bermingham: Does the Minister agree that the next time one of these offenders comes before the courts for sentencing, if the sentence does not contain a deterrent element, bearing in mind the increase in this type of crime, it would be wise for the Home Office to seek the guidance of the Attorney-General so that the sentence can be referred to the Court of Appeal, which could then lay down a guideline sentence for this type of crime which contains a deterrent element?

Mr. Patten: Again, I welcome the hon. Gentleman's constructive suggestion. I shall draw his views to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General. The decision on whether to lay down guideline sentences is for the Lord Chief Justice, the deputy chief justice and others in the Appeal Court, not for me.

Mr. Jaaman: Although I agree with the sensible suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice), does my right hon. Friend agree that we must try to prevent these crimes from happening and that the best way to do that is for him to instruct magistrates courts throughout the country to pass very harsh sentences on those who are convicted of this outrageous abuse of private property?

Mr. Patten: I agree entirely that this is an outrageous invasion of private property, but I am sure that the House would not want Ministers to be able to instruct the judiciary to do anything, because we value its independence. A range of serious and severe penalties is available for those who are convicted of ram-raiding—for example, if robbery is involved, up to life imprisonment.

West Yorkshire Police

9. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the allocation of police officers to West Yorkshire.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Fourteen additional police posts were approved with effect from 1 October 1991, providing for an establishment of 5,295. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced on 28 November that he had not approved the police authority's application for 79 additional police posts in 1992-93.

Mrs. Mahon: The victims of crime in West Yorkshire will not be satisfied with that answer. The Minister must be aware that, because of the threat of poll tax capping, by April 1992 we will have lost 200 police personnel on the beat and 200 civilian personnel. As the Government, with their policies of dividing society, have been responsible for the breakdown in law and order, cannot we at least expect bobbies back on the beat to protect us?

Mr. Lloyd: I do not accept that capping, or the threat of capping, is responsible for West Yorkshire's inability to recruit its full establishment. I think that the hon. Lady will find the answer in Her Majesty's inspector of constabulary report for 1991, which notes that

> "West Yorkshire has one of the highest levels of expenditure per head of any police authority. If it could bring its cost-effectiveness nearer the average, it could recruit up to the establishment that the Home Secretary has recommended."

The hon. Lady mentioned policemen on the beat. West Yorkshire has a smaller percentage of its force on the beat, which no doubt is partly due to its slow pace in the civilianisation of its various police activities.

Mr. Donald Thompson: Is my hon. Friend aware that the chief constable of the West Riding and one of his policemen wrote to me recently to say that there are no outstanding matters with the Home Office and that they welcome the £3·16 million to fight crime and the refurbishment and establishment of new police stations in Bradford, Leeds and Pontefract? Will my hon. Friend do his best to ensure that constituents and police combine to spend the extra resources wisely?

Mr. Lloyd: I am glad that my hon. Friend mentioned the extra expenditure under the urban crime fund, which is designed to tackle crime in particular areas. West Yorkshire has had the benefit of that. He is right that there are no outstanding issues with the Home Office. The outstanding issue is using the resources that the police authority has effectively.

Mr. Corbett: Does the Under-Secretary accept that in the face of a tidal wave of crime there must be better planning in police manning in West Yorkshire, as everywhere else? Instead of the piecemeal approach, cannot he offer a three-year rolling programme of force levels to assist chief constables to make more effective use of manpower in a bid to prevent and combat crime?

Mr. Lloyd: Of course, but decisions on the effective use of manpower are taken by the police authority and the police force. The inspector's report shows that there is room for improvement. As I said, there is certainly scope for further civilianisation.

Police Interviews (Video Recordings)

10. **Sir John Farr:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce video recordings of all interviews in police custody.

Mr. John Patten: We will consider further introduction of video recordings of all interviews in police custody when the outcome of a joint study being conducted by the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Home Office has been fully considered. The pilot project is being carried out on three forces and an independent evaluation will be completed in the spring of 1992. We will announce our conclusions as soon as possible at that stage.

Sir John Farr: Is my right hon. Friend aware that many miscarriages of justice have occurred recently due entirely to uncorroborated confessions? The sooner that that disgrace is ended, the better. One way of dealing with it, without waiting for the royal commission report, is by starting to video all such interviews forthwith. Will he do so?

Mr. Patten: As my hon. Friend said, the issue is being considered by the royal commission, which will report as soon as possible. Perhaps my hon. Friend will be reassured when I announce to the House that we will be laying tomorrow an order to ensure that, for all indictable offences, there will be the compulsory taking of evidence by tape recording in police stations. That will apply throughout the country as soon as possible.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Bradley:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 5 December.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Bradley: Will the Prime Minister confirm that neither he nor the Chancellor of the Exchequer has taken any action to ensure that the European central bank is located in Britain? Does he now agree that it should be based in Manchester?

The Prime Minister: I can confirm to the hon. Gentleman that there have been no serious discussions yet about the location of the European system of central banks. It is possible, but not yet certain, that there will be such discussions next week in Maastricht.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Has my right hon. Friend had time to see the OECD report on unsatisfactory unemployment levels in France and the clear evidence that its minimum wage policy has served to make unemployment worse? Does he agree with the conclusions of the report? Has he noted that the Leader of the Opposition has turned this, like everything else, on its head?

The Prime Minister: I have not seen that report, but I have expressed before the dangers that a minimum wage policy would hold for employment levels. I believe that it would cost many people their jobs and would cause far more damage than good.

Mr. Kinnock: Does the Prime Minister recall telling *The Daily Telegraph* six months ago that economic recovery was coming, in his words, "within weeks"? How did he get it so badly wrong?

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman would study recent CBI surveys he would see that domestic and export orders are rising, that export orders are at their highest level for over a year and that there is confirmation that business conditions are beginning to improve in line with confidence. That is not just my view, but the view of industry and commerce.

Mr. Kinnock: Is the Prime Minister aware that building employers say that conditions are worse than they have been in 40 years, that car sales are down 20 per cent. on the year and that Lord Prior, chairman of GEC, says there is no improvement in trading conditions? If the Prime Minister thinks that all that adds up to recovery, he is not living in the real world.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman should get out of the habit of writing his supplementary questions before he hears the first answer. What is concerning the right hon. Gentleman is the fact that the economy is moving back into growth and he does not like it. Growth is good for the country but bad for the Labour party.

Mr. Kinnock: After years of pushing Britain down, the Prime Minister is in no position to make that kind of claim. He has taken Britain into negative growth, rising unemployment and falling output. It is time he was out.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is a specialist in talking this country down and does it week after week. The only way to get proper growth is to have an economic recovery based on low inflation and proper investment, not on the sort of policies that the right hon. Gentleman has advocated. The policies that he stands for —of high taxation and centralised control—are the policies that would drive this country to ruin.

Mr. Favell: As my right hon. Friend prepares for Maastricht, may he be reassured that to return without a treaty would be no failure? Our European colleagues' vision of Europe is fundamentally different from ours and a shotgun marriage would be in nobody's interests—and good luck.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his best wishes. I assure him I will return with a treaty that I can recommend to the House or come back without a treaty.

Q2. **Mr. Galbraith:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 5 December

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Galbraith: As his experiences clearly influence his policies and following his recent interview in *The Sun*, can the Prime Minister now tell the House exactly when he was unemployed?

The Prime Minister: I was unemployed in the early 1960s. As to the precise dates, that is not a matter which I can immediately remember. It was in the early 1960s.

Mr. Churchill: Is not it unacceptable that pensioners should be defrauded of pensions to which they have contributed throughout their entire working lives, as is the case with the Mirror Group Newspapers pensioners? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that there will be swift Government action to remedy that situation and will he commiserate with the Leader of the Opposition about the fact that his and his party's principal supporter should turn out to be a crook?

The Prime Minister: I am not able to comment on the Mirror Group pension fund as the Serious Fraud Office is examining it. We have greatly tightened the protection of pension fund members over recent years. Nothing, of course, can be complete proof against criminality.

Q3. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 5 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hain: The future of the *Daily Mirror* is now in hock to City spivs and business tycoons—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Gentlemen can shout as much as they like, but does the Prime Minister agree that citizens' rights are best protected by pluralistic ownership of the press? Or does he want to gag free speech and have every tabloid newspaper supporting the Tory party?

The Prime Minister: I do not think that it would be proper for me to get involved in what is happening in terms of the Mirror Group pension fund. I commented as far as I am prepared to a moment ago.

Q4. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 5 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. King: The news that millions of new investors are seeking to invest in British Telecom is good news indeed. Will my right hon. Friend extend to them his best wishes on becoming part of the property-owning democracy and will he send a message of best wishes to the management and employees of West Midlands Travel—the country's biggest bus company—who yesterday concluded a £70 million buy-out? Is not it obvious that when employees own their own business, that is the Conservative way forward?

The Prime Minister: Yes, Sir. The privatisation programme has been an enormous success in recent years and not the least part of that success has been the extent to which it has widened and deepened share ownership around the country. That will certainly increase in the years ahead.

Mr. Ashdown: Will the Prime Minister reconsider his answer to me two weeks ago on mortgage repossessions? Does he realise that his answer was not only factually wrong, but betrayed a depressing complacency in the face of the scale of the homes repossession crisis which is now upon us? Does he realise that if he will not act on the problem, it will not only produce a tide of human misery, but will bring to a clattering end any hope of economic recovery?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman touches on an important matter, but he misrepresents the views of the Government and he misrepresents what I said. As I said, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security has announced help in terms of income support assistance for those facing repossession and the loss of their homes. That help amounts to £400 million a year, which is very considerable and is necessary. The right hon. Gentleman should not misrepresent what the Government have said and are doing.

Q5. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 5 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Moss: Does my right hon. Friend agree that privatisation receipts have helped the Government to increase public spending, to cut taxation and to pay off national debt? Does he further agree that it is sheer hypocrisy to oppose privatisation in principle and to promise more nationalisation, yet to claim that there will still be privatisation proceeds to spend, as did a Labour Front-Bench Treasury spokesperson this morning?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right. If the privatisation programme were to cease, it would have a damaging effect on the inflow of funds, as would proposals to renationalise parts of industry which is what the Labour party proposes. There is no doubt that there is a huge gap between Labour's spending proposals and its capacity to fund those proposals without huge increases in direct tax for the vast majority of people.

Mr. Rooney: Does the Prime Minister have any intention of visiting Essex? If he does, does he have any retraining plans in mind for those of his hon. Friends who will not be here after the next election?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is ill-informed. We have gained four local council seats in by-elections in Essex recently.

Q6. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 5 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Nicholson: As a former Social Security Minister, my right hon. Friend will be aware of the importance attached by the retired to occupational pensions and to the great and successful expansion of those over the past 12 years. Given the crocodile tears on those matters from the Labour party, is not it essential that my right hon. Friend should as soon as possible launch an inquiry into how people's pensions were protected by the prominent Labour party members who were directors and trustees of the Mirror Group Newspapers pension fund?

The Prime Minister: It would not be proper for me to comment on individuals who may be trustees of that pension fund. Pension management is based on trust law and the good management of pension funds and the behaviour of trustees is, therefore, paramount. As I said

some moments ago, we have strengthened the law requiring trustees to disclose key information to members, to pensioners and to trade unions. People listening to this Question Time may wonder why Opposition Members wish to drown out the subject.

Mr. Hume: Does the Prime Minister agree that it is impossible to have a genuine single market without a single currency? Does he also agree that the reservations in his party about a single currency have more to do with nationalism than with economics? Given that in the harmonisation process we have already got rid of the half crown and of the threepenny bit, what is the emotional difficulty about changing the pound coin to the ecu?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman bases his question on a premise that I do not accept. I believe that it is possible to have a perfectly satisfactory single market without a single currency. The question whether it would ever be right to move to one at some distant date is separate.

Balanced Budget

Q7. **Mr. Janman:** To ask the Prime Minister in what financial year he expects to balance the budget between Government expenditure and revenue received.

The Prime Minister: It remains our policy to balance the budget over the economic cycle. The balance between revenue and expenditure in any one financial year will depend largely on cyclical developments.

Mr. Janman: May I urge my right hon. Friend to keep as tight as humanly possible control on public expenditure so as to meet the objective of a balanced budget as soon as possible? Does he agree that the idea of spending an extra £35,000 million a year would be absolutely disastrous for the economy of this country? That is precisely what the Labour party seeks to do.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right. We have repaid a great deal of debt over recent years. It remains our policy to move back to a balanced budget as speedily as possible. The Opposition always promise to spend more. They never say where the money is coming from and they never will, but the taxpayers know where it is coming from—it will be coming from them.

Mr. Tony Banks: Am I being completely cynical—[HON. MEMBERS: "Yes!"] Give me a chance! Am I being completely cynical in thinking that the Government's announcement about the great increase in public expenditure has something to do with a general election?

The Prime Minister: Yes, totally cynical.

Wandsworth Prison (Diplomatic Bags)

3.30 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary if he will make a statement about the diplomatic bags which have been lost in Wandsworth prison.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): We learned some days ago that bags containing Canadian diplomatic mail had been discovered by staff at Wandsworth prison. Diplomatic bags are routinely sent to Wandsworth prison for laundering. *[Laughter.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I imagine that it is a Foreign Office brief. Come on.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I must get the answer right. On this occasion, the Canadian bags in question had been inadvertently included in such a consignment sent to Wandsworth. Steps were immediately taken to recover the diplomatic mail and to investigate the incident.

Mr. Kaufman: I am sorry—I hoped that there would be more.

Will the hon. Gentleman explain why the question is not being answered by the Home Secretary? On Monday *—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that we have a busy day ahead of us. Interruptions will take up time.

Mr. Kaufman: On Monday, dealing with one case, the Home Secretary hid behind his predecessor. On another case, he hid behind his legal advisers and a junior Home Office Minister. Today, he is hiding behind the most junior available Minister in another Department.

Will the hon. Gentleman say what action has been taken to explain why the missing material was left in the bags sent to Wandsworth prison? Will he explain exactly when it was discovered that that material was in the bags sent to Wandsworth prison and when the search for it started? Is it true that an interval of several days elapsed between the discovery and the search? How much material is still missing? Is a search still going on for missing material? How much of that material, missing or retrieved, is sensitive material? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is taking a long time. The right hon. Gentleman should be allowed to complete his question.

Mr. Kaufman: Will the hon. Gentleman tell the House whether a watch was in the missing material and what guarantees—*[Laughter.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kaufman: What guarantees can the Minister provide that other metal objects cannot find their way into prison in the way in which that did and disappear as it did? When was the Home Secretary informed about this latest episode? Why have the Government not made it public? Would they have made it public if prison officers had not been aware of it? The hon. Gentleman says that the Government sent the material to be laundered— *[Laughter.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kaufman: Are the Government going to send other material that they want to launder to Wandsworth prison or are they now going to come clean about this episode? *[Laughter.]*

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *rose*——

Hon. Members: Answer.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: May I take the right hon. Gentleman's question seriously? [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Clearly, this is a matter for the Foreign Office— *[Laughter.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am beginning to wonder whether I should have granted this private notice question.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *rose*——

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This is your responsibility. There are 3 million people on the dole and this country is in a deep economic crisis, yet all this is being shown on television and it is a disgrace.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let us get this over as quickly as we can.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: This is a private notice question tabled by the Opposition. The Government have a duty and I am here to answer it—*[Interruption]*—if the House will give me an opportunity. I think that this is important *—[Interruption.]* I am sure that the House will agree that this is important and that I should explain the background to the answer that I have previously given. I am sure that the House will bear with me for one or two minutes while I explain what has happened on this occasion. It is a serious matter.

The position is that the Canadian Government routinely send their diplomatic bags—*[Laughter.]* Should I go on?—to the Foreign Office for onward transmission *—[Laughter.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. When I decided to grant this private notice question, I took it to be a serious matter and I should like it to be taken seriously.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: On this occasion, some of their bags were contained in the white diplomatic bag belonging to the Foreign Office, which they were using for convenience to contain their consignment—*[Laughter.]*—and, as I have explained to the House, that was the commencement of the error in question which, of course, we very much regret.

I have come to the House this afternoon from a meeting with a representative of the Canadian High Commission, with which we have been in constant touch from the outset of the incident. It is perfectly satisfied with the outcome of the preliminary investigation.

Mr. Robert MacLennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Is not the difficulty that the Home Secretary is incapable of keeping in prison those people who should be and keeping out of prison those things which should not be?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: That is as absurd a political point as was made by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, (Mr. Kaufman). Clearly, this is not a matter for the Home Secretary. It occurred in the Foreign Office and

the Foreign Office, and I personally take full responsibility for it this afternoon before the House. Cheap politics is no way to investigate the matter.

Sir Peter Tapsell (East Lindsey): Bearing in mind the fact that Prince Metternich eventually left Vienna disguised in a laundry basket—*[Laughter.]*—is not it clear that this incident is in the highest diplomatic tradition? Can my hon. and diplomatic Friend assure us that these important diplomatic communications were not ultimately put to any ignoble use?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: As we know, Prince Metternich was not the only person to be put into a diplomatic bag. It happened on other occasions, but not on this one. Our friends in the Canadian High Commission and the Canadian Government are conducting their own assessment of the case. It is obviously not proper for me to comment further on what it concludes, but it is satisfied with our preliminary conclusions.

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): As the Minister who represents the area containing Wandsworth prison, may I suggest to the Minister that if the exchanges of the past few minutes were conveyed to BBC television's "Yes Minister" they might indeed help to revive the Government's fortunes? But there is a serious point here. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] There is a serious point. Prison officers are repeatedly subject to abuses from the Government about their lack of commitment to the job that they do. If the diplomatic bags contained metal objects that got through the system, surely the Minister or his right hon. Friend the Home Secretary should take note of the seriousness of the problem. There have been enough prison escapes under this Government. Surely this should be an opportunity for giving serious consideration to and providing serious answers on this major issue.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The allegation about a metal object being contained in one of the bags is new to me.

Business of the House

3.43 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Will the Leader of the House tell us the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 9 DECEMBER—Proceedings on the Aggravated Vehicle-Taking Bill.

Motion on the Teachers' Pay and Conditions Act 1987 (Continuation) Order.

TUESDAY 10 DECEMBER—Estimates day (1st allotted day). Until about seven o'clock there will be a debate on the financing of private residential and nursing home fees, followed by a debate on the future of the coal industry. Details of the estimates concerned and the relevant Select Committee reports will be given in the *Official Report*.

Motion on the Ministerial and Other Salaries Order.

At Ten o'clock, the House will be asked to agree the civil and defence votes on account and the outstanding winter supplementary estimates.

WEDNESDAY 11 DECEMBER—Until about seven o'clock, motions on the social security benefits uprating and disability benefits affirmative orders and regulations and any related negative regulations. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

Afterwards there will be a debate on fisheries on a Government motion.

THURSDAY 12 DECEMBER—Motion for the Christmas Adjournment.

Proceedings on the Consolidated Fund Bill.

FRIDAY 13 DECEMBER—Private Members' motions.

MONDAY 16 DECEMBER—Progress on remaining stages of the Local Government Finance Bill.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Committee A will meet at 10.30 am on Wednesday, 11 December, to consider European Community documents Nos. 7816/91 and 8046/91 relating to speed limitation devices.

[Tuesday, 10 December

Relevant Documents

Estimates Day: Class XIV, vote 1, central Government administered social security benefits and other payments, in so far as it relates to the financing of private residential and nursing home fees; fourth report from the Social Security Committee Session 1990-91 (HC 421); first report from the Health Committee Session 1991-92 (HC 28); class V, vote 9, privatisation of the coal industry, in so far as it relates to the future of the coal industry; fifth report from the Energy Committee Session 1990-91 (HC 208): "Clean coal technology and the coal market after 1993"; first special report from the Energy Committee, Session 1991-92 (HC 67); Government observations on the fifth report of last Session (to be published on Friday, 6 December at 11 am).

Wednesday 11 December

Social Security Orders and Regulations

1. Social Security Benefits Up-rating (No. 2) Order 1991

2. Social Security (Contributions) (Re-rating) (No. 2) Order 1991

3. Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase (No. 2) Order 1991

4. Statutory Sick Pay (Rate of Payment) (No. 2) Order 1991

[Mr. John MacGregor]

5. *Social Security (Introduction of Disability Living Allowance) Regulations 1991*
6. *Social Security Disability Working Allowance (General) Regulations 1991*
7. *Social Security (Disability Living Allowance) Regulations 1991*
8. *Social Security (Adjudication) Amendment (No. 3) Regulations 1991.*

European Standing Committee A
Relevant European Community Documents
7816/91, 8046/91 } *Speed limiters*
Relevant Report on European Legislation Committee HC 24-iii (1991-92).]

The House will also wish to know that, subject to the progress of business, it will be proposed that the House should rise for the Christmas Adjournment on Friday 20 December until Monday 13 January.

Dr. Cunningham: As someone whose motor car has just been stolen and used in a ram raid, may I give a personal welcome to the Bill which will come before the House next Monday? I am sorry that it has come a little late in my case, but I am sure that there will be a general welcome that the Government are at last taking action in that matter.

When the Home Secretary introduces that legislation next week, will the Leader of the House arrange for him to give the House a guarantee that it is not his intention, as reported in the newspapers, to stop publishing the quarterly crime statistics? Is that not yet another Government attempt to cover up their appalling record of the past 12 years and the explosion of crime which has taken place during their term of office?

Can we have a statement next week from the Government on regional industrial policy, especially on matters to do with assisted area status? May I sadly draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to the announcement yesterday of several hundred more job losses in my constituency of Copeland? Is he not aware—and will he not make it clear to his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment—that yet another Government inquiry into industrial decline and the huge increases in unemployment in west Cumbria is not necessary? We know of the job losses: what we want to hear about is some Government action, especially the provision of assisted area status for west Cumbria, and for Copeland and Barrow-in-Furness.

Will the Leader of the House arrange next week for the Secretary of State for Education and Science to explain in an oral statement how it has been possible so to order his priorities that he can easily find £26 million of taxpayers' money for prestigious new offices for himself and other Ministers, while throughout the country the Government are failing to provide cash to invest in crumbling schools and in our children's education?

Mr. MacGregor: I sympathise with the hon. Gentleman in the loss of his stolen car, as I have already told him. I am sure that he will agree that there are many other reasons for wishing to introduce the Bill, and he will know that we have moved as fast as possible to frame it and bring it before the House. I believe that it is the will of the whole House that the Bill should proceed as quickly as possible so that we can strengthen considerably the penalties involved in what is wrongly known as joyriding.

As to the question about crime statistics, we would be happy to debate the Government's record on all law and order matters and to outline the many measures that we have taken to strengthen the police and to improve police pay, as well as other measures dealing with increases in penalties for crime. That is not appropriate for next Monday, but we should be happy to debate those matters on any occasion with the Labour party.

On his second point, the hon. Member will know that there will be an opportunity to debate economic policy this afternoon. We would happily engage in a debate about all the policies that we have carried through to realise the high growth which was achieved throughout most of the 1980s, and which will certainly be achieved through the 1990s.

I cannot promise Government time next week to discuss assisted area status, but the hon. Gentleman will be aware that there will be a number of opportunities next week when individual matters can be raised.

I do not think that it would be appropriate for my right hon. and learned Friend to make a statement on education next week, but we shall be pleased on every occasion possible to talk about the 35 per cent. increase in capital allocation that has gone into the school building programme in the last two years. Our record is very good.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House knows that I am always reluctant to curtail business questions, but today we have heavy pressure on debate, and I shall have to put a 10-minute limit on speeches. I therefore ask for questions to be related to the business for next week. I shall draw business questions to a close at 4.20, in the general interests of the House.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Is it my right hon. Friend's intention to arrange a debate on the outcome of the Maastricht meetings next week or before Christmas, or to leave it till after Christmas?

Mr. MacGregor: As I said last week, the Prime Minister will make a statement to the House as soon as possible after the summit has been completed. We must await the outcome of the summit before deciding what further consideration might be given in the House.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Has the Leader of the House noted early-day motion 21 against the Control of Explosives Regulations 1991? *[That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Control of Explosives Regulations 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 1531), dated 5th July 1991, a copy of which was laid before this House on 15th July, in the last Session of Parliament, be annulled.]* Has he further noted that it has been signed by 80 hon. Members in all parts of the House—perhaps an unusual number of signatures against a statutory instrument—because of their understandable concern about rights being given to the police to enter houses without warrant, and for that to be possible by way of a negative order?

Will the right hon. Gentleman make time available, preferably in the Chamber but otherwise in Committee, to debate that important matter?

Mr. MacGregor: I shall look into the matter. From recollection, and from what the hon. Gentleman said, I believe that it is one of the early motions and that the time may have passed.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Following the visit of Mr. Le Pen, will my right hon. Friend arrange an early debate on racism so that many of us may take the opportunity to condemn his offensive and hateful doctrines?

Mr. MacGregor: There will be a number of opportunities next week for a whole range of matters to be raised in the House.

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): Can the right hon. Gentleman make time available next week for a debate on the emotional subject of Sunday trading? He will recall the debates in 1986, when the majority of hon. Members rejected the proposals of the Government to alter the Shops Act 1950 and to introduce new legislation permitting Sunday trading. Is he aware that we must debate the matter urgently, because people in the country are illegally opening shops, and people are able to go into them and buy goods, all of which is illegal and could be the subject of prosecution?

Does the right hon. Gentleman also recall the debates in 1986 when the House rejected the idea of bringing back the rope? If the Government intend to flout the law on Sunday trading, perhaps their next step will be to bring back capital punishment without the permission of the House and without the law of the land being changed. We in Parliament, not people in Europe, make the laws of this country. We need a debate so that everybody in Britain may know where Members of the House stand.

Mr. MacGregor: As the hon. Gentleman knows, prosecution of those matters is for local authorities to consider: it is for them to prosecute if they wish to do so. I well recall the debates in 1986 on the Auld committee report and on the Bill that the Government introduced to try to make sense of the current laws on Sunday trading. He will recall that there were a wide range of views about the matter at that time. That is why the Minister of State, Home Office is continuing to have discussions with all those involved to see if an acceptable way forward can be achieved. I do not think that that would be achieved by a debate next week.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for an urgent debate next week on the plight of Mirror Group Newspapers pensioners? Will he also ensure that the debate is opened by the Attorney-General, who should deal with the question whether the Official Solicitor can step in, remove the trustees who have shown themselves to be totally useless, and obtain worldwide freezing orders on all the assets and money of the Maxwell family trust companies and Maxwell family companies? Will my right hon. Friend ensure that the debate is closed by the Foreign Secretary or the Chancellor, who can comment on the massive amount of income tax and capital gains tax of which the country has been defrauded by means of the Liechtenstein family trust, which has managed over the years to deal in other people's money free of tax, causing British taxpayers to lose millions of pounds?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that I can find Government time to debate that matter next week. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said, the Serious Fraud Office is now conducting an inquiry into the Mirror Group Newspapers pension fund. IMRO, the investment fund regulator, is also conducting inquiries into Bishopsgate Investment Management Ltd. Those inquiries should be allowed to proceed on that aspect of the matter. As for who should participate, my hon. Friend would not be entirely right to ask that my right hon. Friends should participate in the debate.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Are arrangements being made next week for a report back to the House by the hon. Member for Grantham (Mr. Hogg), the Minister of State, Foreign Office, who has been to Algeria, Egypt and Tunisia? Is the Leader of the House aware that some of us wish to argue the case for this country acceding to the Libyan request to send British and American judges to Libya?

Mr. MacGregor: No, I do not think that it would be appropriate to debate the matter in Government time next week, but there are opportunities this week for a number of matters to be raised, as the hon. Gentleman knows.

Mr. Bernie Grant (Tottenham): Has the Leader of the House had time to read a letter that I sent him regarding the treatment by the tabloid press of my appeal for information relating to the murder of PC Keith Blakelock? I appealed on television and elsewhere for anyone with information to come forward, and I offered to accompany them to the police. That has been distorted by the tabloid press, which has totally altered the position, thus creating difficulties in my constituency. An atmosphere has been created in which people will not co-operate with the police, as has happened in the past.

In view of the fact that right hon. and hon. Members have made comments in this House and in the papers about the situation, will the Leader of the House allow me time to make a full personal statement on the circumstances of the case, especially in view of the policy inquiry that has been launched today?

Mr. MacGregor: Personal statements, as the hon. Gentleman knows, are not a matter for me but for you, Mr. Speaker. Some of the statements made by the hon. Gentleman in the past have caused many people much concern.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Will the Leader of the House bear in mind the fact that part of his duty is to look after minorities in the House? When will we have a debate about accountability of Northern Ireland Office Ministers to Select Committees of the House? Yesterday in Dublin, the Prime Minister made it clear that he saw no reason why talks could not start immediately on stage 1. That is the conviction of the Unionist parties in this House—that talks should start before an election. Why cannot the Leader of the House get a Select Committee on Northern Ireland going so that, before the election, hon. Members will have an opportunity to question what is happening in Northern Ireland?

Mr. MacGregor: There are many opportunities to question what is happening in Northern Ireland—for example, in statements, at Question Time and in many of our debates. As for Select Committees, I have made it

[Mr. MacGregor]

plain several times that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is willing to consider all those matters at the appropriate time but that we feel that the appropriate way to proceed is to get the talks going again.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): Yesterday, our Prime Minister met the Prime Minister of the Republic of Ireland and agreed that, from now on, he will meet the Dublin Prime Minister twice a year to discuss the affairs of Northern Ireland. As the Prime Minister does not extend the same facility to the Unionist parties of Northern Ireland, whose members live in Northern Ireland, and are elected by and speak for the people of Northern Ireland, will the Leader of the House arrange for at least two debates a year in the House so that all hon. Members have the same rights as are now given to the Republican Prime Minister in Dublin?

Mr. MacGregor: I am well aware that we have more than two debates on Northern Ireland matters every year.

Mr. Speaker: I think that I inadvertently called two Members on the Opposition side, so I shall now balance that.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): Bearing in mind the fact that there has been a Department of Trade and Industry inquiry into all aspects of the allegations of serious financial misconduct since March of this year, will my right hon. Friend arrange for his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to make a statement to the House next week explaining exactly what the Government knew, and when, of the allegations made in March? Will he also arrange a full inquiry into "Mirrorgate", ranging from the allegations of the manipulation of the "Spot the Ball" competition, right through to the looting of £500 million from the Mirror Group Newspapers pension fund?

Mr. MacGregor: My right hon. Friend's Department is in close consultation with the Serious Fraud Office, which is now widening its investigation to include the Mirror Group Newspapers pension fund. I understand that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made it clear that he will not hesitate to take immediate action if any issues emerge that justify an investigation by his Department, as long as doing so will not slow down the work of the SFO.

Sir Ian Lloyd (Havant): My right hon. Friend will know that the Advisory Committee on Science and Technology last week published its first triennial report raising a number of fundamental and far-reaching issues affecting this country's prosperity and future well-being into the next century. As there obviously will not be time to discuss the report next week, will my right hon. Friend ensure that he places high in his list of priorities a proper debate on those important subjects?

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of the subjects. He will know well my previous involvement in them. One reason why I agree with him is that I am well aware of the importance of those reports. I cannot promise time early in the new year, as we have a full programme of work. However, there will be two opportunities to raise the matter next week: Thursday and Friday.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): The Leader of the House knows that the Asylum Bill is being considered in Standing Committee, but he may not know that the deliberations of the Committee are being made extremely difficult by the legal uncertainties that shroud the Bill. Clause 3 is widely seen as a breach of the Race Relations Act 1976. Clauses 4 and 5 cause difficulties because of the legal uncertainty about the future of the legal aid scheme.

Will the Leader of the House arrange for Law Officers to attend the Committee so that its members can receive the benefit of their advice or arrange for the Attorney-General to make a statement next week explaining why Law Officers are unwilling to attend the Committee?

Mr. MacGregor: I am not aware of those matters, and I shall discuss them with my right hon. and learned Friends.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks (Wolverhampton, North-East): In view of the disgraceful disturbances last night at Brinsford prison, near Wolverhampton, a spanking new £50 million prison in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack), will my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House arrange for a debate on the problem of young offenders? We are too often given too many excuses. We have been told that the disturbances in our prisons are due to overcrowding and other conditions. However, Brinsford is a brand new prison that has just opened, and we should take the opportunity to link the debate on young offenders with the subject of young offenders outside gaol who are too often involved in joyriding episodes and other incidents that disturb our constituents.

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend is quite right to draw attention to the considerable prison building programme undertaken by the Government. I shall not be able to find time for such a debate next week, but it may be a suitable subject to raise on the Consolidated Fund Bill.

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): Is the Leader of the House aware that the Yorkshiree police authority, through its chairman and chief constable, has issued a press statement, followed up by a letter to West Yorkshire Members of Parliament, saying that the force is 200 policemen understaffed? Earlier this afternoon, during Home Office questions, a Home Office Minister and the hon. Member for Calder Valley (Mr. Thompson) suggested that that was not the case. Will the right hon. Gentleman arrange for an investigation to see who is telling the truth and for a statement to be made to the House next week?

Mr. MacGregor: That would not be an appropriate matter for a statement, but I shall ensure that the matter is brought to my right hon. Friend's attention and that he considers whether he should say something in some other form.

Mr. Jonathan Aitken (Thanet, South): My right hon. Friend has given the impression from the Dispatch Box this afternoon that the involvement of the Serious Fraud Office in the affairs of the *Daily Mirror* somehow makes it impossible for the House to debate that subject. That view

cannot be right in relation to one aspect of the affairs of the *Daily Mirror*—the uncertainties surrounding its future ownership. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the House will be given an opportunity to debate any possible future transfer of the title, as it is required to do if the Secretary of State had to give his consent under the Fair Trading Act 1973 for a transfer of this important title?

Mr. MacGregor: I agree that only certain aspects are covered by the two investigations to which I have referred. I shall have to consider the matter that my hon. Friend raises, but it is unlikely that we shall be able to deal with it next week. If my hon. Friend wishes to raise other aspects of the matter, there will be plenty of opportunity for individual issues to be raised on two days next week.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): As the Leader of the House is well aware, at 4 o'clock this afternoon the Government's latest proposals on the advertising of commercial and other credit facilities will be published. I fully appreciate that the matter can then be dealt with by way of statutory instruments in Committee, but, bearing in mind the seriousness of the matter and the importance of credit and credit display and warning, will the right hon. Gentleman give an undertaking that the matter will be dealt with on the Floor of the House at a later stage?

Mr. MacGregor: I have noted what the hon. Gentleman says. That will be a matter for us to discuss through the usual channels.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): My right hon. Friend will remember a Department of Trade and Industry report on Pergamon Press which said that Robert Maxwell should never be allowed to run a public company. Surely, in the light of Conservative Members' concern——

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Only Conservative Members.

Mr. Hind: —about what has happened to the Mirror group of companies, particularly the £500 million that has been taken from the pension fund, will my right hon. Friend provide time next week so that the matter can be properly debated?

Mr. MacGregor: As my hon. Friend knows, it was this Government who strengthened the law relating to directors and their disqualification a few years ago, after the particular case to which my hon. Friend refers in relation to Pergamon Press. The Government have also strengthened the law and the regulations in relation to pension funds. Again, my hon. Friend's point can be raised next week.

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): Is the Leader of the House aware that the people of Scotland and England are living in fear of their lives as a result of the escalation of drug abuse and murder by firearms? A recent police report showed that there were 37 murders in the south-east of England and that parts of Scotland are becoming like Dodge City. When will the Home Office clean up the mess so that people can do their shopping and go out after dark in safety?

Mr. MacGregor: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Government take such matters extremely seriously. That is why we have taken a range of measures to address them, including changes in the law relating to penalties for drug abusers and in many other ways. The Government's record is clear. We share the hon. Gentleman's concern; that is why we are doing a lot about it.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Can we find time next week to broaden the debate on pension funds into a general debate on corruption in public life? For some time, Conservative Members have had to listen to Opposition Members moralising about "greedy business men" and "City spivs", but during the past few months the former Labour deputy leader of Liverpool council, who was backed up to the hilt by the Labour party when he was deputy leader, has been arrested for his shady dealings. There have been several leading councillors in north-east Derbyshire——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am not personally aware, but is the hon. Gentleman sure that that case is not sub judice?

Mr. Oppenheim: I have checked on that, but I shall not pursue the matter.

We need a debate on the subject, particularly bearing in mind what has recently happened with regard to the Maxwell pension fund. Is it not the case that the real spivs are the Labour spivs who rip off pensioners and poll tax payers to line their own pockets?

Mr. MacGregor: I obviously cannot refer to the case that my hon. Friend has mentioned. He has made his point about the affiliations of some of the people about whom there is so much concern, but I cannot find Government time to debate it next week.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): Is the Leader of the House aware of the content of early-day motion 256, on the subject of genetic patenting?

[That this House notes with concern the proposed EC Directive which will allow the patenting of genetically engineered animals and plants, and which is designed to foster research in this field; believes that such patenting implies an ethically unacceptable view of animals as instruments for human use and exploitation and will lead to an increase in animal suffering such as that of the American pigs with human growth gene, which were arthritic and impotent and had deformed skulls; further believes that such patenting will increase the control of large concerns over genetic resources, thus harming the interests of farmers and of the Third World; further believes that it will lead to higher prices and curtailment of consumer choice; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to reject this Directive and to advocate a moratorium on patenting of life forms to allow time for public debate.]

Is he aware also of public concern about the morality of creating and patenting life forms? Will he allow time to debate that important issue on the Floor of the House?

Mr. MacGregor: I am aware of early-day motion 256, but the Government consider that patent law is not the right vehicle for controlling genetic engineering activities. If an activity is not otherwise proscribed, then, in general, the benefit of the patent system should apply.

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): Will my right hon. Friend accept that, in this day of the social charter, it must be wrong that members of the armed forces who are grievously injured in the course of duty should have to prove negligence by the mighty Ministry of Defence? When my right hon. Friend reads my new Bill, which sets

[Mr. John Browne]

out to reverse that unjust onus of proof, will he do so with a view to urging his Government colleagues not to kill my Bill?

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot comment on a Bill that I have not seen. However, I do not see how that relates to the social charter—which, as my hon. Friend knows, contains a number of measures that the Government feel could be deeply damaging to employment in this country, although not in the way that my hon. Friend describes. However, I have not yet read my hon. Friend's Bill.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Has the Leader of the House noticed the large number of questions that Ministers are receiving on the subjects of policing and law and order? Given the breakdown in law and order throughout the kingdom, and having noted that last week the Home Secretary appointed four extra police officers for the whole of the county of Cumbria—which embraces half a million people—is it not time for the Government to make a full statement at the Dispatch Box so that right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House can press the Home Secretary on the need for additional policing in their constituencies?

Mr. MacGregor: But there are substantially more police in place now than when this Government took office, and they are better paid. There are not the problems of recruitment and retention that there were when the last Labour Government were in office, and many more officers are also on the beat, because the number of civilian workers in the police service has greatly increased. Penalties have also been increased, and expenditure has substantially increased. This Government have taken many more measures than the last Labour Government, with the result that the position in respect of the police is very much better than it was then.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): There will be widespread appreciation that what comes out of Maastricht will be of monumental importance to the future of Britain. Will my right hon. Friend make sure that when that matter comes to be debated in the House, that is not done over one or two days, but that a whole week is set aside so that all right hon. and hon. Members may have an opportunity to express ideas and thoughts that will be so important for the future of Britain?

Mr. MacGregor: I repeat what I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack)—we have not yet taken a view on how further consideration of the outcome of Maastricht should proceed following the statement of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister—which I made clear will be made as soon as possible. If we have a debate, I will endeavour to allow as much time for it as possible. However, in view of the amount of time that we have already given to those matters, and given the fact that we have a shortened Parliament—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh? How shortened?"]—it is extremely unlikely that I will be able to allow a full week. However, if there is a debate, I will allow as much time as possible.

Mr. Ron Brown (Edinburgh, Leith): The Government claim that the national health service is safe in their hands. However, the Royal Hospital for Sick Children in Edinburgh and the promised Leith hospital have been denied funding unless both are connected with the entrepreneurs—with the spiv society. Clearly that is a disgrace. Can the House debate that matter next week, because it is so important to my part of Scotland?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not know precisely to which individuals the hon. Gentleman refers in relation to those hospitals, but I should have thought that to describe them as entrepreneurs was entirely inappropriate. The hon. Gentleman will know of the considerable increases for the health service in Scotland in the coming year announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland. As to any debate, I made it clear that there will be a considerable number of opportunities for right hon. and hon. Members individually to raise such issues next week.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): Will the Leader of the House, as a good Scot, make a new year's resolution, if he is not able to do this before the new year, to have a debate, not on law and order, but on law, and on the comparative law of Scotland and England? If the law of Scotland applied in England, we would not need to waste our time on the Prison Securities Bill or the Aggravated Vehicle-Taking Bill—the Criminal Law Act 1977 does not apply and the Shops Act 1950 part II does not apply—or the release of innumerable people convicted of terrible crimes. If the law of Scotland applied here, the business of the House would be a great deal shorter and a great deal better done.

Mr. MacGregor: I am not sure about the last point, because I know that there are always so many candidates for Bills that, if some important ones did not come forward, others would take their place. My hon. and learned Friend is clearly not talking about next week in relation to a resolution that I might make on Hogmanay. I have a good deal of sympathy with the point that he makes about the Shops Act.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): Will the Leader of the House undertake that, when the Prime Minister reports on Maastricht, he will include his talks leading up to Maastricht so as to allow hon. Members, particularly those from Northern Ireland, to probe about the meeting between him and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Ireland yesterday? Bearing in mind the disingenuous reply that he gave my colleague the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) earlier, will he not accept that the Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office and in Dublin castle are not actually elected by anybody from Northern Ireland?

Mr. MacGregor: That is not the point that I was making earlier. The point that I was making was that there are a considerable number of opportunities to debate Northern Ireland matters and to ask questions on them in the House. I will draw to my right hon. Gentleman's attention the point that the hon. Gentleman makes about the Prime Minister.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): In the context of business next week, there are other European matters of importance beyond the Community that merit early consideration. Will my right hon. Friend urge the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to come to the House next week and announce the official recognition by Her Majesty's Government of the newly

eleted Government of Ukraine, which, in a referendum, by a majority of 9 to 1, has democratically endorsed the previous democratic decision of its democratically elected Parliament on its own sovereignty and independence? Her Majesty's Government ought to be seen to support these democratic movements.

Mr. MacGregor: Without making any commitment to a statement, I will draw the views of my hon. Friend to my right hon. Friend's attention.

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): May I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to early-day motion 249?

[That this House recognises with sadness the plight of those people infected with HIV as a result of contaminated National Health Service blood/tissue transfers; recalls that the Government has given special financial assistance to haemophiliacs infected with HIV under National Health Service treatment by the blood product Factor VIII; notes that the Minister of State for Health has stated that haemophiliacs should be a special case; but believes that there is no logical or legal argument for the Government's refusal to extend aid to non-haemophiliacs infected by contaminated National Health Service blood/tissue transfers; regrets the Government's failure to recognise their obligations towards this small number of people; and calls upon the Government immediately to include non-haemophiliacs within the category of persons compensated for infection with HIV under National Health Service treatment.]

It has been signed by more than 170 hon. Members from all parties in the House, and calls on the Government to provide financial compensation to non-haemophiliacs who have become HIV-positive as a result of contaminated national health service blood transfusions or tissue transfers. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the Government Whips Office organised last Friday to prevent a similar motion from being debated in the House? I appeal to him to draw the motion to the attention of his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and to ask him to give it very careful consideration.

Mr. MacGregor: I think that the hon. Gentleman is quite wrong about the way in which debates are conducted in the House. He will know that many people often want to speak in individual debates. With regard to the early-day motion, I am sure that the whole House has every sympathy with the plight of those who have been infected with HIV as a result of blood transfusions, but the House decided only recently that it did not support the principle of no-fault compensation for medical negligence. If the NHS is proved negligent in a court, of course the Government accept their liability to pay damages.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): By now, my right hon. Friend will be aware of the very great concern on this side of the House about the crimes of fraud committed by Robert Maxwell and his associates, not least in respect of the raiding of the pension funds of Mirror Group Newspapers. May I, in supporting the request for a debate next week, put it to my right hon. Friend that there are millions of pensioners and contributors to company pension funds throughout the land who are today worried sick about the future of their pensions? We need to allay their fears by a debate to prove that not every company is crooked and not every group of trustees is negligent, as were those in the case of Mirror Group Newspapers.

Mr. MacGregor: I share the concern of my hon. Friend and of other Conservative Members, and I understand the anxiety of pensioners, and future pensioners, in the company. There is no doubt about where our concern lies. I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees that, under trust law, trustees have a duty to act in the interests of all beneficiaries. Many trustees of pension funds do so. The Occupational Pensions Board considered trust law in 1988. It saw no need to change the legal framework but recommended additional safeguards, which the Government enacted in 1990. I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees that many trustees of occupational pension schemes carry out their responsibilities responsibly. The reassurance that my hon. Friend wants can be given to many pension holders all over the country.

Several Hon. Members *rose——*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will carefully keep the list of hon. Members who have not been called and will give them priority next week. I have a short statement to make.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No, I am on my feet.

Consolidated Fund Bill

4.20 pm

Mr. Speaker: I have a short statement to make about arrangements for the debate on the motion for the Adjournment, which will follow the passing of the Consolidated Fund Bill on Thursday 12 December.

Hon. Members should submit their subjects to my office not later than 10 pm on Tuesday 10 December. A list showing the subjects and the times will be published the following day. Normally, the time allotted will not exceed one and a half hours, but I propose to exercise a discretion to allow one or two debates to continue for rather longer, up to a maximum of three hours.

Where identical or similar subjects have been entered by different Members whose names are drawn in the ballot, only the first name will appear on the list. As some debates may not last the full time allotted to them, it is the responsibility of hon. Members to keep in touch with developments if they are not to miss their turn.

Points of Order

4.21 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I hope that it is not because the hon. Gentleman has not been called at business questions.

Mr. Foulkes: You kindly said that you would call hon. Members next week who had been rising. Somewhat eccentrically, the question that I was going to ask was about next Wednesday's business.

Mr. Speaker: What bad luck.

Mr. Foulkes *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: No—I am sorry, that was a bit provocative. However, I gave the hon. Member a very good run yesterday, and the day before.

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—not related to business questions or to the fact that I am sulking or anything like that; it is a totally different matter.

Whenever there has been a whiff of financial scandal in the past, the Opposition, very much to their credit, have raised it and brought it before the public, and there has been a great hue and cry about it. Unaccountably, the Opposition have not requested a statement on one of the great scandals involving Robert Maxwell. Will you, Mr. Speaker, tell the House whether you have been approached on the subject, and, if so, have the Opposition told you why they do not want a statement on it?

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The trouble with points of order like that is that they are highly contagious.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): In view of what you, Mr. Speaker, have had to say about the Consolidated Fund Bill, can you give some assurance that, if this matter about Maxwell and him laundering money is raised, you will ensure that people such as Arthur Scargill and Peter Heathfield will be given special tickets to sit in the Gallery so that they can hear the debate and so that they can draw the attention of various channels to the fact that perhaps Mr. Lightman should investigate the missing Maxwell millions, and perhaps we can find out whether Roger Windsor, Mr. Maxwell's nark, was paid £50,000 out of the *Daily Mirror's* missing millions. Those are the questions that we would like to be asked.

Mr. Speaker: There are opportunities to raise these matters next week. They would have to be raised in a parliamentary manner, and certainly couched in the proper terms.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Could you give guidance on the important matter of confidences given us by constituents? It is important that constituents should be able to consult us about confidential matters, but surely we should not go so far as to give comfort to murderers and bombers, as has been suggested. The hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant) said that he had been misquoted. Will you give a

ruling, Mr. Speaker, that we are not like doctors, lawyers and priests, and that we should uphold the police and support them in their duties?

Mr. Speaker: I think I know to what the hon. Member is referring. The fact is that there is no privilege for confidences given to hon. Members. It is a matter for the discretion of hon. Members.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), I ought to make it clear that we would very much like to see an investigation of the missing pension funds. Also, we have been calling for many years for legislation to get rid of the offshore tax havens of the sort that Lord Duncan-Sandys ploughed money into from Lonrho about 1970.

Mr. Speaker: I think that would be quite a good subject.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): May I ask you about a serious point of order, Mr. Speaker? I have noticed the growing practice on Prime Minister's questions and on questions to other Ministers of Members on both sides of the House, but primarily Opposition Members, asking personal questions which do not relate to the Minister's responsibility. For instance, today the Prime Minister was asked about his period of unemployment.

Dr. Lewis Moonie (Kirkcaldy): The hon. Gentleman might be unemployed soon.

Mr. Devlin: I doubt it very much. I wonder, Mr. Speaker, whether you could give us some guidance on the point. Surely Ministers are appearing at the Dispatch Box solely to answer questions about their governmental responsibilities.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member is absolutely right. In view of what he has said, I deeply regret having called him, I think on Question 2, to ask a question about the Northumbria police which had nothing to do with his constituency. I do allow a slight discretion in these matters.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): The hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) talked about an inquiry into the position of the Mirror Group pension fund. May it be made clear for the record that my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam), who is a junior Front-Bench spokesman, wrote to the Secretary of State this week asking for an inquiry? We are deeply concerned about the matter, about the theft that has taken place and about the laxity of the rules which allowed that to happen. We want a prompt inquiry.

Mr. Speaker: I think I called the hon. Member on business questions. Couched in the right terms, that seems to fall within the ambit of a Consolidated Fund Bill debate, or one of the Adjournment debates before we go off for Christmas.

Opposition Day

[2ND ALLOTTED DAY]

Economy and Recession

Mr. Speaker: I must announce to the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister. Furthermore, in view of the late start and the number of hon. Members who wish to participate, I am putting a precautionary limit of 10 minutes on speeches between 7 o'clock and 9 o'clock. If the Front-Bench spokesmen and those who are called before 7 o'clock exercise discretion, it may be possible in the interests of the whole House to relax that limit.

4.28 pm

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): I beg to move,

That this House deplores the Government's economic policies, which have caused the severe and continuing recession and which are damaging all parts of the economy and all areas of the nation; and calls upon the Government to initiate without delay an investment based recovery including financial incentives for investment in manufacturing, tax credits for the enhancement of technology, assistance for regional economic development and a major programme of education and training to tackle Britain's continuing skills crisis.

I happen for my sins to have been shadow Chancellor since the last election in 1987, during which period there have been three Chancellors of the Exchequer. The first was the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), who is not remembered with exactly ecstatic affection by Conservative Members. Despite being described by the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), then Prime Minister, as both "unassailable" and "brilliant, brilliant, brilliant", he is given a much lower rating by contemporary Conservative opinion. Whenever they gather in private, he is berated for the economic mess in which their political fortunes are floundering, although in public, as hon. Members know only too well, the fiction is resolutely maintained that Conservative economic policy has been a continuing success. The right hon. Member for Blaby will be remembered as the Chancellor who dismissed rising inflation as a temporary blip and who, having put up interest rates to 15 per cent., none the less assured us that the economy would have, to use his phrase, a soft landing. The right hon. Gentleman may personally have achieved a rather soft landing, but sadly that was not true for the economy of which he was in charge.

There followed the present Prime Minister who spent about a year in the job—a year in which the British economy went steadily downward into a deep and savage recession, paralleled only by the recession in the early part of the decade which was presided over by that other Tory Chancellor, the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe).

The present Prime Minister assured us that there would not be a recession at all. Speaking to the Association of British Chambers of Commerce on 6 December 1989 he said:

"I do not myself think a recession is either likely or necessary."

Even 11 months later, in presenting his autumn statement to the House, he refused to use the word "recession" throughout and forecast:

[Mr. John Smith]

"the British economy is coming back on track".—[*Official Report*, 8 November 1990; Vol. 180, c. 125.]

To be fair to the right hon. Gentleman, he did appear to have a revealing glimpse of self-doubt in his own assessment when he told the *Financial Times* in an interview on 27 October 1990:

"It will take some time. It always does to change the economy. It's like turning the Titanic round as you know."

Well, we do not know; we do not think that that was the Titanic's problem.

I believe that there is a unifying characteristic about the three most recent Tory Chancellors—a stunning inability to predict even with vague accuracy what is about to happen to the economy, coupled with the disreputable technique of bogus reassurance which would put Arthur Daley to shame. In the latter respect, the present Chancellor is the undisputed champion. Shortly after he became Chancellor, he told the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee on 5 December 1990 that the recession would be "short lived and shallow."

As the economy went into a nose dive, the right hon. Gentleman was soon proved to be absurdly wrong. Perhaps chastened by that experience, he seems to have decided by the time of the Budget that he would be more realistic in his forecasts for recovery. In his wind-up speech in the Budget debate on 25 March 1991 he told us:

"I am not in the business of publishing forecasts that are more optimistic than I think is the case, as that leads us nowhere. It is better to put the facts before Parliament and the country."

He went on to predict:

"There is every reason to expect that growth will start again towards the middle of the year."—[*Official Report*, 25 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 698.]

He repeated that forecast a month later when speaking at a press conference of the International Monetary Fund in Washington on 29 April. According to *The Times*, the *Financial Times* and *The Independent*, the Chancellor said —and I quote from *The Independent's* copy:

"The recession would be over somewhere around the end of the second quarter"—

that is, the second quarter of this year.

Therefore, the Chancellor, who was by that time careful not to be over-optimistic, predicted that recovery would begin in July of this year. By June of this year he was beginning to moderate that forecast somewhat. He told David Frost on TV-am on 2 June this year:

"In my Budget speech I said that from the middle of the year the recovery would begin . . . it may be slow at first. It will begin in certain sectors, probably in the housing market . . . there are . . . vague stirrings, but the signs are there."

I have on previous occasions reminded the House of the outraged reaction of the building industry to the Chancellor's statement, but one person at least appears to have been persuaded—and that is the Prime Minister himself.

In an interview in *The Daily Telegraph* on 19 June this year, under the banner headline "Recovery coming 'in weeks'"—this way in June—the Prime Minister was asked about the faint stirrings that the Chancellor had detected in the housing market. The interviewer said:

"The Chancellor did speak of 'vague stirrings' in his recent television interview."

The Prime Minister replied:

"I think you can look anecdotally at what is happening."

I am not sure how one does that, but I am quoting exactly what the Prime Minister said, and it must be right because it is in *The Daily Telegraph*. He went on:

"Anecdotally you look around you, you find lots of those For Sale boards now have Sold stickers on them."

To help the comprehension of the readers of *The Daily Telegraph*, there are photographs of signs with "Sold" stickers on some of them.

Mr. Den Dover (Chorley): The right hon. and learned Gentleman says that signs of recovery are hard to find. Can he explain why unemployment in Chorley has gone down in the past two months and why several of the builders are doing very well?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman should look at the figures for the country as a whole. If he does so, he will find that that is not an encouraging sign. Some 850,000 people have been put out of work in the past 18 months and that is the figure about which the hon. Gentleman should think. If we are conquering the unemployment problem, why do vacancies keep falling? Vacancies have fallen again from 106,000 to 103,000. There are now 24 claimants chasing every notified vacancy and the number of vacancies in Greater London has almost halved, leaving a remarkable 84 claimants for each vacancy. Anyone who thinks that that is a satisfactory state of affairs has a lack of ambition for our economic success.

I return to the Prime Minister and the "Sold" signs all over the area at which he looks anecdotally. At this point one wonders what world the Prime Minister lives in, as repossessions mount to a record level, projected to be 100,000 in this year alone, and as the housing market remains wholly depressed.

No doubt encouraged by the Prime Minister's reassuring anecdotal ventures, the Chancellor continued into the early autumn promising recovery around the corner. He told the *Financial Times* in an interview on 16 September:

"Britain is coming out of recession. The statistics are highly encouraging and pointing very much in the right direction."

A month later, at the Conservative party conference in Blackpool, the Chancellor told the Tory faithful:

"the green shoots of economic spring are appearing once again".

I must bring the House rapidly up to date.

Interviewed by Mr. Walden last Sunday, the Chancellor appeared to be sadly bereft of statistics or even of anecdotal sightings of recovery. Rather lamely, he claimed:

"I have never changed my view about how I saw the path of the recovery . . . so far things have turned out very much as I expected".

In what I find an astonishing backtrack, he then told Mr. Walden:

"We are not assuming, in our view of the future, that there will be a great and sudden revival necessarily of the housing market . . . we are not assuming that housing is leading the economy out of the recession on this occasion".

The words "on this occasion" should be translated as "in this interview". It was precisely the housing market in which the Chancellor claimed to detect the "vague" and faint "stirrings" which led the Prime Minister off on his anecdotal trail.

Will the Chancellor now admit that what he said in June on TV-am about "vague stirrings" in the housing market and what the Prime Minister told us about "Sold" signs everywhere was rubbish then, as it is rubbish now?

What is most revealing is that if we accept that Ministers believed what they said at the time, they were woefully ignorant of the catastrophic effect that their policies were having on the housing market and on the construction industry generally.

Ministers appear to have no concept of the mortgage misery and the consequent alarming surge in repossessions and lost homes, which are the direct result of their economic mismanagement. The collapse in the construction industry simply cannot be talked away. I noticed an article by Mr. Andrew Taylor in today's *Financial Times* which said:

"Bad news continues to pour out of the sector with no sign of the recession loosening its grip on residential and commercial property markets."

The article quotes Sir Clifford Chetwood, chairman of Wimpey, Britain's second largest housebuilder, as saying:

"I have been in the industry 42 years. These are the worst conditions I have experienced."

The article goes on:

"Tarmac, the country's biggest housebuilder, said this week that trading conditions had deteriorated substantially during the last two months."

That is, the "last two months" in which recovery is supposed to be happening before our very eyes. Where are the encouraging statistics which are pointing very much in the right direction?

In his Mansion House speech given this year at the Guildhall, the Chancellor told us that the good news was that

"In Britain we are now on the road to recovery. Retail sales are on an upward trend."

The Chancellor felt so strongly about that matter that he waxed indignant in our previous debate. Indeed, he challenged me to withdraw my sceptical remarks about his statistical justification. Unfortunately for the Chancellor, since that debate the release of the latest figures for October shows a 0·5 per cent. fall in retail sales for the month, a 0·3 per cent. fall for the August-October quarter over the previous quarter, and even a 0·3 per cent. fall compared with the equivalent period a year ago. On 19 November, the *Financial Times* reported:

"The Treasury agreed that sales had been flat for the last three months."

It quoted a Treasury spokesman as saying:

"On the face of it the figures are a bit of a disappointment."

We cannot look for recovery in that quarter—certainly if the Treasury assures us that it is not happening.

Construction is a disaster and retail sales are poor. What about industry? The Government claim that we should be encouraged by a 0·3 per cent. rise in GDP in the third quarter, a rise which has occurred exclusively, as they well know, because of the full resumption of North sea oil production after a period of interruption. However, in the onshore economy, non-oil GDP continued to contract by 0·3 per cent., with manufacturing flat and services falling. Over the past three months—sad to say—both the value and volume of exports have declined, and manufacturing output, which constitutes about a quarter of our GDP, has barely moved since April. Car production in October fell by 27 per cent. and sales of new cars plunged by 22·5 per cent. in the same month.

Perhaps the most worrying feature of all is the alarming growth in liquidations and the rise in unemployment. The Association of British Chambers of Commerce revealed last week that companies are going out of business at a faster rate than at any time in the past five years. Dun and Bradstreet tell us that, in the first nine months of this year, business failures are running at a rate of 930 per week—a 70 per cent. increase over the previous year and the largest increase for 11 years. Other alarming figures, from the real economy in which our constituents live, are that, in the past 18 months, unemployment has soared by 850,000 and 100,000 homes are being repossessed this year alone.

Against that tragic background, is it any wonder that consumer confidence has been slipping in successive months ever downwards—September down on August, October down on September, and November down on October? I agree, none the less, with the Chancellor on one point. In his Budget wind-up speech, he said:

"It is better to put the facts before Parliament and the country."—[*Official Report*, 25 March 1991; Vol. 188, c. 698.]

In the absence of candour from the Government, that is just what this debate is about.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): The right hon. and learned Gentleman has mentioned putting the facts before Parliament and the country. Will he put the facts before the country about Labour's spending pledges? Will he comment on the remarks of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), who said that he would increase overseas aid to 0·7 per cent., which would cost £2·3 billion? How does that square with Beckett's law that only old-age pensions and child benefit would go up?

Mr. Smith: I can understand the hon. Gentleman's anxiety to talk about almost anything except the recession. I have made our spending plans clear on innumerable occasions. We are discussing—I really must keep in order—the recession from which this country is suffering, even if there is a disinclination among those responsible for it to want it discussed in Parliament.

I ask the Chancellor how he can conceivably justify his claim earlier this year that the recession would be over "somewhere around the end of the second quarter." That is to say in the middle of this year. There is no doubt that he claimed that, and there is no doubt that that has not happened. Here we are, approaching the end of the fourth quarter, and the very best that one can say is that we are bumping along the bottom of a deep and damaging recession. That is all too clearly understood by those at the sharp end in industry, commerce and finance, as well as by our constitutents.

The repeated claims of recovery around the corner, which are not fulfilled and which have been the Chancellor's stock-in-trade month after month, have fatally damaged his credibility and that of the Government as a whole. Indeed, the Chancellor's efforts are now regarded as risible as well as incredible. At the recent royal variety performance, Mr. David Frost, who was compering the proceedings, told the company that the Chancellor could at last give a completely firm forecast of when the recovery would occur—he said that it would happen definitely in the fifth quarter of the year. That statement has some aptness, because Mr. David Frost elicited the "vague" and "faint" stirrings that the Chancellor detected in the housing market.

What is deeply disturbing for Parliament and for the country is the "wait and see" attitude, which is the Government's substitute for a policy for recovery from recession. They hope for a consumer-led recovery. Indeed, on 4 June, the Chancellor told the OECD conference in Paris:

"Consumer spending led us into recession and I expect it to lead us out."

[Mr. Smith]

Many people might think that high interest rates led us into the recession, but I let that point pass for the moment.

In the Walden interview, the Chancellor even seemed to lose confidence in that hoped-for salvation. On the retreat once again, he said:

"We are looking for part of the recovery to come from consumer demand, but by no means all . . . It does take time"

—we have heard that before—

"what we need is what Disraeli once called the alchemy of time."

Intrigued by that reference to alchemy, which I did not think was all that honourable an occupation, I consulted "Collins English Dictionary", which I have in the office. According to that dictionary, alchemy—alchemy of time is what we are relying on—is

"the pseudo-scientific predecessor of chemistry that sought a method of transmuting base metals into gold: an elixir to prolong life indefinitely: a panacea"—

it is hardly believable—

"or universal remedy."

The Chancellor was being even more percipient than he realised. The truth is that, after 12 years in power and with an election fast approaching, the Government are merely hoping that something will turn up. In no sense is that an economic policy for this country.

What we need surely is an investment-led recovery which recognises the fast-approaching challenge in the form of the single market after 1992 and which seeks to rebuild the industrial capacity on which this country depends. Over the Conservative years, we have seen the persistent reduction in the capacity of our manufacturing sector, which, after all—we repeat it endlessly, but it is a fundamental truth about our economy which should be appreciated by the Conservative party—is our fundamental wealth creator and the indispensable internationally tradeable part of our economy. For a country which has a tendency both to inflation and a balance of payments deficit, the overriding objective of policy must be to enlarge our capacity to produce the goods that customers wish to buy, both at home and abroad. That is exactly what is not happening now.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): The right hon. and learned Gentleman is correct to say that manufacturing is important, but is he aware that, according to the OECD's six-monthly series figures, manufacturing output fell under the last Labour Government, whereas it has risen by a quarter under this Government and rose faster in this country in the 1980s than in any other major country in Europe? Will he cast his mind back to the time when his party last implemented its industrial policy—when British Leyland was the butt of international jokes; when British Airways was rated beneath Aeroflot and when British Steel was the world's largest loss maker? As the right hon. and learned Gentleman has never manufactured anything except dodgy policies, how can he do any better?

Mr. Smith: As he often does, the hon. Gentleman has once again traded in bogus statistics. He is quite wrong about that——

Mr. Oppenheim: No.

Mr. Smith: As I recollect it, manufacturing investment is now lower in real terms than in 1979, which is pretty well the end of that argument.

We do not have an investment-led recovery now—

Mr. Oppenheim: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is denying OECD figures.

Mr. Smith: To show that that is not just a view that is held uniquely by the Opposition, I shall quote from the *National Institute Economic Review* of May 1991, which argued—in my view, persuasively—that

"the loss of manufacturing capacity in the early nineteen eighties must be partly to blame for the overheating of the economy at the end of the decade and the consequential problem of inflation and payments imbalance. It's only too likely that the present recession will create the conditions for just the same kind of overheating to occur again sometime in the nineteen nineties if nothing is done to compensate".

So what is being done to compensate? Seemingly nothing.

Let us take the projections for investment, the very life blood of economic development. After a dramatic fall this year in gross fixed investment, which the Chancellor conceded in his autumn statement to be almost 11 per cent., the consensus of economic forecasts, which was helpfully compiled by the Treasury, shows an even further fall in gross fixed investment next year. According to the International Monetary Fund, the United Kingdom will be bottom of the investment league of the G7 countries next year and, according to the Confederation of British Industry, manufacturing investment, which is already falling this year by around 15 per cent., is expected to fall again next year by almost 4·5 per cent.

However, in this situation, the Government do not propose any action to bridge the investment gap. We appeal to them, before even more damage is done, to reconsider their rejection of the case for fiscal incentives to encourage company investment in manufacturing by increasing capital allowances and by introducing tax credits for research annd development expenditure to stimulate the adoption of new technologies in British industry. Those proposals are backed—

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: I am sorry, but I have given way frequently and I really must get on.

Those proposals are backed by a wide consensus in industry. The excellent House of Lords report, "Innovation in Manufacturing Industry" of January this year, argued strongly for the principle of such fiscal incentives. It is also supported, as the Chancellor well knows, in Budget submission after Budget submission by the Engineering Employers Federation, the CBI and the Trades Union Congress. I have no doubt that, in anticipation of next year's Budget, the representations will be resumed with even more urgency than before as our industrial situation deteriorates even further. I hope that the Chancellor does not, on this occasion, turn a deaf ear. What is galling for our industry is that, allegedly in the name of creating a level playing field, the present Government have created a situation in which, in the context of international competition, our industry has to play uphill in both halves against competitors whose Governments specifically encourage industrial investment.

I make no apology for once again urging the compelling case for a new approach to education and training. In "Training Statistics 1991"—the Chancellor seems to find this amusing, but the skills shortage is the most serious problem that this country faces and should not be a subject for amusement. "Training Statistics 1991", issued recently

by the Department of Employment, again reveals the astonishing prevalence of serious skills shortages even at a time of severe recession and high unemployment. It takes a bit of believing, but in the past 12 months, according to the Department of Employment, 24 per cent. of all enterprises reported skills shortages. The figure rose to 41 per cent. in high technology sectors, such as mechanical engineering.

The amount of training that employers are planning to provide has fallen dramatically. The balance of large manufacturing firms plans has become negative, falling by a staggering 67 per cent. between October 1989 and July 1991, with a balance of 20 per cent. of those firms planning to decrease training in the next 12 months. That is further evidence of the baleful effect of savage recession on industrial companies which are forced to cut essential investment and essential training simply to survive. According to the Government's own report, fewer than half the participants in employment training complete the course; 55 per cent. go straight back into unemployment; and only 23 per cent. find a full-time job at the end of it. That is no doubt why the Treasury quarrelled with the Department of Employment about giving it more money for schemes that achieve such poor results.

Perhaps most damning of all are the international comparisons. Our weakness in developing intermediate skills is starkly revealed in a paper by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research, which was published in January this year. It shows that, in Britain, 31 per cent. of technical workers in manufacturing had no vocational qualifications. In Germany, the figure was only 8 per cent. At higher levels of qualification, only 14 per cent. of British technicians were qualified, while in Germany the figure was 36 per cent.

It is absolutely clear that to compete, against Germany and others, in the single market after 1992 and in the world of constant technological change, those investment and training gaps must be closed. The Government can no longer shuffle off responsibility for training on to companies, particularly companies that have been debilitated by the recession. The Labour party believes that it is in the necessary marriage of technology and training and in the continuous enhancement of investment, particularly in manufacturing, that we can find the way forward to the competitive and productive economy that alone can guarantee our economic progress and support our standard of living.

As is often said, it is quite true that we need a recovery of confidence before we will see an end to recession. The Opposition believe that such confidence can be secured and maintained only by an investment-led recovery. Once this country starts investing in enlarging its industrial capacity, in enhancing its technological capability, and in developing the skills of our people, there will be a sound basis for self-confidence in our economic future. There is no sign whatsoever that this Government and this Chancellor comprehend those realities. That is why, after 12 years of failure, they will soon be relieved of the responsibilities of government.

4.47 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Norman Lamont): I beg to move, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"welcomes Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer's Autumn Statement, which reaffirmed the Government's forecast of a modest recovery in the second half of 1991, with growth gathering pace in 1992; notes that the total output of the British economy rose in the third quarter of 1991, providing further confirmation of this forecast; and congratulates the Government on its sound and prudent economic policies, which have reduced inflation from nearly 11 per cent. to under 4 per cent, have allowed interest rates to be reduced from 15 per cent. to 10½ per cent, and have laid the foundations for sustained non-inflationary growth.".

After four days of not always very exciting negotiations in Brussels, it is a great pleasure to return to the light entertainment that is provided by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). As usual, he has given an assortment of selective quotations and short-term statistics. If he has any constructive thoughts about the economy, he is determined to keep them firmly to himself. He has not offered the House any policies—he never does, and he never will. He knows that, as each month goes by and as the economy moves out of recession, the Labour party's position will become more difficult. He is desperate to talk down the British economy, but his opportunities are fast fading.

Much of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's speech dealt with forecasts. He told the House of the Government's stunning inability to foresee even the immediate future, but the right hon. and learned Gentleman himself has a bit of a past at forecasting. He, too, has a track record. In fact, his speech today bore an extraordinary resemblance to the speech that he made on 12 November 1984, when he forecast that unemployment

"will go on rising relentlessly and remorselessly."—[*Official Report*, 12 November 1984; Vol. 67, c. 435.]

In March 1985 he said:

"So long as the Tory Government remain in office, unemployment will continue to rise".—[*Official Report*, 11 March 1985; Vol. 75, c. 104.]

What happened after that brilliant forecast? Over the next four years unemployment fell by more than a million.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): It has risen again.

Mr. Lamont: It is lower today than it was when the right hon. and learned Gentleman made his point.

The OECD said:

"Between 1984 and 1990, the UK had by far the best job creation record of the larger EC countries".

So much for the right hon Gentleman's forecast.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Will the Chancellor give way?

Mr. Lamont: I will give way in a moment.

Far from being able to forecast the future, the right hon. and learned Gentleman has shown that he is singularly unable to forecast either the past or the present. In the same speech in March 1985 he was unable to do it. He said that he was amazed to be told that we were in the fourth year of economic recovery. What was happening? Between 1982 and 1985 growth had been running at more than 3 per cent. a year and the economy carried on growing for another four years after that. Not only did the right hon. and learned Gentleman not know where we were going; he did not even know where we had been. So much for his ability to forecast. What about the favourite subject of the right hon. and learned Gentleman, to which he returns in every speech—investment? On 12 November 1985 he predicted that,

"there will be a temporary upward blip in the figures. However, from 1987 onwards . . . there will be a return to the downward trend."—[*Official Report*, 12 November 1985; Vol. 86, c. 467.]

[Mr. Lamont]

That was an extraordinarily precise prediction, one might think, from someone who is so meticulous in his determination never to say anything. What happened? In 1987, 1988 and 1989 there was an unprecedented investment boom in Britain. Some downward trend! Even today, manufacturing investment is running at levels higher than those achieved in 1986. In view of those forecasts, is the right hon. and learned Gentleman in any position to give anyone lessons in forecasting? He does not even bother to make new mistakes; he just repeats the same ones that he has made before.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): While we are talking about the past and the nature of precise predictions, will the Chancellor recall the precise predictions that were made in 1985 about the way in which the money supply would diminish over the years and inflation would follow correspondingly year by year? The figures were precise—7 per cent., 6 per cent., 5 per cent., 4 per cent., year by year. That was the nonsense of all time.

Mr. Lamont: From the early 1980s inflation fell. The right hon. Gentleman knows that perfectly well. Inflation fell markedly and it has fallen again.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East and his hon. Friends have talked in the past of a recession made in Downing street. That is the phrase often used by the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I must have more influence than we thought because, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows only too well, throughout the industrialised world 1991 has been a year of either falling industrial growth or recession. Even in Germany industrial production is falling. Indeed, industrial production has fallen in the past year in every G7 country. The United States, Australia and Canada have been in recession for much of the past year. In Europe, Sweden, Switzerland and Finland are all in recession, while in turn growth is now slowing and unemployment is rising across much of the rest of Europe.

Overall, 1991 is likely to show the weakest growth in the world economy in a decade. We know that Opposition Members are still locked in their isolationist world. It is wilful ignorance to imagine that that factor could have no impact on the United Kingdom. Of course, the last year has been a difficult one for the British economy. Some sectors and many individual businesses have been badly hit. However, the right hon. and learned Gentleman's portrait of ever-deepening recession is fiction.

In my Budget statement last March, I forecast that growth would resume in the second half of the year. So far, the economy has developed in line with that prediction, so when I presented the autumn statement a few weeks ago there was no need whatever to depart significantly from my Budget forecast. I have no reason to revise my view that GDP will show a modest increase in the second half of this year and that recovery will accelerate next year. That is what I said in the Budget and in the autumn statement. That is what I say now.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): The Chancellor mentioned what is happening on the continent. Does he remember that the Governor of the Bank of England told the Select Committee that our recession was home grown? In view of the right hon. Gentleman's optimistic forecast, will he tell the House whether he believes that there will be a credit crunch this winter?

Mr. Lamont: I do not believe that there are reasons for thinking that there will be a credit crunch, if by that the hon. Gentleman means the inability of British banks, because of capital inadequacy, to meet the demands of borrowers, I do not believe that that is the position in Britain. Britain is better positioned in that respect than many other countries. I have demonstrated to the House that many countries are in recession and many countries are experiencing slowing industrial production. That plainly affects the world economy and the growth of world trade.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East did his best to suggest that my forecast for next year was over-optimistic, but my view is broadly shared by independent forecasters. Over half of the main City forecasters believe that growth in 1992 will be 2 per cent. or more and so do organisations as diverse as the National Institute of Economic and Social Research, the International Monetary Fund and the European Commission. The IMF forecasts that we will grow as fast or faster than Germany or France in 1992.

As for this year, the right hon. and learned Gentleman did his best to present my views and those of independent forecasters who support my views as unrealistic. However, he admitted that no one has ever suggested that we would see fast growth at this stage. In virtually every speech and public appearance that I have made since the Budget, I have made it clear that growth would be modest at first and that business conditions would remain difficult in some sectors for a while. I understand the frustration and impatience of business men who would like to see demand picking up more quickly, but it is simply not normal for the economy to move instantly from recession to speedy growth. Current conditions are exactly what one would expect to see at the turning point between recession and recovery. Mixed signals are inevitable but there are signs that the fall in output is behind us.

Industrial production rose by more than 1 per cent. in the third quarter. That was a larger increase than in the United States, Japan, Germany, Italy or France and larger than in all the G7 countries other than Canada. As one of my hon. Friends said, the rise in unemployment in October was the smallest for over a year. Unemployment fell in the north and Wales and fell in Scotland for the second month running.

Manufacturing investment, in which the right hon. and learned Gentleman claims to be so interested, rose in the third quarter for the first time in a year. Companies increased their stocks in the third quarter, again for the first time in a year. The narrow definition of money has moved into the upper half of its target range, again for the first time in a year. Manufactured exports are running at record levels and business surveys show that output, export and investment expectations are all up. After falling by 1 per cent. in the second quarter of this year, GDP rose by 0·3 per cent. in the third quarter. However the right hon. and learned Gentleman seeks to explain that away, it was the first time in a year that the total output of the whole economy had risen. Industrial production also rose in that quarter compared with the previous quarter, and by

a larger amount than in other G7 countries. That fully justifies some of the remarks that I made in both the Budget and the autumn statement.

Mr. John Smith: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that, as is reported in *The Independent*, he said in Washington on 29 April of this year that the recession would be over

"somewhere around the end of the second quarter"?

Is he saying that the recession is now over?

Mr. Lamont: As the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows, a recession is defined as falling output. Total output has ceased to fall and it rose in the third quarter. In that sense, technically, the recession has ended, as I have said publicly before.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) *rose*——

Mr. Lamont: I will give way in a moment.

There are good reasons for believing that growth will gather momentum during coming months. Real incomes have been rising, consumer expenditure will increase as the full impact of lower interest rates works through to demand and, as world growth picks up, exports will increase further.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East and his hon. Friends seem confused. Today the right hon. and learned Gentleman talks of nothing but recession; in September, he absentmindedly started to use the word "recovery". Not only that, he and his right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition were so alarmed at some of the accounts appearing in the newspapers that the Leader of the Opposition said that Britain was heading for a short-lived boom fuelled by consumer credit. Which is it, recession or boom? The right hon. and learned Gentleman should have made up his mind.

Even during a boom, firms fail and people lose jobs —so it is not surprising that, as the economy emerges from recession, the right hon. and learned Gentleman always manages to come up with plenty of gloomy quotes, but his picture is highly selective. He should listen to the words of those who know far better than he does what is going on in the economy. Professor Doug McWilliams, chief economic adviser to the Confederation of British Industry, agrees that the economy "is edging up slowly." The president of the Association of British Chambers of Commerce said:

"Commerce and industry is on the road to recovery."

Even in the depressed housing market, the chief executive of Abbey National says that the worst is over.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman says that I am wrong, but does he think that all those people are wrong as well? He went on about retail sales again this afternoon, but they rose in the third quarter. It is true, as he said, that they fell back in October. Instead of talking so much about how bad business is, he should listen to some people in business.

Mr. Desmond Pitcher, the chief executive of Littlewoods, said:

"I am sure we have turned the corner."

Mr. Colin Evans, deputy chairman of Austin Reed, said:

"I believe the turnround has arrived."

The CBI's last survey of the retail trade said that the "slow upturn in retail sales is now starting to gather momentum."

That does not mean that all retailers view the position in the same way and that all retailers are experiencing the same conditions. Clearly, there are business men who believe that conditions are improving.

In the months ahead, there will be weeks when the figures are encouraging and weeks when they will be less so. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman seriously think that the way to run the economy is to try to manage demand, quarter by quarter and week by week, changing our policy as each new statistic is published? What sort of stability is that for industry?

Mr Foulkes: As the Chancellor knows, I am a simple sort of soul. I do not know all the professors and chief executives to whom he refers. Every week I spend Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday in my constituency. I talk to the textile manufacturers, who tell me that they are in a slump. I talk to the motor sales men, who tell me that things are pretty bad. I talk to all of the people in my constituency, people who see the reality of rising unemployment—then I come back to the House and hear an entirely different story, divorced from reality, from the Chancellor. Does not he think that it might improve his credibility if he were to admit what is really happening outside, and say what he intends to do to resolve the problem?

Mr. Lamont: I am sorry that I gave way to the hon. Gentleman. He is not such a simple soul—only a bit of one. His intervention would have been more telling if he had commented on some of the facts and statistics that I have given. He made no attempt to reply to those.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East wrote me a letter last week—I have it here somewhere —calling for what he referred to as a "change of economic course". What change of course is he suggesting? Today he offered nothing in the way of serious policy proposals. He talked a great deal about recession, but did not say what alternative policies he would pursue, apart from training. What is this mysterious change of course that he keeps talking about? He implies that it exists, but he does not specify, or tell anybody, what it is. At the time of the Budget, the right hon. and learned Gentleman refused to say what his tax policies were. Now he tells me to change course. What does he want? Now is the time for him to tell us. Does he think that taxation is too high or too low?

At the time of the autumn statement, I asked him whether he thought that public expenditure was too high or too low. He asks us to change course, but what does he want? He will not say. I asked him a few weeks ago if Government borrowing was too high or too low or just about right. He calls for a change of course, but he will not tell us what he thinks the three main levers of policy—spending, taxation and borrowing—should be or how they should be used differently. He will not tell us because he has not got a clue.

Conservative Members have learnt the folly of fine-tuning, even if the right hon. and learned Gentleman has not. The sort of quick fix that he implies exists does not exist and could only undermine stability for business. It would encourage the illusion that Governments know best, that Governments produce economic recovery. As the history of Labour Governments shows only too well, attempts to pump up demand in response to short-term statistics end only in disaster. Businesses generate economic growth and prosperity. That is why we say that

[Mr. Lamont]

the Government must stick to doing what only they can do —providing the framework within which businesses can plan and invest in the expectation of a sustained recovery, something that never happened and never could happen under Labour.

The Government have kept control of public spending; under Labour, it ate up almost half the nation's wealth. The Government have cut taxation rates. We now have the lowest corporation tax rates in the Community and among the G7 countries. That is why we get more inward investment than anywhere else in Europe. All Labour wants to do is to put up taxes again. The Government take a long-term view of measures to promote competitiveness. We cut unnecessary regulation and help markets to work better.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman wants to smother business in bureaucracy and restore trade union power. The Government have brought inflation down—it is now 3·7 per cent., half the lowest rate that the last Labour Government ever achieved. Most important of all, by joining the exchange rate mechanism and sticking to its disciplines, the Government have demonstrated their determination to keep inflation down to levels comparable with the best in Europe.

Above all, it is our determination to secure low inflation that is laying the foundations for sustained recovery. Retail price inflation is down by two thirds. Underlying inflation, which never rose as high, has fallen less dramatically, but will fall further during the coming year. Factory gate inflation has fallen even faster than expected and by the end of the year should be down to the lowest level in more than 20 years.

As usual, the right hon. and learned Gentleman managed to go through a speech on the economy without mentioning inflation, exactly as his right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition did in his interminably long speech at the Labour party conference. There was not a word on inflation. We have been trying to get inflation down. All that the right hon. and learned Gentleman does is to try to get everyone down. His refusal to accept that the defeat of inflation must be the first priority—and, what is more, his refusal to understand and support the measures necessary to deal with inflation—would have led us to a far deeper and more damaging recession.

No matter what the level of interest rates, for years the right hon. and learned Gentleman has been arguing for a cut. In October 1990, when inflation was 11 per cent., he was calling for interest rate cuts. In October 1987, when interest rates were 9·5 per cent., he called for interest rate cuts. In March 1988, when interest rates were 8·5 per cent. —many people with hindsight believe that they were too low—he called for interest rate cuts. The right hon. and learned Gentleman proclaims his undying devotion to the ERM, but has never stopped him calling for interest rates to be cut further and faster. He never fails to choose soft options and easy answers. If I had taken his advice, it is all too clear what would have happened to the pound in the last few weeks.

In July, when the right hon. and learned Gentleman was asked about the effect on sterling of his policies, he made this extraordinary remark to "Newsnight":

"All I would have to do is pick up the phone and talk to someone on first name terms."

I wonder who that would be. I have been thinking about it. One can imagine the conversation, "Allo Jacques, is that you? How are things in Brussels? Listen Jacques, I've got a bit of a problem here. Can you help? Yes, I know you had to bail us out last week, but the colleagues keep spending it—yes, all of it. Yes, I'm sorry Jacques". But even the right hon. and learned Gentleman must have realised that first name terms might not deliver the goods —*[Interruption.]* Two weeks ago he seemed to be having doubts about his own abilities because he said, in answer to a similar question, that before doing anything, he would have to take advice. A lawyer's cry. Advice from whom? I can give him some advice, though I do not think he will thank me for it. His death-bed conversion to monetary prudence will not convince anybody, least of all the foreign exchange markets. They have heard him week in, week out talking of lower interest rates. The truth is that his policies inevitably would have led to higher inflation and higher unemployment in the long run.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Does the Chancellor see much prospect for lower interest rates in the coming months? Is he prepared, if necessary, to allow higher interest rates if there is pressure on sterling?

Mr. Lamont: The hon. Gentleman knows that I never comment on the trend of interest rates—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] I will answer his question by saying that we shall do whatever is necessary to sustain the pound's position.

Mrs. Dunwoody *rose*——

Mr. Lamont: I have given way several times.

The one policy that the right hon. and learned Gentleman always puts forward in answer to every problem, short term or long term, is training and investment. That is the one phrase he always uses. He became rather cross when, in a previous debate, I compared him with a parrot which knew only that one phrase—training and investment. Whatever the question, the answer is always the same from the right hon. and learned Gentleman—training and investment. When he was asked on the radio the other day how he would keep inflation down, he replied:

"We need a programme of investment and training."

In another broadcast, he said that the United Kingdom was in a poor competitive position, and he gave as his remedy more money for training and investment. When asked how he would keep the pound in the ERM, he replied that it would be done through

"a programme of investment and training."

When asked how Britain would be able to be ready for monetary union, he replied:

"A programme of training and investment, of course."

The right hon. learned Gentleman's letter to me last week called for action to initiate a programme of training and investment. That really will not do. He has refused to answer questions about taxing, spending and borrowing. We know why he refers to training and investment—because it is less embarrassing than talking about the things that other people want to talk about. Someone at some time should let him in on the secret that next year we shall be spending over two and a half times as much in real terms on training, enterprise and vocational education as in 1978-79.

Perhaps someone will tell the right hon. and learned Gentleman that employers' training expenditure is now

running at record levels and that under the Conservatives the share of our total resources going into investment has reached record levels, far above anything achieved under Labour. Even with a fall in investment—and it always falls in recessions—the investment-GDP ratio will be far higher this year than at any point under the last Labour Government.

The truth is that the right hon. and learned Gentleman's much-vaunted programme for training and investment would only make it more difficult for business to train and invest. How would he pay for it? His hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) tells us that the Labour party has only two spending commitments—increasing pensions and child benefit.

"Everything else is regarded as a desirable aim",

she tells us, and will have to be paid for "as resources allow" out of economic growth. So there we have it—Labour's main policy to create growth will have to wait until there is growth. Under Labour it would be a very long wait indeed.

Where will the right hon. and learned Gentleman find the money to finance the training and investment? He has talked in the past of financial incentives and tax credits, but he knows, or he should know, that one business's tax break is another business's tax increase. We have reduced corporation tax from Labour's 52 per cent. to 33 per cent. He would have to put the rate up again. He would be taxing away the money that businesses already use to finance training and investment.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman always forgets that people invest in the hope of making profits, but does he ever talk about making profits—not in our hearing. In the 1980s, profitability increased markedly. The result was that, contrary to the famous prediction that the right hon. and learned Gentleman made in 1985, business men invested on a vast scale. Business investment under Labour increased by barely 1 per cent. a year; under the Conservatives it has grown by over 2·5 per cent. a year. Despite the recession, business investment in plant and machinery is 50 per cent. higher than in 1979 and business investment will rise again next year as profitability recovers. Who is the right hon. and learned Gentleman to talk about investment? As I say, it is easier for him to talk about investment and training than more difficult issues such as taxing and spending.

Another point to which the right hon. and learned Gentleman never refers is the fact that the best way to get more investment is to have more savings. That is one of the first things students learn in economics, though not, apparently, in the Labour party. The more we save, the more investment we can have and the more interest rates can be lowered. We have had 10 years of cutting taxes on savings. What a contrast to the position of Labour Members, who still refer to income from savings as unearned income; they believe in taxing it as heavily as possible.

The Labour party wants to introduce a new tax on savings, disguised as national insurance contributions. That proposal, together with all of Labour's other tax increases, would slash the return on savings. As a result, savings would fall and so would investment. A Labour Government would end up, as they did before, with a miserable investment performance. As always, there is a yawning gulf between rhetoric and reality. In every area, the right hon. and learned Gentleman is determined to repeat the mistakes of his predecessors.

Nowhere is that more true than on public expenditure. All over the country the right hon. and learned Gentleman's colleagues have been pledging extra spending —£35 billion worth of pledges at the last count, and still rising. Who is to pay for it? That is the key question. We do not know, they will not answer, they do not have an answer and they never will have an answer. There is a gaping hole in Labour's accounts, the same hole which last time they filled first by borrowing and then by running to the International Monetary Fund.

At the last election, at least the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) was frank and honest. He told basic taxpayers where they stood—that they would be hit hard with higher rates. This time, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East talks mysteriously only of new tax bands. We are told that they would not make basic-rate taxpayers worse off. What on earth is the point of introducing bands if they are not to take money from some people and give it to others? We do not get any answers.

On economic and monetary union, it is the same story. Is Labour in favour of a single currency? We have had no answer—or rather, we have had two answers, yes and no. Labour's leader opposes the opt-out clause that we want, but its shadow Chancellor refuses to make a commitment to a single currency. They think that things are better seen in perspective—facing both ways.

The Opposition called this debate on the economy today. I am more than happy to respond by expressing the confidence of the Government that the policies that we are following are right. Is not it extraordinary for the Opposition to use one of their parliamentary days to call for a change of course, then advance scarcely a single positive proposal or suggestion in the debate? Is not it amazing that they come to the House crying loudly for what the right hon. and learned Gentleman called in his letter a "change of course", without being able to give the slightest detail on that change of course or how the Labour party would make such a change? Perhaps it is all training and investment.

We know what a change of course really means. We have cut tax rates, controlled public borrowing, reduced inflation and brought down interest rates. The Opposition would change course all right—they would put up taxes, borrowing, inflation and, ultimately, interest rates, too. They are not only devoid of positive policy proposals for economic success, they actively hope for economic failure. They will be disappointed, and no amount of gloom, depression and hand wringing will stop the recovery gathering momentum. That recovery will be produced by policies that are clear, consistent and firm, not diverted or abandoned because of each passing statistic; policies designed to ensure sustainable growth in the future, on the firm base of stable, low inflation. Every hon. Member knows that those policies are right.

The only threat to renewed growth would be a return to office of a party that is reckless with inflation and profligate with taxpayers' money. Britain's economic recovery can survive the cultivated gloom of a Labour Opposition, but it certainly could not survive a Labour Government. That is why we shall continue with policies that have created the opportunity for renewed growth and increased prosperity. Our policies have laid the foundations for recovery and they deserve the support of the House.

5.30 pm

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): There were two surprises in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's speech, but the one that struck me most was that he wants more saving. There seems to be some schizophrenia, because I understood that the Government's policy was to encourage people to spend, that they wanted a consumption boomlet that would last until the election. The right hon. Gentleman now says that that is not what was in his mind—that he is really trying to reconcile what he has been saying for many years.

It is unwise to make comparisons with past predictions, because in 1979 the Government increased VAT from 8 to 15 per cent., saying that it would not increase prices. I found that astonishing then, and I still find it astonishing. We need reasonable forecasts, not because we expect them to provide blueprints for the future but because they provide a guide so that policies can be changed. The Government, however, see the trends and continue to make the same forecasts. If they were realistic, they would admit that they need to change their policies, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) has proposed.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Francis Maude): What can we understand the right hon. Gentleman to be proposing?

Mr. Sheldon: I shall come on to that in great detail. I shall go into greater detail than my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East had a chance to do on the kinds of investment that can be produced, rather than the consumption boom which the Chancellor hopes for.

The debate is intended to bring the Government to account. They must account for their management of the economy. Naturally, I do not expect the apologists on the Government Front Bench to criticise the Government's policies, still less to condemn their actions. However, some of them might have had it in them to refrain from congratulating the Government on delivering the two worst recessions of the post-war years.

How did the implementers of the monetarist nonsense which brought about the first recession manage to produce a second recession? The Government came to office in 1979, when my constituency, Ashton-under-Lyne, was a manufacturing area with a level of prosperity higher than the national average. It earned its living then, as it does now, by making things, and it had many small to medium firms.

It used to have less unemployment than the regional or national average. In the district that embraces both my constituency and Stockport, there were 20,000 skilled engineers, many of whom were made unemployed. Today, there are no longer 20,000 but 5,000. At a time when skills are in demand, they have been wantonly discarded. That is why my right hon. and learned Friend continually puts forward those proposals, and he has the full support of the companies in my area, which understand those problems.

In the two years 1979-81, one third of the firms in my constituency closed. That was a devastating blow from which the constituency is struggling to recover. My right hon. Friend is right to talk about the industrial capacity being too low to produce the recovery we need. It is a long-term, essential and immediate job to bring industrial capacity back to what it should be. I have never forgiven the Government for what they did to my constituency in those two years. The good medium and high-tech firms all flourished in Germany, Japan and the United States—indeed, in all countries. They had a good past and a reasonable future, but they were ruined by the highest interest rates this century and an unrealistic exchange rate, which lost them export markets and provided further competition in their home markets.

We now have the present long-lived recession, which is a further injury to deal with. It will be some time before I have the figures to show how serious the second recession has been—how many firms have closed, how many jobs have been irrevocably lost, and how the finances of the survivors have suffered. However, I know of repeated pleas for action and the despair of so many small firms, one of which resulted in yet another suicide of someone whom I knew, resulting from business failure. Meanwhile, closures of important firms continue. There is no question of a weeding-out process. Many are firms that expanded and invested with no expectation of 15 per cent. interest rates. Even prudent companies' reasonable expectations have been destroyed by the Government's actions.

The Chancellor gives selective statistics, but I suppose that all our statistics are, to an extent, selective. I visit many manufacturing companies and ask them about the state of their order books. I do not ask what hopes or expectations they have, or what they are dreaming of, but what they are experiencing. There is no question but that firms that expect recovery do not lay off workers. Firms that are hopeful about the future do not take such measures. Therefore, the rising levels of unemployment are a direct consequence of what those firms are experiencing, not what they are hoping for. That should be of concern to the Chancellor.

In such circumstances, it is effrontery that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East and my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) should be attacked for what they might do, instead of the Government being brought to account for what they have done and continue to do. Opposition Members want to return to common-sense methods of running the economy, encouraging investment and skills.

When I hear the attacks on that modest, even cautious, and certainly prudent programme, I must compare it with the gross waste of public money in which the Government have indulged. They spent billions of pounds on the nightmare of the poll tax, and millions of pounds were lost to the taxpayer when they sold off publicly owned assets at well below valuation. In fact, some of them were not even valued, so anxious were the Government to get rid of them. They waste our public services, and essential repairs are not carried out. The fabric of our schools, public buildings and roads store up bigger and bigger bills for the future.

Meanwhile, the Government are busy opting out of industrial policy. I recently asked Lord King of British Airways about his decision to buy Boeing aircraft and United States General Electric aero engines—not only that, but the fact that he was giving them a foothold in Britain at the expense of Rolls-Royce. I asked him what he had told the Department of Trade and Industry, and he said that he had said nothing. I was astonished, and thought that he had misunderstood my question. I asked what the DTI officials had said, and he said that they had told him nothing. I could not believe that, but he confirmed it openly and readily.

If the Department of Trade and Industry is dealing with one of the most important companies in our country, it should hold a view on what that firm should do or how it might be helped to overcome its problems. I am not talking only about the position in countries such as Germany or Japan, but about second or third-world countries. We are dealing with the issue of investment and the necessity for it—which, I regret to say, the Chancellor of the Exchequer did not seem to understand.

The Confederation of British Industry has come round and is now talking about 40 per cent. capital allowances. I do not think that that is enough, but I am delighted that my right hon. Friends have again and again spoken of the necessity for plant and machinery. We must recreate the industrial structure that we once had and wantonly destroyed.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Does not the right hon. Gentleman appreciate that, if we were to return to 100 per cent. capital allowances—which I think he may want—it could have a damaging effect on the quality of investment decisions, which are at present made for good, sound, commercial reasons? When I worked in industry in the 1970s, people took investment decisions for tax reasons, which are the wrong reasons for taking such decisions.

Mr. Sheldon: There is no doubt that the best way to invest is with the intention of selling more of the goods that come from those investments, and receiving a greater return on them. However, does the present level of 25 per cent. provide a level playing field? I do not believe that it does. Anyone who buys a piece of plant and machinery and tries to sell it back to the manufacturer at 75 per cent. at the end of the first year will be laughed at, because the value will then be much less—in some cases it will not even cover the commission of the salesman who organised the sale. That provides not an incentive to invest but a disincentive—a penalty. I understand why the Government call for neutrality, but the present position is far from neutral. I am in favour of some incentive beyond that represented by depreciation, because new methods tend to encourage new ideas of production, which is so important.

Again and again, I hear people say that it is a pity that we who produced the great ideas of the world did not actually manufacture their consequences. The feeling is that we had the idea, which was the crucial element, and anybody could manufacture the product, but that is not true. The great skill of Japanese and German manufacturers is that they know how to make things efficiently and well, which is what we are so bad at. Manufacturing requires the necessary industrial investment to transform the ideas into the articles that can be sold in the keenest markets. We must be more than neutral, but at present we are not even that.

Meanwhile, the Government are busy opting out of industrial policy. I asked Lord King of British Airways about the decision to buy Boeing aircraft and United States General Electric aero engines, giving that company a foothold in Britain at the expense of Rolls-Royce. We must turn our attention to that. When industry takes such decisions, the DTI must be involved and must know what is going on. I am not even sure that the Department's officials knew, but if they did, and they took no action, they are culpable in the extreme.

Mr. John Watts (Slough): Will the right hon. Gentleman explain to the House more clearly what sort of involvement he would expect from the DTI? Should it twist the arm of British Airways? Should the company have been subsidised with taxpayers' money in order to buy a British product? What sort of distortion of the market is he recommending?

Mr. Sheldon: The market is being distorted: if General Electric wants to come into this country, it gives a price concession which damages one of this country's crucial companies. The DTI should at least have investigated the issue and asked questions. Its officials may not have come to exactly the same conclusions as I did, but they should have tried to find out. If they had agreed with British Airways, I could understand that they might have left the issue alone, but they might have come to different conclusions and taken different action. However, the Government leave it to the financial operations of others, and meanwhile the economy is run on the basis that one might be able to regulate but not to promote. I totally disagree.

We are now hearing that our outlook is so bad that we had better leave it to an independent central bank to decide the important aspects of our future. I find it strange that people with whom I have been associated should now accept that independent bankers control so much of our destiny. I would expect them to be more cautious.

People point to the success of the German Bundesbank as a sign of the strength of the German economy. It is nothing of the sort. It is not the cause of German economic strength, but the consequence. Mercedes-Benz, Siemens and Bayer do not owe their success to the Bundesbank: the Bundesbank owes its strength to German industrial progress. Germany found itself facing an expansionist Europe and a booming industry. The strength of Germany derives from the skills of people in industry. It did not matter that so much plant and machinery, and so many factories, were destroyed in the war, because the skills of the people were not destroyed; they remained, to recreate the industrial strength which we once again admire and respect. That is the task facing us.

When my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East rightly speaks of the essential nature of skills, training and investment, he has it exactly right. It is terrible that, for 45 years, we have not done that—that is the scandal of our time. It is about time that we started to realise that the financial centre of London is not the key to our success. I do not deny that it plays an important part, but the key to our strength is our industrial might.

I find our love affair with the banking profession curious. From being the bogey of bankers, we are becoming the bankers' friend. I have played my part in defending the role of banks and the necessary role that they have, but I find myself a little outflanked by the new enthusiasm. If British industry were in the same powerful position as German industry, I might be a little more relaxed about economic monetary union, but I am worried about the time at which we are entering into new commitments.

The urge for an independent central bank and a proposed Euro central bank comes at a particularly dangerous time, when recessions, depressions and even a slump cannot be ruled out. We could be legislating well into the next century. Nobody can say that depressions were something peculiar to the 1930s. At times,

[Mr. Sheldon]

Government intervention is required. This could be a time when Franklin Roosevelt's new deal, hated by bankers, could come into its own. It is a time for the Governments to act together to take charge of economics for the sake of the citizens that they, and only they, can represent.

I used to hold that an international depression was impossible because, faced with an economic catastrophe, the bankers, people and Governments would overcome their differences and co-operate with Keynesian methods to end such a disaster. There are goals other than conquering inflation. The Government and our times rightly attach great importance to conquering inflation, but it is not the only aim of a successful economy. Following the German inflation of the 1920s, there was enormous unemployment and the rise of Hitler. Nazism was the result not of inflation, but of the counter-inflationary measures that did so much damage. The trouble was that they voted against the large numbers of unemployed and voted for Fascist and Nazi Governments.

In 1945, the Bank of England was nationalised with some Conservative support because of the way it had handled the depression. Independence of the central bank would restore its power. I always thought that, if an international crisis similar to that of the 1930s were to recur, there would be international agreement to control such events. I cannot be sure now that that would happen. With a Eurobank, I would be even less sure.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) once told the Governor of the Bank of England that the latter had the better job. I do not think that he was joking. The power of day-to-day decision-making, even in a nationalised bank, is underestimated. How much greater would be the power of the Eurobank.

Of course we cannot be excluded from progress within the Community. We must accept our position in the Community, which will lead to a greater alignment between us, but the main solution to our economic problems lies in ourselves. It lies in our will, determination and good industrial sense, wherein the Government have been found seriously lacking.

5.50 pm

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): It is always a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon). We have all listened to his speech with great interest. He certainly convinced me, and I am sure the rest of the House, that he is diametrically opposed to a central bank. In those circumstances, he seems to be at variance with his own Front Bench spokesmen. I do not know whether that is a serious matter, but given the right hon. Gentleman's experience and standing, I should have thought that the Opposition Front Bench spokesmen would take careful notice of what he says.

The right hon. Gentleman spoke about his constituency. I agree that many jobs, particularly in manufacturing industry, have been lost since 1979, but one must remember that there was a great deal of overmanning in 1979. For example, in 1979 the steel industry employed roughly twice the number of people that it does now, producing the same amount of steel. That in itself meant that we took over an uncompetitive company. In order for it to remain competitive, jobs had to be shed.

Politicians often succumb to the danger of talking down the economy. For example, if a Gallup poll goes against the Government, sterling starts to shake. Equally, when Labour politicians talk down the economy, saying how bad it is, that has an effect on the foreigner. Therefore, I hope that they can be persuaded to stop.

As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said, the latest reports of the Institute of Directors and the CBI show that they are not pessimistic about the economy. In fact, they say that the increase in confidence has been the highest for some years. The chambers of commerce are not pessimistic. It does the economy no good for the Opposition continually to talk it down. Never once does one hear the Opposition say that, since 1981, manufacturing output is up 25 per cent., manufacturing investment is up by 33½ per cent., and manufacturing production is up by more than 50 per cent.

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): The Government took office in 1979.

Sir William Clark: If the hon. Gentleman just thinks about what he is saying, he will realise that it takes a Government one or two years to bring the economy round. The economy cannot change overnight. It is ridiculous to suggest otherwise.

The Opposition never mention manufacturing exports, which are up 75 per cent. since 1981. The export of motor cars in the past nine months is 90 per cent. higher than last year. Those are all pointers for the economy. Why do we not start talking about some of our successes?

Mrs. Dunwoody: Would the right hon. Gentleman therefore care to suggest what I should say to those 420 workers in Rolls-Royce who have been ejected from their jobs with scant courtesy and with no idea why it has happened, who have all the skills required for building motor cars and are not to be given the chance to do so?

Sir William Clark: I fully sympathise with the hon. Lady's constituents, but one must face the facts of life: in a recession, and coming out of a recession, jobs are always being lost.

In the third quarter of this year, our exports rose by 1 per cent. That is something that we should be talking about. There is a slowdown in destocking. Many manufacturing industries have been destocking during the past few years but now that is slowing down. That in itself is a sign that we are coming out of the recession.

In the third quarter of this year, pay settlements were down from an average of 10 per cent. to an average of 6·5 per cent. In manufacturing industry, pay settlements were down from an average of 9 per cent. to 5·5 per cent. Those are all steps in the right direction to make us more competitive; and if we are more competitive, we can obviously sell more of our goods.

As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor reminded the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), he did not mention inflation once. He did not say that our inflation rate had been 10·9 per cent. and was now down to 3·7 per cent. It is just a little above that of Germany, but it is well below the EC average. Consequently, it is forecast that in 1992 our inflation rate will be below even the German average, which at the moment is 3·5 per cent.

In order to give people more confidence rather than surrounding them with gloom and doom, we should point

out that, since 1979, GDP has risen 22 per cent. in real terms. There are 800,000 more jobs now than there were in 1979. The net income of an average family, a husband and wife with two children, is up by 37 per cent. in real terms.

Our corporation tax, which has already been mentioned, is the lowest in the EC. It is the lowest in the G7 countries. It has come down from 52 per cent. under the previous Labour Government to 33 per cent. now. Income tax has dropped from 33 per cent. to 25 per cent., and the top rate, a penal rate of 83 per cent., is down to 40 per cent. The investment income surcharge, which we abolished, had a top rate of 98 per cent.

The economy is also assisted by separate tax assessments for husband and wife. In many cases, that has given the family an added incentive and advantage.

Public expenditure is under control. In 1979, it was 44 per cent. It is now down to just over 40 per cent. Up to last year, we had repaid £26 billion of the national debt. That is unheard of. It is true that this year we have a public sector borrowing requirement of about £10 billion or £10·5 billion, but with the strength of sterling and of previous national sector repayments, borrowing, and debt, that is something we can meet.

I want to make a few suggestions to my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary about small businesses. Many of the new firms that started were under-capitalised and so went to the wall, but the net number has increased by many hundreds of thousands since 1979. One of the snags that confronts small businesses in particular is that of cash flow. They have orders—although perhaps not as many as they had—but also cash flow problems, because the companies they supply do not pay their bills on time.

It is time that the Government considered a system such as that operated by some of our retail stores. If one has an account at Harrods, for example, and does not pay one's bill by a certain date, a mandatory rate of interest is immediately added to the total.

Mr. Beith: Harrods does that?

Sir William Clark: Yes, it does—if one does not pay within the stipulated time.

When a small company arranges to supply a bigger client, settlement terms of, say, 30 days may be agreed. Once that period is exceeded, a mandatory rate of interest should automatically be added. The small supplier would then not be in the hands of his bank. As it is, his overdraft increases, and so do the interest charges, at two or three points over base. That penalty should be paid by the firms which owe money to a smaller business.

I also want to point out that the Trades Union Congress, with 6·5 million members, has six representatives on the National Economic Development Council; the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses, with 5 million members, has none. I believe that organisation ought to be represented.

As to the capital allowance, I was interested in the point made by the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne, and I agree with the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) in his intervention. One hundred per cent. capital allowances could lead to investment decisions being made entirely for tax reasons. What else could be done? At present, a 25 per cent. reduction is given on a reducing basis. In terms of cash flow, it takes a business man eight or nine years to get his money back on any machinery, for example, that he buys. Would it not be easier to offer a straight-line reduction, giving 25 per cent. capital allowance over four years? That way, a business man making an investment would know that he would get his money back within four years.

I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will consider that suggestion. It would not cost the Exchequer anything more the first year, because a 25 per cent. allowance is already given. Only in the second year, when the allowance currently is 25 per cent. of 75 per cent., would any difference arise.

Mr. Sheldon: I am delighted that the right hon. Gentleman has come up with some further suggestions. There are probably many more. However, perhaps he could be more generous, given the present need for investment, and allow for a limited period, such as that which operated when the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) was Chancellor. An allowance period shorter than the four years mentioned by the right hon. Gentleman might have an immediate and useful effect.

Sir William Clark: That is worth considering, but I am not completely sold on that idea. My right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) reduced corporation tax to 35 per cent., but at the same time he took away the 100 per cent. allowance. In that way, despite the fact that a company lost the capital allowance on the excess on its investment, it gained on the reduction in corporation tax, from—I believe it was—42 per cent. to 35 per cent.

During his 30-minute speech, the hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East did not once say where the money for his proposals—other than those on training and investment—would come from. Neither did he refute the two commitments made by the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) in respect of pensions and child benefit. Will Labour fulfil the £35 billion of pledges being given by its spokesmen throughout the country? I understand that is a conservative estimate.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): It would be.

Sir William Clark: I meant, with a small c, in that some economists attach a higher figure to the cost of implementing those pledges.

There can be no doubt that, if Labour's pledges are implemented, even an increase in taxation from 40 per cent. to 49 per cent. would not produce enough revenue to pay for them. The ordinary person would inevitably be affected. Every person in this country earning between £10,000 and £30,000 would, if Labour implemented all its pledges, be worse off. Anyone earning more than £30,000 would be severely worse off.

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): The hon. Gentleman knows that we have answered that point many times, but I cannot let it pass. We have made it explicitly clear that none of the changes that we propose, either in tax or in national insurance contributions, will make a penny difference to any individual earning less than £21,000 a year. No one earning less than £21,000 will pay a penny more under us.

Sir William Clark: Rhetoric and promises are all right, but if Labour's pledges are to be honoured, there is no question but that the ordinary taxpayer will be affected —or that some of those pledges will have to be reneged upon. It is as simple as that.

[Sir William Clark]

I have no doubt that, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said, Britain is coming out of the recession. The recovery is slow and patchy, but the policy is sound—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members who laugh and snigger at such remarks ought to ask themselves why it is that Britain of all the countries in Europe has the most inward investment from overseas investors.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Because Britain offers them cheap labour.

Sir William Clark: That is simply untrue.

I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary that the British economy is basically sound. Our gold and dollar reserves are sound, and we can look forward with confidence to the future—provided that there is no change of Government.

6.10 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I was glad to hear the right hon. Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark) reiterate his support for measures to help small businesses, in particular over the late repayment of debt. This is something for which my hon. Friends and I have pressed for some time. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman's call will be heeded by those on his own Front Bench, because it would be an extremely helpful and valuable measure.

The fairest statement that I have seen recently of the prospects of recovery was the one in the Greenwell Montagu Recovery Watch bulletin a few days ago. It said:

"The balance of evidence over the last month has been towards continued recession. Shafts of light from com[illegible] statements and bullish confidence surveys are outweighed by gloomy economic data and depressing anecdotal evidence."

One can make one's own judgment a little to one side or the other of that. There is a mixture of indicators, but on the whole the adverse indicators seem heavier and more serious than the favourable ones, many of which are things such as confidence surveys, which do not tell one very much about what will happen.

We must, surely, eventually get to recovery, but we have been waiting for it for a long time. The Chancellor has been waiting for Father Christmas since the spring, and I do not think that Father Christmas will arrive for him before 25 December. Worse than that from the Government's point of view, I do not think that he will arrive in time for the general election.

The Government are laying great stress on the possibility of a consumer-led recovery. That is perhaps the area in which they are least believed by those closest to the reality of retailing and the experience of consumers. The Government produced in the autumn statement a graph of consumer confidence. It is the first time, as far as I can see, that what is in effect an opinion poll has found its way into the autumn statement. It is a bit like taking a poll of general election candidates asking them to state in public whether they think that they will win. Of course, they all say that they will win. How many meetings have we all been to, all of us in all parties, at which the candidate has said that he looks forward to winning? Consumer confidence is not all that far from that, but, from the retailer's point of view, it does not pay the staff wages. The people in the street outside may tell the market researchers that they are more confident than they were six months ago, but that does not take them into the shop, put their money over the counter or pay the staff wages of the retailer.

The Government do not seem to realise how severely consumers have been affected by the experience of recession. That is the factor that the Government are not considering. Consumers who saw their commitments enlarge so dramatically as a result of higher interest rates, who found themselves over-committed, and then found themselves unemployed and even less able to meet those commitments, will not rush out and spend money even if they have more of it. They are credit-wary, because their experience of credit has been a very adverse one in recent times. The Government fatally underestimate how very chastened many consumers are by the harsh experience of the last couple of years.

The main driving force of a consumer-led boom would have to be improvement in the housing market. That is where so much of the consumer boom of the 1980s came from. There is massive equity withdrawal from housing. There is no sign of that recovery in the housing market. That is perhaps the weakest of all the indicators on which the Government seek to rely. However hopeful we may be, however much we may snatch at the more encouraging indicators, we cannot look forward with any great confidence to a consumer recovery.

Mr. Tim Smith: Chart 2.7 in the autumn statement shows consumer confidence. It also shows that, since 1974, before every increase in consumer spending there has been an increase in consumer confidence—that the one always follows the other. What reason is there to suppose that this will not happen this time?

Mr. Beith: The reason that I just gave, which is the experience of recession. But I am prepared to wait and see. I advise the Government, however, not to take an indication of confidence as the same thing as money over the counter. One could never run any business on that basis.

Another danger which the Government face in the coming months is that of post-Maastricht pressures on sterling. There is considerable evidence that markets are expecting a realignment following the Maastricht negotiations and that there will be downward pressure on sterling, testing the Chancellor's resolve over interest rates. I believe that there is a strong likelihood that markets will seek to test that resolve. Nobody in the markets seems to believe that the Chancellor dare put up interest rates this side of the general election. Indeed, I have defended the Chancellor in some conversations on this very subject with people in these fields. I have said that I think that he might and they have all said that of course he will not; he dare not, they say, there is no way that he will put up interest rates this side of the general election. My touching faith in the Chancellor's resolve and commitment to anti-inflation policy was ridiculed by those with whom I had this discussion, who were obviously much more deeply cynical than I am. I have to warn the Chancellor that there is a widespread belief that he is not at all likely to take the measures that might prove necessary if intervention is insufficient to stem severe downward pressure on sterling in the coming months.

All this adds up to the likelihood that the Government cannot sort out the economy in the very short term and certainly cannot do so this side of the general election; they

cannot generate the feeling of happiness and cheerfulness about the economy which parties traditionally rely upon to win general elections. I think that that is impossible. I do not think that any incoming party with any set of policies could turn the economy around over the next six months. It is a much longer-term task than that.

My plea to the Government, therefore, is that they concentrate on what they can do, and that is to improve the long-term prospects for the economy. If they fiddle around with the short-term situation that will not enable them to win; it will not enable them to get a better general election performance. They might get at least some credit if they were seen to be laying better long-term foundations for the economy. They must, at the same time, provide some immediate help to the main sufferers, particularly the unemployed, and take measures designed to reduce unemployment by investment in those areas which can produce some reduction in unemployment. I am thinking particularly of repairs in schools and housing, which can generate some employment.

The Government must get on with addressing the long-term solutions. One of these is, of course, the single currency. Our whole attitude to this is fundamental to the future of our economy. What an admission to make after 12 years of Conservative government that our economy is uniquely incapable of being signed up for participation in a single currency. That is one of the principal arguments of those on the Government Benches who say that we should not sign up, that we cannot say at this stage whether we are capable, as an economy, of participating without damage in a single currency. That is a terrible indictment of 12 years of Conservative government.

The alternative to participating in a single currency is higher interest rates in this country than within that currency. The opt-out clause which the Government have so anxiously sought, the clause that would enable Britain uniquely to opt out of participation in a single currency, is a health warning on the British economy. It is a label attached to the British economy which says, "Warning: This is the United Kingdom economy; we reserve the right to devalue our currency. If you invest here, your money may lose its value, your products cannot be reliably priced for trade across Europe; you may face high transaction costs; and you may not get the full benefits of a single market." That is the label which the opters-out wish to attach to the British economy.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): In that case, how does the hon. Gentleman explain how, under both the Labour Government and the Conservative Government, inward investment has been at its peak when there has been a floating currency, where that has been a possibility?

Mr. Beith: The right hon. Gentleman must address himself to the new situation which is developing and in which there will be a single currency. I believe that, if we are not participants in it, it will be severely damaging to inward investment. In the case of a Japanese company wishing to invest in this country, whereas hitherto the attractions of the United Kingdom economy, along with the English language, which is important in Japanese investment, have been significant, for the future we are issuing a warning to the Japanese investor to be careful; he may not be able to price across Europe in the future, he may experience high interest rates in this country and he may find it much harder to trade into the Community, because if we are not participating in the single currency we may not get all the benefits of the single market either. This is a warning which the Government must heed. It is not a label which I want to see attached to the British economy.

Sir Ian Stewart (Hertfordshire, North): What the hon. Gentleman has said is an absolute travesty of the position taken by the Government and, as far as I know, by the official Opposition as well.

The reason why it is considered so important that we should not make a commitment at this stage to join a single currency is that a single currency would involve not only a single central bank but single economic management and a commitment by the Government and people of this country to subsidise, if necessary, the trade deficit of Italy, the budget deficits of other countries and the different standards of living. That would be a major constitutional and economic decision which we could not possibly take here and now. That is the reason why that option has to be kept open. It has nothing to do with the arguments which the hon. Gentleman has put forward.

Mr. Beith: The right hon. Gentleman has not been listening to his hon. Friends. Unlike the Prime Minister, I am prepared to have a referendum on this fundamental constitutional issue. I am prepared to let the people of this country decide.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the independent central bank, which I believe is part of the long-term anti-inflation policy. It was significant that the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) expressed two views—that an independent central bank was a bad thing, and that there are worse problems than inflation. Inflation has been at the root of many of the worst economic problems that we have faced, and was certainly at the root of the problems in pre-war Germany, to which the right hon. Gentleman referred.

The Chancellor has clearly got the message about how an independent central bank would have to work if we had a single currency. He said:

> "But the European central bank in stage 3 would have to be free to set interest rates without interference."

Significantly, he said:

> "That is the view of every member state. In a Community of 12 countries, it simply would not be practical for 12 Finance Ministers to intervene in the monetary policy decisions of the central bank."—[*Official Report*, 21 November 1991; Vol. 199, c. 516-17.]

It is Government policy that if we have a single currency there can be no interference with the setting of monetary policy by the central bank. That is a significant step forward in Government policy. I accept that it is conditional on the decision to participate in a single currency, but I hope that Conservative Members have noted that the necessity of an independent central bank to such a system is accepted by the Government and other member states.

For the long-term benefit of the economy, the Government should invest to ensure that we have an adequate public transport system to move people to and from places of work without massive environmental pollution and to move goods. Our record compared with France, for example on the channel tunnel, is deeply depressing.

The Government should invest in housing to encourage labour mobility, and in training and education, which the Chancellor sought to ridicule as if they were unimportant.

[Mr. Beith]

It is fair to point our that training and education were one of the few positive points that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) made. They are extremely important and, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman said, a frequent cry of industry and business is that those needs are not being met.

The Government should consider the genuine promotion of competition. The fiddling little Competition and Service (Utilities) Bill, which is being considered in Committee, does not address the need to promote competition in the economy, particularly among the massive privatised utilities that the Government have created. We have made proposals on the break-up of British Gas and British Telecom that are designed to promote competition, which the Government have not begun to do.

The Government must consider corporation tax and not simply brush it aside. I do not share the confidence of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East in investment incentives. They run considerable risks of distorting investment decisions. It might be more productive to guarantee a stable tax environment for business by indexing corporation tax allowances, for example, so that business could predict with reasonable accuracy what its tax liability would be. In the long term, that might be a more effective way of encouraging investment than some of the short-term proposals that we have heard today.

The Government must establish the constitutional framework for stable and decentralised government. The Federal Republic of Germany has had both because of its electoral system and the decentralised way in which so much of Germany is governed, where many decisions are taken by the regions. Such changes would be to the long-term good of the United Kingdom's economy.

My advice to the Government is that they cannot sort out the problem this side of a general election, so why not get on with the job of laying the long-term foundations for a successful economy? There might be some credit for that.

6.24 pm

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): I have just finished reading Roy Jenkins's memoirs, which I commend to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They are most civilised, and are rather like reading about Marie Antoinette in the French revolution: all elegance amid disaster. One would not dream that he was giving an account of the first visit to the International Monetary Fund.

More recently, in his excellent memoirs, Edmund Dell—an admirable person, I always thought—gave an account of his stewardship as Chief Secretary under the previous Labour Government. As he was in charge of public expenditure, it might help the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) to read what he said. He said that there had been

> "No comparable example of such intellectual and political incoherence in a party coming into office. They had no economic policy except a 'social contract' of obeying trades unions which was worse than codswallop and an industrial policy that politicians should tell industrialists how to be industrial, which could not be taken seriously yet had to be taken seriously."

We all know where the Labour party's policies landed us then—the collapse of the economy and our infrastructure and a high Cuban-like tax regime. The basic rate of tax was 33 per cent., the top rate was 83 per cent. and tax on investment income was 98 per cent.

We are told that Labour has learnt its lesson, but the leaders of the previous Labour Government were highly intelligent, well-meaning people. All of them had firsts at Oxford and one never would have thought that they could make such a mess of the economy.

I wonder whether the Labour party has learnt its lesson. The hon. Member for Derby, South has said that there will be higher taxes to pay for higher pensions and higher child benefit. But is there not to be more money for training? Did not the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) tell us that there will be more money for training? Did I not hear that there will be more money for the national health service? Were we not told that the Government are spending £6 billion too little on the NHS?

Mrs. Beckett: Those are the BMA's figures, not ours.

Sir Peter Hordern: So the hon. Lady disagrees with the BMA's figures.

Mrs. Beckett: The BMA is giving its impression of the level of underspending. It may be right. We have not committed ourselves to restoring that underspending, nor are we in a position to do so.

Sir Peter Hordern: That is helpful, because it is now clear that the Labour party has no assurances of increasing expenditure on the national health service—contrary to the impression that it has been giving.

Nationalisation of the water authorities is deeply embedded in Labour's policy. It will cost quite a lot to do that. We do not know how much, but Labour will inherit the capital expenditure programme of all the water authorities. When the authorities were nationalised, total capital expenditure was £8 billion. Today, it is £28 billion. Instead of being financed by borrowing and the private sector, it will count as part of the public sector borrowing requirement.

I do not know what the PSBR will be next year, but some estimates suggest that it will be as much as £20 billion. If we add a further £28 billion, what does the Labour party think that will do to its credibility as a potential Government? It would represent such an enormous increase in borrowing as to make its policy incredible. If the hon. Member for Derby, South would like to correct me, I shall happily give way. The hon. Lady is not prepared to deny the figures. Taking the capital expenditure programme of the water authorities, the PSBR will be almost £50 billion.

It is hard to understand, therefore, why the Labour party should be so enthusiastic for a single currency and a European central bank because in the plans for the European central bank in the Dutch draft the deficit cannot exceed 3 per cent. of GDP and with Labour's proposals it would exceed 5 per cent. very easily. The only possible conclusion is that the Labour party would devalue again, as it has always done in the past.

The European dimension is the most important element in our economic policy. We have always been a trading nation, but the single market will bind our trade and business even more closely to Europe. Over very many years we have learnt the lesson that we cannot be immune from casualties which occur in other countries. For

example, the savings and loan debacle in the United States and the Government guarantees which were given at the time meant much higher borrowing for the federal Government. That affected interest rates everywhere throughout the world.

The collapse of stock markets in 1987 was universal; so was the response of lower interest rates. That was followed by a property boom. Perhaps more could have been done at that time. It is easy to argue in retrospect, but the Governor of the Bank of England could have been more explicit about what would happen because of the quantity of money that was borrowed for the property market. The difficulty now arises from the amount of money tied up in unproductive investment, such as empty office blocks here, in the United States and in Japan.

Now there is a new phenomenon. More and more money is being invested in east Germany in basic infrastructure—quite rightly, because they cannot proceed without it. But there is no immediate return from any of that investment. The return on trading activities throughout the world is inadequate. We cannot buck that trend. It is bound to be still with us, whichever party is in power in future.

However, there are some sensible things which we can do. One is to concentrate on the proper use of assets in the public sector. That is only a small example, but my right hon. Friends might consider it. I mean something as mundane as police stations. A police authority cannot sell a police station in order to build another one, because, although it may sell the station and put the money in the bank, it has to get Home Office permission to build a new one. That is absurd. There cannot be any possible financial loss in the transaction, because one set of assets will be paid for by the private sector and the police will be able to put the police station where they believe it should be sited. What the Home Office has to do with the calculation, I cannot imagine.

We can also continue to attract investment from abroad; in that we have been remarkably successful. The Japanese have invested in our country because they believe that is the best way of getting into the European Community; they invest because they reckon that we will be full partners in the Community. That is why Europe is so important.

That brings us back to the great debate. It is doubtful whether we would continue to attract so much investment from Japan and the United States if they felt that we were not full members of the European Community. The debate is between those who accept no diminution of our sovereignty and those who say that, having accepted membership of the exchange rate mechanism, we might as well take the next logical step and proceed to a single currency, believing that that is where our destiny lies.

I start from a different position. Let us look at the last 30 years. Are we satisfied with the stewardship of our economic sovereignty? This goes back over a long period, involving both political parties. In 1961, there were $2·80 to the pound; the exchange rate is now $1·79. There were FF13·7; there are now just over FF10. There were DM11·2; there are now DM2·85. We had fixed exchange rates with the dollar until 1972. After that, we floated; we floated downwards and we have done so ever since. That movement was a fair reflection of our economic performance relative to other major economies.

Parties of all political complexions have tried everything—prices and incomes policies, both voluntary and statutory, and monetary policies. They all failed. The prices and incomes policies failed because of their inherent absurdity, and the monetary policies because they were not strictly applied.

So we joined the exchange rate mechanism under my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher). I have reached independently the same conclusion as my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson). Since so much trouble had been caused by trying to manage monetary policy ourselves, why should we not hitch ourselves to the deutschmark, which is managed so much better? Sir Alan Walters and Professor Minford told us that that was an impossible and disastrous policy. Encouraged by their opinions, we should consider what happened. We have seen a fast fall in inflation and a rapid fall in interest rates. Now they say, "Look at the trouble you are in."

The position cries out for further cuts in interest rates but, hooked as we are to the deutschmark, it seems that interest rates may have to rise rather than fall. They may rise, but I think that Germany is in difficulty. When it is recognised that Germany's internal deficit amounts to 5 per cent. of GDP and is rising, I expect the pound to begin to rise against the deutschmark, which would give scope for cuts in interest rates. I think that the fear of a possible Labour Government is the only thing that is holding the pound back.

We have to face the fact that, over the last 30 years, our economic sovereignty has meant the sovereign right to devalue our currency. We have had a sovereign right always to accommodate high wage increases without increases in productivity. Our manufacturing companies especially have never bothered to be competitive, because they knew that they would always be bailed out by the Government, as they always have been. That is not the position now, and they know it. That is why we are seeing much lower wage increases and substantial improvements in productivity. If there was not an exchange rate mechanism, something like it would have to be invented.

What about our loss of sovereignty? After the House of Commons Committee of Secrecy presented its second report on the expediency of the Bank resuming cash payments on 6 May 1819, Britain was on the gold standard for a century and more. Nobody talked about our losing our sovereignty to South African, Californian or Australian gold miners then. For many years after the last war, under the Bretton Woods agreement, we were effectively subject to the US Federal Reserve. Nobody complained about loss of sovereignty. Nobody called Sir Winston Churchill, who presided over our membership of Bretton Woods, arrogant for not having a referendum. For the best part of the last 170 years, we have deliberately relinquished our economic sovereignty, first to gold and then to the dollar, and we are arguably the better for it.

So now, what is new? We are already in the exchange rate mechanism. We are moving towards a single currency and a European central bank. That move needs to be considered carefully. Clearly there are considerable doubts about the timing and whether it will work. That needs to be looked at at the right time. I do so now not because of any Euro-enthusiasm but because of a calm calculation of our national interest. What is that interest? It is the defeat of inflation; it is to create conditions for sustained growth, which only stable prices and competition can secure.

We could, of course, decide to go no further but, as a member of the exchange rate mechanism, we would not

[Sir Peter Hordern]

have the protection of the single currency and we would be outside an arrangement of the dollar, the yen and the ecu. I do not believe that the position of sterling outside those major currencies would be sustainable for long. If it were, it could be sustained only by higher interest rates than would otherwise be the case.

What are we being asked to do? I understand that, according to the Dutch draft, no national deficit should be more than 3 per cent. of GDP. It is rather good to have such a limit. For those who believe—as I do—in monetary policy, such a limit is an acceptable—indeed, necessary—discipline. Of course, it will take some time to deliver. I understand that the Italians have a deficit of about 20 per cent. and no prospect of being able to deliver at the moment. However, it could lead in time to phase 3 of the negotiations for a European central bank.

Some people say that we cannot have economic union without political union. I recognise that that is a great difficulty, but I do not understand why it should be so, because the Federal Reserve in the United States does not attempt to conduct fiscal policy or to set the level of federal spending, and nor does the Bundesbank in Germany. It remains the policy that the federal Government of the United States and the German Government set fiscal policies and public spending levels, which is what Governments are for.

Provided always that the fiscal deficit overall is not more than 3 per cent., there is no reason why the countries of the European Community should not run their own fiscal and public spending policies and maintain their parliamentary sovereignty. There is no reason why there should be an even distribution of resources throughout the European Community. I do not go along with the idea of converging economies. I see no reason why that should be the case, any more than it is in the United States at present. If that were the case, it would allow us to allow entry to the eastern European countries in due course.

We must ask one question—what is it in our national interest to do? I believe that the acceptance in due course of a single currency and of a European central bank are plainly in our national interest and would bring about a stable and competitive economy and a rising standard of living for our people, which is what we are here for. It is not an easy policy. If the Opposition are genuinely interested in obtaining manufacturing investment and long-term investment of any kind, low—or better still, nil—inflation is required. It is no coincidence that Germany and Japan have had the lowest rates of inflation, the highest levels of investment and low interest rates for many years.

It would be easy to pump money into the system as the Opposition propose, but——

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East) *rose——*

Sir Peter Hordern: No, I am coming to an end. But it would also be fatal. By far the most demanding economic policy of the past 20 years is that which the Government are trying at present. I think that it is a courageous policy which deserves to succeed.

6.42 pm

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): It would be sad enough if we were debating only one recession, but we are debating the consequence and continuance of the historic tragedy of the 1980s. I remind the hon. Member for Horsham (Sir. P. Hordern) that if the Government had not destroyed 20 per cent. of manufacturing industry, if they had sustained the record level of manufacturing investment that they inherited and if they had used the opportunity provided by £130 billion worth of oil from the North sea, we should not be talking about recession today—we would be celebrating our continuance in a virtuous circle such as that enjoyed by Japan and Germany for decades.

Instead of talking about high interest rates, we would be talking about the fact that we had balance of payments surpluses which gave us low interest rates which gave us the opportunity for higher living standards for our work force and low unemployment. Instead, we are talking about the monumental failure of the past decade and the recession is merely one sad—but sadly not final—symptom of that failure.

When the Government came to office, they took the £5 billion surplus in manufacturing trade and turned it into a £17 billion deficit by 1989. That represents a £22 billion turnaround in our trading position and I shall deal with that issue later. In fact, if one up-values that to current prices, it represents a £27 billion turnaround, because the 1978-79 surplus would be worth about £10 billion at today's prices.

The Government inherited a £594 billion current account surplus but turned it into a multi-billion pound deficit. Despite the £130 billion of balance of payments benefit from the North sea oil, they recorded a decade deficit of £25 billion. They took 10 years to equal the level of manufacturing investment that they inherited and, sadly, the recovery turned out to be a temporary blip, as hon. Gentlemen well know. Already, manufacturing investment has fallen another 20 per cent. and is due to fall again.

It is fascinating that, as they cooked the employment statistics, the Government have wriggled and tried to switch ground when talking about investment. When manufacturing investment was looking bad they switched to business investment so that they could include empty office blocks. In the autumn statement there was a switch to core investment, which includes the computers at race courses and supermarket checkouts—anything but face the reality of what they have done to this country.

We are now able to quantify what that destruction of investment has meant for this country, not on the basis of my figures, but on the basis of the Prime Minister's figures given to me in answer to a written question when he was at the Treasury. We have repeated those figures time and again—£20 billion of manufacturing investment has been lost merely because of the failure to sustain investment at the 1979 level. However, that does not mean anything—it is difficult to conceive it—so I shall illustrate what it could have meant.

The value of that investment is equivalent to 30 Nissan car plants washed away in the destruction of manufacturing investment. Nissan contributes £0·9 billion to the balance of payments each year. Had we been able to carry out investment on that scale—and I am talking illustratively—we could have been talking of a return on

payments of between £20 billion and £30 billion a year. But let us halve that, because we must recognise that there are limits to the number of investment opportunities of that quality. Even so, we would still have rid ourselves of our balance of payments problem.

The virtuous cycle—the price that we sought for the whole of the post-war period—is the prize that was lost in a bout of monetarist madness. The Chancellor today spoke about running to the International Monetary Fund. Instead of the prize, we have the spectacle of a party which derided the £2 billion IMF loan—which, incidentally, had been paid back before the Government came to office—itself being dependent, and its policies conditioned by its dependence, on £80 billion of footloose hot money that it had to hold in this country to finance its payments deficits. Because it has had to hold that £80 billion, it has had to keep interest rates high and because it has kept interest rates high, the exchange rates have been high. As exchange rates have been high, our companies could not compete and because our companies could not compete they have closed and our people have lost their jobs. At the end, another balance of payments problem was created. Instead of generating a virtuous cycle, the Government have generated a vicious downwards spiral.

I said that we are facing not only a single recession but a symptom of the long-term structural decline which the Government have brought about. They did not do so calculatedly, because they did not have the intelligence to understand the consequences of what they were doing and do not now have the honesty to admit the consequences of what they have done. To listen to what the Prime Minister and the Chancellor say is to hear a masterpiece of public relations. They say repeatedly "Good news, the recession is hitting bottom." How many times have we heard that phrase?

I am reminded of the leader of the lemmings, plunging down a 1,000 ft. cliff, seeing the jagged boulders below him and looking over his shoulder and shouting, "Don't worry boys, we're nearly there." That is what the Government are saying. Hitting the bottom, about which the Chancellor has been boasting today, is not an achievement. For heaven's sake, is that an achievement? It is the culmination of failure. The dead bodies at the foot of the cliff are the 41,000 dead bodies of companies that have gone into liquidation in the past two and a half years alone. That is the cost of blindly following the ludicrous monetary policies which Ministers have espoused.

The Chancellor said today not only that we have hit the bottom, which is supposed to be so reassuring, but that the worst is over. What does he mean? At the bottom of the cliff, the survivors now have to get all the way back up again. That is what the Chancellor means when he says that the worst is over. The Government will now measure all growth from today—from the bottom of the chasm. When the Government climb all the way to the top again——

Mr. Austin Mitchell: If.

Mr. Williams: I will come to that. If they climb all the way to the top again, they will have got back only to where they started. Yet they will tell us, "Look how marvellously we have done in getting ourselves from down there, where we should not have been, to here where we started." They will not say, "If only we had had the sanity to cross the bridge, we would be so much further down the other side."

As my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) said, we may not get back and we certainly will not do so in the life of this Government. There are economic time bombs in the cliff which have been manufactured by the Government's own policies. The Government are, for example, relying on the recovery of consumer spending to lead them out of the recession. However, if the £9 billion that has gone back into circulation on an annual basis as a result of the change in mortgage rates is spent, as the Government hope that it will be, in time to bail them out, a third of that, as I have said before, will go into imports and £3 billion will go on to the balance of payments. Before anyone says that that is rubbish, he should look at the autumn statement. The Chancellor said then that the balance of payments would worsen by £3-5 billion next year.

The other economic bomb that the Government have planted is a wage explosion, which will not be brought about by a trade union plot. It will be created, pushed and driven for by the marketplace. If there is a recovery, the shortages, to which my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) referred, that exist in key industries at the bottom of the cliff will be even greater as we start to find our way back up. As firms start to compete for finite skills resources, they will drive us into wage inflation on the way back up. The consumer boom that the Government hope to see will generate a balance of payments problem and wage inflation, prompted by business men and not by the unions, will generate an inflation problem.

As the balance of payments deficit grows over the next 12 months, as firms force up wages and as inflation inexorably rises as a result, the hot money will become increasingly volatile. The Government will be forced, if they are to retain it—and with an increase of £3 billion in the balance of payments deficit they cannot afford not to retain it—to increase interest rates.

I will make a purely personal observation. The hon. Member for Horsham and I came to the House at the same time and he knows that I am not given to seeking colourful or irresponsible solutions. We may disagree, and what I am about to say will inevitably attract the rebuttal of those on both Front Benches. I accept that. I would not make my observation if I did not think that it is essential that we face up to reality.

The heart of the problem was touched on by the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), but he then sidestepped the implications. The heart of the problem is the exchange rate. We have gone into the exchange rate mechanism at the wrong rate of exchange. I remind hon. Members of my point about the gap of £155 billion and they will understand why I am giving a political hostage to fortune. If we have had over the decade £130 billion benefit in balance of payments terms out of the North sea, and if even with that we are in a £25 billion negative position, without the oil—and we all know that there will be less oil in the 1990s than there was in the 1980s—the gap in our capability of paying our way is £155 billion. That is the gap that we must close.

The rate at which we have gone into the ERM is the average rate over a period of years, according to the Government. How on earth in logic or in practice can anyone pretend that we can close a gap of £155 billion at the rate of exchange that created a gap of £155 billion? We must understand that truth, instead of making silly political points about this or that party being the party of

[Mr. Williams]

devaluation. As I said when I intervened in the speech of the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, who does not seem to understand much about economic matters, if devaluation is such a sin, why on earth did the Conservative party live for so long with a floating currency? That is not just devaluation, but oscillating currency. Whether devaluation or revaluation, it is left to the marketplace. It cannot be so wrong to say what I am saying; it is just politically inexpedient for the Government to say it.

Both the Conservative party and the Labour party have to recognise another fact. I realise that Front-Bench Members cannot support the conclusion to which I have come. I understand why they cannot endorse my remarks and why they will have to rebut them, but there is another consequence if my analysis is correct. A single currency is either an illusion or a suicide note. It is a suicide note because we cannot survive economically at the present rate of exchange, so we cannot guarantee our future. It is an illusion because at the present rate of exchange it is an economic impossibility to meet the requirements of convergence. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] I ask hon. Members to think it through. The rate of exchange is such that by 1997 we shall not be able, at the present rate of exchange, to meet the convergence requirements that have been laid down in the proposals coming from Brussels and in the conditions set out by the Opposition.

I realise that the Government must say no to devaluation. However, I suspect that the real answer is, "No, at present." I suspect that it may not be no even before an election and it certainly will not be no after an election.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: My right hon. Friend should not be so embarrassed about the Government's position. Previous Conservative Governments have devalued the currency quite substantially. The Heath Government's own expansion was stimulated by a devaluation, which they called floating, and, in the same way in 1985-86, the pound went down about 30 per cent. in real terms against the deutschmark, which was one of the reasons for the Lawson expansion.

Mr. Williams: My hon. Friend's intervention is helpful. The Economic Secretary to the Treasury may find that his own Front-Bench Members are in a somewhat different position even before the election, not out of choice but out of necessity. I suspect that the Government would love to participate, not in a crude devaluation but in a nice respectable currency realignment. That is not devaluation —it is just tidying up the house. I do not care how it comes about and I do not care what label it is given, but if we do not face up to the reality that the rate of exchange is completely and utterly indefensible, Britain, which once boasted of being the workshop of the world, will become the back-street sweatshop of Europe.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. At the beginning of the debate, Mr. Speaker announced a precautionary 10-minute limit on speeches, which meant that we would judge the state of play at 7 o'clock. I am glad to inform the House that I judge that it is not necessary to impose a 10-minute limit. However, if hon. Members are to have the opportunity to speak, I calculate that there should be a voluntary limit of about 12 minutes on speeches. I hope that right hon. and hon. Members will respond to that request.

7.1 pm

Sir Ian Stewart (Hertfordshire, North): I must immediately use one or two of my valuable minutes by saying a word about what the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) said. The most immediate response to his call for a devaluation of the currency is that, since sterling joined the exchange rate mechanism a year ago, there has been a substantial and sustained increase in British exports. That seems to undermine the main basis of the right hon. Gentleman's argument about the correct level of the exchange rate.

Both the right hon. Gentleman and the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) filled out a bit of the case that is being deployed by the Opposition on investment incentives. The right hon. Member for Swansea, West appeared to argue that only investment in manufacturing industry is relevant to the state and the prospects of our economy. As he knows, since the 1970s, an increasing proportion of investment has been in the oil and energy sectors, which are not part of the manufacturing sector, and in the service industries. Those trends have been followed not only in this country but elsewhere.

The level of investment in the economy has risen dramatically since the late 1970s, when the Labour party was in government. The benefit of that investment has been strongly demonstrated. It has meant a great increase in output during the 1980s, which can be closely related to the changes in the investment allowances which were introduced at the time. In the 1980s, we looked very carefully at the potential impact of reducing the 100 per cent. investment allowance and, at the same time, reducing the overall level of taxation on corporate profits. We came to the conclusion that it would be far better for companies to know that they could retain a much higher proportion of their profits than that they should have to shelter their profits from high rates of tax by resorting to artificial levels of investment allowances in order to save themselves having to pass over all their profits to the Exchequer.

Although it seems to have acquired a certain vogue that increased investment allowances are needed, the converse is an increase in the basic rate of corporation tax. That would be a step in the wrong direction. In the second half of the 1980s, following the changes in the investment allowance and corporation tax regime which we introduced at that time, we saw a considerable increase in investment. I have no doubt that if we were to reverse that change we would encourage a certain amount of investment which would not and should not otherwise have taken place, because it would be less concerned with profitability and more concerned with reducing the tax bill of the companies concerned. I do not believe that that would be in the interests of companies, and I am certain that it would not be in the interests of the British economy.

I strongly caution hon. Members who may be tempted to think that simply by increasing investment allowances, which would have to be offset by an increase in the rate of corporation tax, one would encourage investment in the long term, or even in the short term. A low rate of corporation tax of 33 per cent.—33 per cent. is the highest

rate; the small company rate, of course, is only 25 per cent. —coupled with a reasonable flat rate of 25 per cent. for investment allowances is much more likely to encourage companies to retain profits for productive investment rather than the artificial system which applied before.

I wonder why the Opposition have chosen economic management as the subject of the debate. Perhaps they are beginning to realise that national health service trust reforms and other moves in that direction are beginning to show their worth and they no longer regard it as a suitable policy on which to try to create political difficulties for the Government. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that they should choose this subject for debate. I always enjoy the witty speeches of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), but I am always left wondering what is the economic policy of the Labour party. If Labour Members are to put themselves forward seriously as a prospective Government, they must answer some basic questions which have so far been left unresolved. The heart of the problem is the fact that Opposition Members' sums do not add up on public expenditure, taxation and borrowing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Sir P. Hordern), who spoke about water authorities, put his finger on an important issue. At the very least, a Labour Government, if by some mischance they were elected, would discontinue the programme of privatisation and would therefore immediately deprive themselves of many billions of pounds of revenue over the public expenditure programme period. If they were to increase taxes on higher earners, savings income, capital gains and on the other matters that they threaten, they would only barely replace the money which they would lose by discontinuing the privatisation programme. That is without taking into account any money spent on renationalisation or deprivatisation, whatever the correct term might be, let alone bringing back into the public sector all the borrowings of companies which are currently in the private sector and which now do not count as part of the public debt.

The Opposition cannot have thought the matter through. We have had no explanation from them. Endless speeches, statements and policy documents have been produced by Labour Members, but not a single line has addressed the gap between what they say that they would want to spend and their means of raising the money to meet it. There is a serious conflict of interest in what they are trying to do. They are saying to people, "We want you, as voters, to believe that we will spend an extra £35 billion, £40 billion or £50 billion on wonderful public expenditure projects, and we will not tax you, as earners. All right, if you are on a higher income, you will get a big increase in taxation." However, everybody knows that increasing taxes on higher incomes does not produce anything like the revenue necessary to sustain Labour's public expenditure commitments. Opposition Members cannot have their cake and eat it. They must explain how they will bridge the gap. To put it another way, they cannot use the same financial resources twice.

Let us consider a parable. Let us suppose that a disreputable business man was running a great commercial empire with many public and private companies and had control of the group's pension funds. One could not take money out of the pension fund and put it into the private companies controlled by the same person and still have that money in the pension fund. One cannot use money twice over. Similarly, one cannot make commitments to huge public expenditure programmes while saying that one will not raise taxation ferociously to meet those commitments.

We need only look back at the past. The same sort of noises were being made in the 1970s that the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) is making now about not imposing extra taxation on people with low incomes. In the election, as a result of which I first became a Member of this House, I well remember the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) travelling around the country with a great grin on his face saying that he would squeeze the rich until the pips squeaked with his new tax policy. The Opposition are at it again now. They want to increase taxation on higher earners. The right hon. Member for Leeds, East did not say that "the rich" included all those on anything above half average earnings, yet those were the people who received the extra tax burden.

One has to increase taxation all the way down the scale, to those on average and low incomes, if one is to raise anything like the amount that Labour would need to fund its public expenditure programmes. That is why the last Labour Government stopped increasing personal allowances in line with inflation and why, as a result, nearly 2 million people were brought into the income tax net. However, in the 1980s, under a Conservative Government, about 2 million people have been removed from the tax net. We have reversed the unsatisfactory direction that was taken by the last Labour Government. That is why take-home pay for a person on average earnings remained virtually unchanged under the previous Labour Government. Indeed, the income of the average single person actually fell whereas, since 1979 under a Conservative Government, the average increase for single and married people, and married couples with two children, has been no less than 40 per cent. in every category.

That is the difference between an economy that has tax rates that are set to encourage incentive—and earnings progress—and an economy with the suffocating levels of taxation that are inevitable under a Labour Government because of their huge public spending commitments. If a Labour Government raised the basic rate of taxation from 25p to 33p, which was their chosen rate at the end of their last period in government, they would raise in tax only about half of what is needed to meet the public expenditure commitments that they have made throughout the country in the past two or three years.

That is the scale of the mismatch between the Opposition's words and figures. I warn them—perhaps I am even trying to be helpful—that they will not do their cause any good if they continue to put forward financial and economic arithmetic that does not add up. They will not be able to do that during a general election campaign because it will be easy for us to point out the gaping holes in their arithmetic and nobody will believe them.

The Labour party should come clean. There is nothing wrong or immoral about saying that one wants to be a high tax, high public expenditure party and that that is the way in which one wants to conduct oneself in government, but one cannot say that one would form a high public expenditure, low tax Government; that simply could not work. It has not worked in the past and Labour Governments have come a cropper every time that they have tried it. One cannot use creative accounting to get out of that problem. The Opposition must face up to that. The

[Sir Ian Stewart]

sooner that they do, the better for them, but the better for the country also, because people will know where they stand.

7.13 pm

Mrs. Irene Adams (Paisley, North): It is now just a year since I first became a Member of Parliament. In fact, I was elected on the very day that the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) became Prime Minister. In my maiden speech, I told the House of the difficulties that my constituency faced and the rundown that had occurred there during the 12 years that the Tory party had been in power.

In my first few weeks here, I listened intently to the Government telling us, "Our difficulties are over now that Mrs. Thatcher has gone. Mr. Major is about to deliver unto us a bright new tomorrow." In fact, at that time the Prime Minister and the Chancellor were denying that we were in a recession, and even when they finally conceded that there might just be a recession, they continued to deny its depth.

Far from having a bright new tomorrow, my constituency has continued to suffer since the right hon. Member for Huntingdon came to office. All the key indicators have gone from bad to worse in that time. Unemployment in the country has increased by about 3,000 a day; businesses have failed at a rate of more than 200 a day; and in every working day of the past year 300 families have had their homes repossessed. The misery that homelessness brings to families is a terrible indictment of any Government.

During the past year, manufacturing investment has decreased by 12 per cent. and manufacturing output by 5 per cent. In the past year, 8,178 businesses have failed in Scotland. Again, that has caused abject misery.

My constituency has not fared any better than any other. The picture has become bleaker and bleaker. Paisley is essentially a mill town—or rather, it was a mill town until 1979 when the Tories came to power. At that time, United Thread Mills in Paisley employed 3,271 people, but today only 402 people are employed there. Only last week, we were told that Paisley is likely to lose those 402 jobs in the next few months. That is not because people no longer need thread or because it is no longer being manufactured, but because that company, which started its life in Paisley, is now a multinational company with investments all around the world. Because of the Government's policy on and attitude to manufacturing industry, the jobs are no longer in Paisley—and they are not likely to be there.

In a recent written reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South (Mr. McMaster), the Minister responsible for Scottish industry admitted that, between 1979 and 1989, the Paisley postal area lost 76 per cent. of its manufacturing jobs. If that is updated to the present day to include the recent manufacturing job losses, the figure is now over 80 per cent. In fact, only today we heard that we are likely to lose another 320 jobs in the whisky industry in Paisley, South.

Our area now needs a major economic initiative to regenerate its manufacturing base. We have suffered a haemorrhage of job losses. That has not happened in one fell swoop; it has been death by a thousand cuts. We now need a genuine initiative, but not the sort that has happened in other areas, where jobs are simply transferred from one area to another without any new jobs being created. We desperately need a Government partnership with industry, such as the Labour party would initiate. As a result of the Government's lack of initiative and investment in manufacturing and training, we are in desperate danger of losing all our manufacturing skills. In my area, those were the skills of the thread-making industry and of heavy and light engineering.

During the by-election in which my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South and I were elected—on the day that the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) resigned—I was campaigning when a newsagent said to me, "Look out at that road. I remember the day that Mrs. Thatcher came to power. I remember it well because a small boy was knocked down outside the shop when he was trying to cross the road. He was knocked down because the road was so busy with traffic and with people going to work in the manufacturing industries that he could not cross it safely. I looked out at that road this morning and there were two boys playing football on it." That is what the Government have done to the manufacturing industry of Britain. They have reduced it to absolute rubble.

Mr. Gordon McMaster (Paisley, South): Does my hon. Friend recall that the newsagent made that statement on the very day that the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) resigned? That is the legacy that she left us from that 10-year period.

Mrs. Adams: I agree with that.

As a result of the lack of investment in manufacturing and training, young people have not learnt the old skills that we had in manufacturing. Therefore, it is all the more difficult to convert those old skills to fit the new technologies of today. Indeed, we have missed a rung on the evolutionary ladder. The end result is that we miss out yet again because we do not have the necessary skills for the new industries that are coming along, so the vicious circle created by the Government becomes an ever-increasing downward spiral in the loss of manufacturing jobs that has so damaged my constituency.

The only new jobs that we have been offered are at a toxic waste incinerator. An application has been made to site one in Renfrew in my constituency. No one wants such an incinerator. It would cause greater damage to the industry than we already have because the nature of the business would discourage new investment in the area.

I have described the grim reality that people in my constituency face every day. The Government have presided over that loss of jobs. Coupled with that, a lack of investment in the construction industry, especially public sector housing, and a lack of funding for local authorities have created huge waiting lists for council housing and high levels of homelessness in my constituency. Council houses are in increasing disrepair. Renfrew district council estimates that it would need to invest some £300 million to bring its housing stock up to a tolerable standard.

Is it any wonder that people in my constituency continually question the sanity and morality of a Government who allow public buildings to fall into disrepair while building workers are unemployed, who have presided over record unemployment and record interest rates, who have created a level of homelessness in

Britain that we have not seen for a hundred years, who refuse to invest in manufacturing industry and training, who are locked into a dogma of the past and who are bereft of new ideas? They are a Government in their death throes who cling on to power in the hope that something will turn up. I have to tell them that it does not look as though something will turn up. It is time for the Government to die with dignity; it is time to go now.

7.22 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): I had the pleasure of listening to the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mrs. Adams). She spoke then with the same passion with which she spoke this evening on behalf of her constituents in Paisley. It is entirely right that she should do so. As the character of this recession has been rather different from that of the previous recession, not only her constituents have been affected. In many ways this recession has been harder in the south-east. In some respects it has been a white-collar, middle-class recession and many of my constituents have also been affected. Therefore, I sympathise with what the hon. Lady said.

However, we must ask ourselves what policies are most likely to be effective in dealing with the problems that we face. The Government are right to give the highest priority to getting inflation down. I make no apology for repeating what I said at the end of July when we last had a debate on the economy. Reducing inflation should be the Government's top priority. Since we joined the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system, we have had considerable success in reducing inflation.

In the autumn statement of 1990 the Chancellor forecast that in the fourth quarter of 1991 inflation would fall to 5·5 per cent. By the Budget of this year he forecast in the Red Book that in the fourth quarter of this year inflation would fall to 4 per cent. He has beaten both those forecasts. Today inflation is below 4 per cent. In the Budget he forecast that by the middle of next year inflation would be 3·75 per cent. In this year's autumn statement he forecast that inflation would be 4 per cent. by the fourth quarter of next year.

It is possible that the Treasury is being unduly pessimistic. There is every possibility that the underlying inflation, and indeed the retail prices index, will be below 4 per cent. by the end of next year. That is the benefit of having adhered through some difficult times to the policy of United Kingdom membership of the exchange rate mechanism. That is the great benefit which the ERM will deliver to the British economy in due course.

Of course, there is an important trade-off here between the short term and the long term. What would have happened if we had not joined the ERM a year or so ago? Interest rates might be 1 or 1·5 per cent. lower today. Almost certainly sterling would be lower than it is today, and, therefore, inflation would be higher. It does not follow—I am sure that the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) would disagree if he were still here—that exporters could have taken advantage of a weaker exchange rate in the way that he suggested.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Sir I. Stewart) said, the record of exporters in the past 12 months was a good one, even with an exchange rate which some people claim is excessively high. I should have thought that most people would have learnt by now that devaluation of the currency is not an economic panacea and that they would see that countries which have had a firm exchange rate have been among the world's most successful exporters.

If inflation was higher than at present, house prices might be a little firmer and there might be a little more consumer confidence knocking around, but I suggest that that would give the illusion of improvement but no real improvement. There is no doubt that our membership of the ERM offers an opportunity to break the mould in which we have been stuck for the past 20 or 30 years. In the short term, it seems that everyone in the House agrees that there is no quick fix. I was doing a piece for the BBC World Service earlier this afternoon with the hon. Member for Redcar (Ms. Mowlam) in which she agreed that there was no quick fix. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) did not come up with any proposals that would have any short-term consequences on the economy. There are no policies designed to give it an instant kick start. All that the right hon. and learned Gentleman could come up with were the same policies that we have heard endlessly before. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said, those policies are the answer to every question about Labour's economic strategy—more investment and more training.

We all want to see more investment and more training, but, as I said to the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), the way to achieve that is not by increasing tax allowances to 100 per cent. That would have a distorting effect. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North, who was a Treasury Minister at the time, was right to make the changes that were made in 1984. They have paid handsome dividends because the main source of cash for new investment is retained profits. If the taxes on retained profits are low, people have more cash for investment.

The Government have the right economic policy, even if it is frustrating that recovery seems to be so long coming. ERM membership brings a stable exchange rate and no one should under-estimate the value of that to Britain's exporters. It brings, and has already brought, lower inflation and in due course that will doubtless be followed by lower interest rates.

The Government also have the right fiscal policy. In a time of recession, it is right that we should move from the position three years ago, when we had a large public sector debt repayment, to the situation today when we have a growing but not unmanageable borrowing requirement, which will rise next year to about 3 per cent. of GDP.

Mr. Jimmy Wray (Glasgow, Provan): The hon. Gentleman says that the Government have the right fiscal policy now. They have been in government for 12 years. I feel sorry for the Opposition Front Bench, which will have to take over after April, because of the mess that the Conservatives will leave behind. There are debts totalling billions of pounds, but the Government have sold the assets of this country. How can the hon. Gentleman say that they have the right fiscal policy now?

Mr. Smith: The Government have had tremendous success in reducing the national debt. In the previous three years, there have been substantial repayments of public debt. We can contrast the position today with that under the last Labour Government, when the fastest growing head of public expenditure was debt interest. That Labour Government borrowed so much money. The bill has to be

[Mr. Smith]

met by taxpayers today and by future generations. Our achievement in repaying some of the national debt is that future generations will not have to pay, today's taxpayers will not have to pay and that money is available to be spent on hospitals, schools and all the other things that we would like money to be spent on.

Hon. Members should read a written answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw), who asked which member state is doing best in the European monetary union stakes as regards public sector borrowing, which is one of the criteria for convergence. Hon. Members will find that one of the conditions is that the total national debt of a member state must be 60 per cent. of GDP or less. Some of the member states in the European Community have a national debt of more than 100 per cent. In the United Kingdom it is well below the 60 per cent., so we shall have no difficulty meeting that test, if and when the time comes. It would be irresponsible and wrong to go any further as regards fiscal policy. We should seek to place a ceiling on borrowing of around 3 per cent. of GDP, which is exactly what the draft economic and monetary union treaty does.

In comparing this recession with that in 1981, hon. Members will recall that in the 1981 Budget, contrary to conventional wisdom—although it was certainly the right decision at the time—my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) cut public sector borrowing in the middle of a recession. That was the right policy at that time and rapidly proved successful in terms of economic recovery.

Today we face a different situation. As I described, we start from a much stronger fiscal position and so it is right that we should now have a larger public sector borrowing requirement. I welcome the autumn and the fact that the Government want to increase public spending in key areas, including health and the transport infrastructure.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): What about Blaby?

Mr. Smith: Does the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes), who is wittering from a sedentary position, want to intervene?

Mr. Haynes: What about Blaby?

Mr. Smith: I shall ignore that remark.

Mr. Haynes: You supported him, that is why.

Mr. Smith: On unemployment, the position now is very different from what it was after the recession of 1981, when unemployment continued to rise until 1986. The signs are quite encouraging. Unemployment is still rising, which is obviously unacceptable and a matter of considerable regret—certainly to those of my constituents who have lost their jobs.

However, although unemployment is normally a lagging indicator in the economy, already the monthly rate of increase in unemployment has declined substantially. Last month it was only 15,000 and it fell in Scotland, Wales and the north of England—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] I have the Department of Employment's figures here. Unadjusted unemployment fell throughout the United Kingdom last month by 25,000. The figures rose by 16,000 only on an adjusted basis. In Scotland, Wales and the north of England unemployment fell. That is also cause for some optimism.

On the question of economic and monetary union, I was sorry that the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), who is no longer in the Chamber, grossly misrepresented the Government's position. He knows very well that the criteria are clearly set out in the draft treaty. If he looks at them, he will realise that the United Kingdom will have no difficulty in meeting the criteria. That is not the point. The question is whether it is sensible to make a decision now about something that the treaty says will be considered in five years' time, at the end of 1996. No rational person would try to make that type of decision now. It should be for the next Parliament or for the Parliament after that to decide.

The United Kingdom will have no difficulty in meeting the criteria, which relate to inflation, to our fiscal position, our performance within the ERM and to interest rates. We meet all those criteria and we should continue to pursue policies which ensure that we meet them. I think that we shall.

The two written answers that I referred to, given to my hon. Friend the Member for Dover, show that many other countries in the European Community do not meet the fiscal criteria—either current borrowing of 3 per cent. of GDP or a total national debt of 60 per cent. of GDP. The United Kingdom is in a much stronger position than many other member states, and meeting those criteria will not be a difficulty.

I was disappointed by the speech by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East. I want my hon. Friends to hear a little more detail about Labour's economic policies. That is not an unreasonable request when an election is imminent. People will start asking more detailed and more searching questions as the elections approaches. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North is right in saying that we hear so little because the Labour party has no answers to those questions. We hear the same tiresome statements about investment and training, but no answers to other questions. It is about time that we had some answers to those questions from the Labour party.

7.36 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I do not intend to follow the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), because his economics is the economics of accountancy. He knows all about the figures but nothing about the reality behind them. It is his obsession with figures that leads him to make the crucial economic mistakes that he made. The debate is interesting in the light of those mistakes. It is almost a throwback debate to 1981, with the Government saying that things are bad but—a Micawberism—"Wait and see, something better will turn up, it might get a bit better."

Conservative Members have obviously been briefed by Conservative central office, because they cannot find anything good to say about their Government, so they give central office speeches attacking the Labour party and asking what it would do. They are attacking not a past Labour Government but the Labour Government who will take office next year. If that is all they have to say, if they can only attack Labour, it is a sad summation of 13 years in power. The reality is clear to all of us. My hon. and

learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) summed it up brilliantly—it is the state of the depression. It is horrendous—the mother of all recessions. It makes the Chancellor the Saddam Hussein of economics for accomplishing it in such a brief period.

I will not go on about the statistics. They are shocking. The consequences of those statistics are dismal for the future of this country. The manufacturing base, which is already nearing the limits of viability—it is only about 20 per cent. of GDP, compared to about 30 per cent. in Germany—is shrinking still further. We are losing all the supporting network of training, research, development and suppliers which keeps the manufacturing base in being.

The balance of payments has become a stranglehold. In the depths of recession, we are in a balance of payments deficit. It is horrendous. What happens when we expand? We cannot expand without making that balance of payments deficit worse. Every job we lose now, every factory we close, every production line that stops producing, means more imports later. It means, in other words, a tighter balance of payments deficit.

We shall be entering the single market in the coming year. That will be a highly competitive environment and we are entering it by jettisoning investment, research, design, development and all the other attributes that would allow us to compete in that market. We are not prepared for it, whereas our competitors are.

Firms that should be investing and preparing are throwing overboard, just to survive, research, design and everything, including model changes and investment, to struggle through a depression that the Government have created. That is the prospect not of success but of disaster later. It is a national tragedy for Britain.

The hon. Member for Beaconsfield said that, sadly, the depression had hit Beaconsfield. I remind him that it hit Grimsby bitterly between 1979 and 1981, and now we are having a second dose of it, with the loss of Findus Ltd. and 900 jobs, and the shrinking of labour forces by major employers. We are suffering the failure of viable businesses. It is a tragedy. People who put their lives, their effort, their everything into creating businesses have seen them close simply because of the level of interest rates, the depth of the depression that the Government have created and the hostile, unfavourable and unacceptable behaviour of the banks.

From where will the recovery come? What will produce it? I cannot see the answer. The Government are always making predictions, and in that sense the Chancellor may be described as the Mother Shipton—perhaps I should call him the Brother Shipton—of economics. I fear that we are in a new norm, a prolonged recession with no real recovery, rather than the real prospect of recovery. I say that because all the engines of recovery seem incapable of driving us out of the recession.

Housing is one such engine. From where will recovery in housing come, with interest rates at their present level, with house prices still having some way to fall and with a huge overhang of unsold houses? One house in five sold in Britain now is repossessed, and that depresses the house price market. That is why I ask where the recovery will come from in housing.

Where will it come from in terms of consumer demand if unemployment continues to rise? People are more frightened as unemployment rises and they have less money to spend. Credit, the debt level, presses on everyone and causes people to save and struggle rather than spend.

It will not come from companies. They are still struggling under a huge burden of debt. Nor will it come from exports, which are now falling because the pound is so overvalued that we cannot have export success at its present level of valuation. There might have been an improvement earlier with an expansion of the German economy, but that is now being deflated.

It will not come from Government spending, because the Government will have to borrow massively to keep going at the present mean levels of public spending. Hence none of the engines of recovery is available to pull us out of the recession. There is no escape and the tragedy is that the exchange rate mechanism—which the present aggressive, decisive Prime Minister bullied the hapless, shrinking right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) into entering all those months ago, forcing it on her against her will in such a decisive fashion—precludes recovery, because we cannot reduce interest rates.

It is paramount for us now to retain high interest rates, which are high in the historic sense, in real terms, and are high compared with Japan, and with America, where they stand at 5 per cent. Interest rates at 5 per cent. have not yet produced recovery in America. Yet our higher interest rates cannot be reduced; nor can we reduce the exchange rate, because high interest rates are necessary to support the exchange rate.

The right exchange rate is necessary for a country in deficit, as we are, to shift resources from imports to production and to attract investment into manufacturing industry by again making it profitable. The exchange rate, which in a market situation would fall, cannot come down because the whole dedication of Government policy is to keep the exchange rate at an unreasonable level. The result is that the market cannot operate. We have nailed down the lid on the recession.

There can be recovery only if we reduce interest rates and the pound with them. It is no good reducing interest rates on their own, because there is no point in just pumping out credit. It is like trying to push on a piece of string: it cannot be done. One can pull interest rates up, but one cannot push the string to get them down again. We must increase demand for British goods by adjusting the exchange rate so that demand is channelled to British goods through the price mechanism, making our goods and exports more attractive and cheaper and imports dearer.

It is no good telling me that the price mechanism does not work any more. The Government's alternative is to reduce prices in manufacturing from the uncompetitive levels to which they are forced up by the exchange rate, by firing people and depressing the price of labour. I agree that price is important, but the only way to achieve a reduction in prices and an ability to expand is to adjust the exchange rate. If inflation is too much money pursuing too few goods, it does not follow that we must—as we have been doing in this country—reduce the supply of money all the time and thus have the disastrous consequences for industry that have occurred.

We should expand the supply of goods, which simply means expanding the money supply and channelling demand to British production in Britain. If the exchange rate is kept at its present level, every coal mine, steel plant and textile mill that closes is due directly to the exchange

[Mr. Austin Mitchell]

rate and will produce a worse balance of payments problem later on. We are deliberately taking resources out of production by means of the exchange rate.

It is no answer for Ministers to keep saying that we need only reduce inflation to produce the conditions for recovery. That is not true. We produce nothing but a graveyard. Any fool can bring inflation down. The Conservatives, understandably therefore, have been successful in their graveyard economics. But what is to produce recovery once inflation is down?

Our tragedy has been that we have always cut the supply of money, and kept money at too high a price, because of the dominant interests of finance and the kind of economics about which the hon. Member for Beaconfield talked. It is rubbish in terms of production, because a high exchange rate means that we shift the balance from production in this country to production overseas—in other words, to imports—thereby making imports more attractive and our production more expensive. We shift the balance from investment in Britain to investment overseas, and we have been doing that for the last 13 years. We shift resources from production into consumption, as we have been doing over the years.

Mr. Tim Smith: Why has that not worked for the Germans?

Mr. Mitchell: A country with a powerful exporting sector can let its currency appreciate because it has the economic strength to ride that out. A country in which manufacturing has been shrinking needs the edge of a competitive currency to expand and rebuild back to the competitiveness which will allow its exchange rate to appreciate. It does not happen simply by putting up the exchange rate—that way comes rigormortis for industry—but from policies which make investment in this country profitable. It gives industry the prospect of being able to sell its production, and the only way to do that is to make the currency competitive. It is simple economics, although the Government do not understand that.

Instead, they have shifted the emphasis from production to consumption by the exchange rate. In other words, they have shifted from labour, which we represent, to wealth, which they represent. It has been a matter of simple social priorities for them. They have shifted it from manufacturing to finance. The whole policy of the Government has been dedicated to making money dear and people cheap, and they have succeeded. They have produced the sort of society that reflects that set of attitudes. Unemployment will increase because there is no way of stopping it increasing.

There is no way out unless we reverse the priorities. We must reduce interest rates, and with them the exchange rate. We must do that to channel demand to production. No other way will lead to recovery. Water cannot be made to flow uphill. By constantly preaching about defeating inflation, the Government simply shift the emphasis from the real economy to the mythical battle against inflation.

It is a mistake for a country to tie its currency to that of another, because a currency insulates a country against drops in another countries' economies. It is also a mistake to tie our economic cycle to that of Germany, which wants to increase interest rates and deflate its economy, whereas we want to hold interest rates down and expand our economy. Yet we are forced to keep interest rates high to suit Germany. It means that we cannot improve our balance of payments and market forces cannot operate. It is a mistake to make changes in our exchange rate dependent on competitors who have a vested interest in seeing that exchange rate overvalued, because it strengthens, confirms and sustains their access to our market.

To make all those mistakes and then compound them by entering the exchange rate mechanism at too high a rate is total folly. The Prime Minister took us in at that high rate, and it is the last nail in his coffin. The pound is 24 per cent. overvalued in real terms against the deutschmark and more than 40 per cent. overvalued in real terms against the dollar. British industry can never recover the ground that it has been forced to give up by that overvaluation. The estimate of John Williamson in the bulletin of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research is similar.

The overvaluation will cause a growing deficit in our balance of payments, more unemployment, less investment and a Government who are twisting in the wind because they will be subject to every threat and challenge to the exchange rate. Governments who hang on in that way are usually challenged by their friends—in the present Government's case, the markets, which will test them in the next six months. Every year we are wasting production and there is a gap between what we produce and what we should produce, if we were on the trend growth line, even the low trend growth line of the 1980s. I do not know how much that amounts to. Sir Donald MacDougall came up with an estimate of some £60 billion a year in lost production just because of that economic folly. How much richer that would make us and how much more powerful as a nation, yet we are chucking it all away.

The position worries me, because I now see a deflation sustained by the exchange rate mechanism, which has become tripartisan policy. Each party is committed to the mechanism that imposes that deflation. It is strikingly close to the situation of the 1920s, when Winston Churchill took us back to gold at an overvalued rate in 1925. The consequence was the general strike of 1926, the depression of the rest of the 1920s, and the suffering of manufacturing industry and basic industries of this country because they could not leap the hurdle of overvaluation that the Government had imposed on those industries. The problem ended only in 1931, when a Conservative Government took us away from gold and devalued by 30 per cent. A Labour Government, who had broken their backs and given their all to keeping the country on gold, went out, with Ministers saying, "They never told us we could do that".

We now have the same orthodoxy, except that it is called "communautaire". It is called a commitment to Europe, and is placed higher than the recovery of our economy and jobs for our people. It is producing the same results, and the outcome can only be the same. There will be a breach, and we shall devalue because such suffering cannot be imposed on electorates through the hidden hand of the exchange rate. The Government cannot keep the lid down.

We have seen what is happening in Europe. Because of the futile quest of the exchange rate mechanism to get inflation rates down to Germany's abnormally low level, which it has achieved because of its powerful manufacturing sector, France now has the CRS using its batons on nurses and has experienced four rounds of public

expenditure cuts, and Ministers cannot leave Paris without a police escort. A similar fate awaits us, because our deflation will be harder than that.

The only way out is to devalue. It will happen because it is the job of politicians in an untenable situation to walk out backwards, proclaiming that they are doing something different from what they are doing. I hope that it will be a Labour Government who do that because, without that devaluation, no Government can succeed, people can only suffer, our manufacturing base can only shrink further, and we shall be relegated to an indefinite, long-term future of crippling—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Beaconsfield sneers.

The previous Chancellor of the Exchequer effectively devalued our currency by 30 per cent. against the deutschmark in 1986. That was the reason for the expansion and was a contributing factor to the Tory party's success in the 1987 election. So let us not have a sneering partisan attitude to that, because the fate of this country and British industry is at stake. British industry has been strangled by a crippling and excruciatingly high exhange rate, from which there will be no escape unless someone devalues.

7.55 pm

Mr. John Watts (Slough): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), I was both puzzled by and disappointed by the speech of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). He started with a few good jokes, in true barrister style, then went through the ritual denunciation of the Government, but he said little about the Labour party's policy or anything relating to the motion on the Order Paper. I could not understand why that should be, but, as the debate has developed, the reasons have become crystal clear. Labour Back Benchers have said little in support of what I understand to be official Labour party policy.

We have just heard a powerful speech by the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), denouncing the Leader of the Opposition's commitment earlier this week, when he met his socialist comrades in Europe, to sign up to economic and monetary union with absolutely no conditions. We heard a similarly powerful speech from the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) in a similar vein, and the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) was not exactly fulsome in support of the line peddled by the Opposition Front Bench.

Therefore, all that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East could do was try to pour scorn and ridicule on the economy's prospects for recovery. In recent weeks, the Labour party has cast itself in the role of someone scouring the country looking for bad news. Earlier this week, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), who is clearly becoming rattled because the financial and management reforms in the health service are reducing waiting lists, felt that he had to rubbish the Government's policies on that.

Likewise, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East disputed whether the economy was now starting to recover. He castigated my right hon. Friend the Chancellor for having forecast that the recovery would start from the middle of this year. Yet the GDP figures for the third quarter show a 0·3 per cent. increase, which is surely one sign that the worst is over, and that better times are coming.

Labour Members will then say that, if oil is taken out of the calculations, everything else is going flat. One can always pick and choose one's statistics, taking out all the good news and giving only the bad. Labour Members sought to do the same when my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Dover) intervened and asked, very reasonably, why, if everything was so dreadful, unemployment was falling in his constituency in the north of England over the past two months. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East said that he should look at the national figures. If we do so, we find—as my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield said—that, on an unadjusted basis, unemployment fell last month and, even on an adjusted basis, the increase was only 15,000 which is much less than most independent forecasters had expected.

In my constituency, unemployment is no longer rising but has peaked and levelled out at about 5 per cent. That is a problem for my constituents who are out of work and I look forward to the prospect of their finding work again when the economy recovers. But 95 per cent. of the working population in my constituency are in work and still earning good money.

The Slough industrial estate is still the largest in western Europe. The demand for power on the power station which serves the whole of the estate and therefore relates to a cross-section of businesses, and which provides employment for thousands of people, is higher this year than it was last year. That is another sign that industry in my constituency is recovering. The Thames Chiltern chamber of commerce and industry covers my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield. In fact, it covers the whole of the Thames valley district north towards Aylesbury. In the past two quarters, the returns from a wide cross-section of businesses have been positive.

Opposition Members are wrong to seek to talk down the performance of the economy. They are equally wrong to pour scorn on the notion of an increase in consumer spending contributing to recovery. I may be too simple in my approach, but I do not think that I could find a business man in my constituency who would be prepared to invest in new capacity unless he believed that he had customers in the market who would buy those goods.

Some of that increased purchasing power in the domestic economy will come from the success of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in squeezing down inflation and part will come from the benefits of lower interest rates, which mean that the disposable income that was being consumed—particularly by the servicing of mortgage debt—is now available for other expenditure. Some of that purchasing power could then be applied to increased consumer demand to give manufacturers the markets for their goods. That would be a positive development that should not be decried.

Similarly, our partners in the European Community should join us in concentrating on measures to complete the internal market to increase the market available to all producers in the Community rather than being sidetracked by issues of political union—which do not necessarily have to be decided at this juncture. They should also concentrate on making progress in the important negotiations on the general agreement on tariffs and trade

[Mr. John Watts]

to expand the prospects for trade worldwide. Such activities would expand the export markets for our producers.

The argument that financial incentives for investment will necessarily lead to greater investment in the absence of any increased demand is clearly flawed. I believe that it was my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, North (Sir. I. Stewart), who explained that such tax allowances were necessary only if the Government ran a high tax regime. If profits are taxed at 52 per cent., 60 per cent. or 100 per cent., tax allowances are needed if companies are to have enough cash to fund their investment programmes. How much better it would be to have a low tax regime, so that even companies that make the largest profits can retain 67 per cent. of them tax-free and smaller companies can retain 75 per cent. of their profits after tax and spend the money on investment that they judge to be commercially viable.

Investment can be financed from the retained profits that companies are allowed to keep due to a lower tax regime, and private sector savings. The supply of savings would be fatally affected by the Labour party's policy of taxing private individuals heavily. If the higher rate of tax is effectively to rise from 40 per cent. to 59 per cent., from where will the extra tax revenues be diverted? Savings, not consumption, are far more likely to be squeezed.

All our experience of trying to slow down a booming economy showed that the last sector of expenditure that consumers were prepared to cut was consumption. Their savings went first, and a decline in the savings ratio was created as people tried to maintain their standard of living. That would be the response if a Labour Government—were one ever elected—were to impose their new high tax policies on both those who pay high rate tax and those who pay basic rate tax.

In an intervention, the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) reiterated that, under a Labour Government, there would be no increased burden of taxation for anyone earning less than, I think, £20,000—it may have been £21,000. That simply does not square with the Labour party's spending commitment pledges, which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and his colleagues have costed at £35 billion. I know that Labour spokesmen and women find it boring when Conservative Back Benchers or Ministers question them about their spending plans. They are in the habit of saying that our estimate of £35 billion is rubbish. Labour's Treasury team should take the opportunity of this debate to make the position absolutely clear. Do they dispute my right hon. Friend's costings which total £35 billion, or do they allege that what we have identified as their commitments are not really commitments? Either way, I believe that the electorate have the right to know.

There is a suspicion that the Labour party is making promises to bribe people with their own money. They throw out promises of extra spending but are unwilling to frighten the horses by telling those same people what they will have to pay in taxation. Even today, I learned that the Labour party has announced two new spending commitments——

Mr. Austin Mitchell: —it says here, in this Central Office brief.

Mr. Watts: No. I have that information from an hon. Friend who serves on a Standing Committee.

I understand that the Labour party has made a new commitment that the 20 per cent. contribution to community charge will be abolished by an incoming Labour Government so that the community charge benefit will rise to a maximum of 100 per cent.—*[Interruption.]* I am not talking about the council tax, on which I estimate that that policy would cost about £400 billion.

I understand that a Labour spokesman in the same Committee said that there would be no control over the level of local government expenditure if a Labour Government came into office. I understand that there would be no capping, no circulars, no friendly chats and no attempt to constrain the level of local government spending. That is a further commitment on top of those that have already been costed.

Mr. Nellist: When the hon. Gentleman talks of the minimum 20 per cent. contribution to the poll tax, is he saying that he is in favour of literally millions of people in this country being driven further into debt to try to pay that 20 per cent.? Is he not aware that, despite Treasury protestations that nobody who could not afford to pay the poll tax would ever go to prison for failure to do so, of the 100 people who have been sent to prison, 31 were unemployed, 15 were pensioners and three were on invalidity benefit? If the Government carry on with the 20 per cent. rule for at least another 15 months, those people will be joined by many more.

Mr. Watts: It is perfectly reasonable for Opposition spokesmen to make new pledges that, if a Labour Government came to office before the community charge was abolished, they would increase the benefit to 100 per cent. However, I want the Opposition Treasury team to say how such a policy will be funded, because it is very much at odds with the frequently reiterated statement of the hon. Member for Derby, South that a Labour Government would make only two commitments to increase spending: on pensions and child benefit.

I am sure, particularly as my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary is present, that Conservative Members will sympathise with the hon. Member for Derby, South. As shadow Chief Secretary, she has the difficult job of trying to keep under control the wild spending promises of her would-be ministerial colleagues. I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend has had some experience of restraining some of the demands of his right hon. Friends.

The hon. Member for Derby, South must make it absolutely clear to the House and the country whether her frequently reiterated statement that the only increased expenditure would be on child benefit and pensions is still Labour policy. Is she saying that the other so-called commitments—the extra money for overseas aid that the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) promised at the Labour party conference, the new commitment made today on community charge benefit and the extra spending on training and investment about which we have heard today—are not commitments, even though the training and investment proposals were contained in the speech of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East? The House and the country are entitled to a clear answer on those matters.

The speeches that we have heard tonight suggest that there is clearly much less confusion and division on the single currency on the Conservative Benches than on the Labour Benches. A substantial proportion of Opposition Members are unreconstructed 1960 devaluers, as the hon. Member for Great Grimsby made clear. It was a travesty of Conservative Members' position for the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) to say that our concern was that the British economy was uniquely unfitted to meet the criteria for entry into a single currency system. On the contrary, the British economy is one of the few of the 12 which currently meets the criteria laid down in the draft treaty.

My concern relates to what is known as Club Med; whether, at the time that a single currency is introduced, a political decision will be made, in the interests of what is called social cohesion, to allow Greece, perhaps Italy, and other weaker economies which cannot meet the criteria, none the less to be allowed into the system, and then for massive financial transfers to be made from the northern states to Club Med in order to bail out their economies which could not take the effects of a single currency, any more than the east German economy would easily adapt to the introduction of the deutschmark.

That is a particularly strong concern because, along with the Germans, we are still the only consistent net contributor to the EC budget. If any such costs arose from social cohesion, they would fall heavily and unfairly on the shoulders of British taxpayers and, at the same time, would add to the balance of payments problem to which Opposition Members have referred.

We are already in the unhappy position of contributing more to our wealthier partners in the EC than we make available to the third world and eastern Europe through our overseas aid programmes. Unhappily, the public expenditure plans in the autumn statement show that that trend is to continue. By the end of the planned period, we shall be shelling out £3 billion a year to our rich Community partners without any changes in policy or additional burdens being imposed by the Community.

That is my concern about the arrangements for a single currency. That is why we are wise to insist that, while we should take part in the discussions about the institutions which would be required and the way in which a single currency should work, we should not commit ourselves to joining such a club until we know who the other members will be on day one.

8.12 pm

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): I congratulate the hon. Member for Slough (Mr. Watts), who is a colleague of mine on the Select Committee on the Treasury and Civil Service, on his stout defence of the Government. It is clearly central to that line to attack the Labour party on public spending, as every Conservative speaker so far has done. That attack has been answered many times by my hon. Friend the shadow Chief Secretary, and no doubt it will be answered again with her usual ability this evening. Therefore, I shall not follow the hon. Gentleman in his remarks, but I shall take him up later on what he said about economic and monetary union.

Having had the pleasure of watching the Chancellor carefully for about a year, I have decided what his problems really are—and I should like to share my discoveries with the House. The Chancellor's first difficulty is that he has to fight an election in the next seven months. Left to himself, he is a man of realistic disposition, a pragmatic chap, the sort of person to see things as they are. By nature, he is by no means a Pangloss.

If the election were in 1993, things would be much easier for the right hon. Gentleman. He would be much more relaxed and he might even have told the House what he really thinks—but because the election is imminent he continually has to be promising a recovery. We have heard the stories this afternoon—dawn is nigh, the sunny uplands are in sight or, in the words of the old song, good times are just around the corner.

Last December, as I am sure the hon. Member for Slough will remember, the Chancellor told the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee that he believed that the recession could be relatively short lived and relatively shallow. In fact, it was neither short lived nor shallow. We now know that output fell for four quarters in succession and that non-oil output fell for five quarters in succession. Output also fell by 3·7 per cent., the second deepest recession since the 1930s.

At the time of the Budget, as my right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Chancellor said, the Chancellor revised his position and said that the recovery would begin around the middle of the year. That prediction is looking precarious. The latest output figures show that in the third quarter there was a fall of 0·3 per cent. in the non-oil economy. The hon. Member for Slough did not mention that. During the past three months there has been a fall in retail sales, a dip in consumer confidence, and big companies such as GEC and Pilkington, which have reported during the past two days, see no sign of recovery. We should listen to what they have to say.

The Chancellor points to the stock-building figures. He says that there is a small rise in manufacturing investment and he points to a fall in the rate of increase in unemployment as evidence of the recovery. An objective observer would probably conclude that the jury is still out, that it is too early to say that there is a recovery. The Chancellor rather admitted that when, in a Freudian slip, he told the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee that the recovery was slow in coming.

If there is a recovery, it is so imperceptible as to be a micro-recovery that cannot be discerned by the ordinary human eye. I suspect that the real situation is that the economy, after taking a nose dive for a year, is probably still bumping along the bottom and that any recovery, when it comes, will be slow and hesitant. It could be some time, even as much as a year, before we return to our productive potential. I suspect that that is what the Chancellor thinks; it is certainly what he should have said to us this afternoon. However, he did not dare say it because to do so would be politically disastrous for the Government.

The Chancellor has another obvious problem and that is that his predecessors, the right hon. Members for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) and for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), have left him an appalling inheritance. First we had the Lawson boom and now we have the Major slump. As to the Lawson boom, experts will continue to argue about the precise moment when the British economy went out of control. Monetarists emphasise the money supply figures and the explosion in the housing market. Keynesians point to the splurge in consumer spending and the succession of

[Mr. Giles Radice]

tax-cutting Budgets. It is certainly the case that by March 1988 the economy was seriously out of balance, and the March Budget accelerated the process.

I shall not accept this evening the hoary old argument that I am speaking from hindsight; I am not. I have looked again at the speech that I made at the time and that is what I said then, as did many other Opposition Members.

Mr. Oppenheim: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that tax cuts in 1988 amounted to only £4 billion, whereas the increase in credit that year amounted to £40 billion? Does not that show, therefore, that the real culprit was not tax cuts, but the fact that interest rates were too low, and they were cut in 1988 at just the wrong time?

Mr. Radice: I will reply to the hon. Gentleman's point about interest rates later. It is true that there was a credit explosion, mostly due to Government deregulation. However, the hon. Gentleman's figure for tax cuts was wrong: they amounted to £6 billion in a full year. Added to everything else, they led to the consumer boom and to the economy going out of control. Therefore, those cuts must be taken into account—as we said in our Select Committee report.

I do not believe that the explosion was an overreaction to black Monday. Other countries that relaxed policy in the immediate aftermath of black Monday subsequently tightened it. Britain could have done the same, if the then Chancellor of the Exchequer had not begun to believe his own propaganda, to the effect that Britain had experienced a supply side miracle. There was no miracle, but instead a very British boom followed by a very British recession. The Governor of the Bank of England told the Select Committee—as I reminded the Chancellor this afternoon—that it was a home-grown recession.

The recession of the right hon. Member for Huntingdon was caused by relying solely on raising interest rates to bring the economy under control. As many of us warned at the time, interest rate increases take a long time to work, have unpleasant side effects and clobber the economy. It would have been far better, as many of us also said, to have taken a more balanced approach—especially in respect of tax and credit control. The Government ignored our advice, and look what happened. The British economy did not slow down until the middle of 1990. Small and medium-sized companies went out of business at record rates. Investment dropped like a stone, the service sector suffered, and house owners were dispossessed.

When the economy eventually slowed down it fell over a cliff, and we are still crawling along at the foot of it. There is an undermining of public finances, which the Chancellor admitted to the Select Committee was caused by recession and inflation. Two thirds of the public sector borrowing requirement can be accounted for by recession and inflation. In other words, that is the cost of the Government's mistakes with the economy. Bankruptcy announcements and redundancy notices continue to be issued and "To Let" signs are still in all our high streets. We see all around us the waste of talent, enterprise and skill. I see the impact of recession in my own region and constituency and even in my own family.

My right hon. and hon. Friends reminded the House that the present recession is the second to be caused by the Government in 12 years. I remind Conservative Members that in the first ICI lost one third of its suppliers. That was not a question of dross or of overmanning, but of ICI—the bluechip flagship of our country—losing one third of its suppliers. That was a big recession and now we are experiencing another. It is a tragedy for the British people and no one can pretend that the Government are not responsible for it.

I want to conclude my speech with a few words on economic and monetary union.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Oh, no.

Mr. Radice: My hon. Friend said a word or two about that matter, so I shall do so—especially as I am in line with party policy and he is not.

A good result will strengthen the prospects for our economy. There are strong arguments for Britain committing itself now to the objective of a single currency. They include savings on transaction costs, the elimination of exchange rate instability and the provision of a firm framework for economic and monetary growth. Instead of seeking an opt-out clause, which would weaken our bargaining stance in other regards at Maastricht, it would be better for the Government to have the courage to make up their mind now on a single currency.

It is no argument to say that no rash person would expect the Government to make up their mind now. Rational people in most of our partner countries are making up their minds in favour of a single currency—and some have an economic position that is less strong than our own. Uncertainty about our intentions will be bad for investment. Inward investment might switch from this country to the core EC countries, such as France and Germany, and uncertainty could be bad also for currency stability. If our position at Maastricht is seen to be too negative, we could have problems afterwards, and that might be bad for our reputation within the EC, which is bad enough anyway.

In contrast, a decision in favour of the objective of achieving a single currency would lend credibility to our anti-inflationary policies, underwrite the need to maintain a balanced macro-economic strategy—without the boom and recession we have had over the past five years—and provide the economic and monetary framework within which it would be possible to improve the supply side in the way that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) described—through education and training, research and development, and high-quality investment.

The Chancellor made fun of those objectives. I cannot imagine what he was thinking about, for those are the ways to improve the supply side and the economy's productive potential. There is no other way. If we do not start tackling those problems we will be unable to improve the supply side. We need the framework of European monetary union and of a single currency to achieve that. Deciding on a single currency would help to promote economic change in the decade ahead and would make us ready for the third stage of monetary union.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: My hon. Friend mentioned earlier that he is in line with current policy. As I understand it, current policy is that we would be in favour of economic and monetary union, provided that there was convergence between the economies. I refer to a convergence according to a much wider range of measures, including productivity.

The alternative would be a system of redistribution. Otherwise, we would see the same sort of tearing apart that hit East Germany. Is my hon. Friend suggesting that we should commit ourselves without insisting on either of those safeguards?

Mr. Radice: No, I am saying that if one accepts the objective of a single currency it will be easier to promote convergence. I am glad to learn that my hon. Friend wants convergence, because that implies that he is in favour of a single currency. That is splendid news.

The Government have lost their nerve. In 1987 and 1988, they set off an unsustainable boom, and in 1989-90 they forced the country into a deep and unnecessary recession. Now the Government are fudging the issue of a single European currency instead of giving a decisive lead. That is not a good record.

The Government have failed the British people, but fortunately they will soon be replaced by a Labour Government committed to preserving balance and to improving the country's productive potential—unlike the Government, who do not want to invest in education, training, research and development or high-quality investment. A Labour Government will also at last give a lead in the European Community.

8.28 pm

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): The hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) made a cogent case for Britain's entry into European monetary union. Earlier, other Labour Members argued that Britain should not follow that course. No wonder members of the Opposition Front Bench take an ambivalent attitude towards the issue. Members of the Opposition Front Bench have not told the House, either today or in previous debates, whether they want Britain to go full speed ahead into EMU in the 1990s, or approve of the Government's negotiating position—which is that Britain should have the right to opt out of the European monetary union if the conditions at the time are not right. I really think that an Opposition which takes its own policies on Europe so seriously and now says that it is the party of Europe should at least come clean and have a positive, definite policy on this very important issue.

It is also worth noting that there seems to be a certain amount of division on the Opposition Benches. I for one believe that it is better to have an honest debate on this crucial issue than to be dishonestly united, which is what the Opposition have tried to present to the country over the past year or so.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): The hon. Gentleman will recall that the Prime Minister, when asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) whether he accepted the principle of a single currency, said:

> "It is entirely clear from the documents in front of us in the treaty that what we are doing is entirely enabling for ourselves to have an option to opt in and we are not committed to opting in by anything either in clause 2 or any later part of the treaty."

What on earth did that mean?

Mr. Oppenheim: I hope that my right hon. Friend is not catching bad habits from the Leader of the Opposition. My understanding of the Government's position is that we want the option to go into EMU in the mid-1990s if conditions are right. I hope that that is a straightforward view that can be understood.

The hon. Member for Durham, North mentioned research and development and said that this was a very important part of increasing our productive capacity. I agree to an extent, but I warn the research and development lobby that it is not quite as simple as that. It is not enough just to pour money into research and development. The economy must also have the ability to commercialise, to productionise and to market that technology.

One problem that Britain and many other western countries have had compared with say, Japan is that we have put a lot of money into research and development and have come up with good products, but we have not always manufactured or marketed those products properly. The Japanese, by contrast, have bought a lot of technology from other countries and concentrated on honing their production and marketing skills. It is only now—as they have got these to a very productive level—that they are beginning to pour money into research and development.

It is also worth noting that recently the British Patents Office produced a paper that showed that in Europe countries wasted £20 billion a year reinventing the wheel because they put money into R and D for products which have already been invented and for which patents are on offer.

One of the themes of Opposition Members on both the Front and the Back Benches is that we need to take a long-term view in industry and that British industry needs to be able to plan for the long term. That is an important concept which deserves examination. I believe that most hon. Members would agree that the two countries in which industry has best been able to plan for the long term in recent years are Germany and Japan. So what characterises their policies?

First, Germany and Japan have tiny state sectors; there is virtually no state industry in Japan and very little in Germany. Secondly, both countries, consistently since the war, have followed extremely sound monetary policies. I accept that there has been an aberration in German policy in the last year or two, but there are special circumstances. Since the war Germany and Japan have pursued extremely sound, rigorous monetary policies. They have almost always balanced their budgets. In Japan, public spending has been very low. I accept that in Germany public spending has been more in line with that in the rest of Europe, but the important fact there is that the Germans have increased spending only when their economy has been growing and has been able to afford that spending—not the other way round, as has so often happened in Britain.

Mr. Nellist: Will the hon. Gentleman also accept that one thing that links Germany and Japan is that they have very little in the way of standing armies and no nuclear weapons? Since Britain has spent in the last 40 years, in present-day money, something of the order of £20 billion a year on those things, Germany and Japan have each been able to invest in their manufacturing industry around £400 billion more than Britain. That is quite relevant as well.

Mr. Oppenheim: I do not want to shock the hon. Gentleman unduly, but I rather agree with the point he

[Mr. Oppenheim]

makes. Countries such as Britain and America have borne a disproportionate share of the burden of defending the west over the past 30 or 40 years. Although there are benefits to certain sectors of the economy, such as defence and aerospace, high levels of defence spending are detrimental to the overall performance of the economy. That is one reason why America has failed so dismally in commercial and consumer electronics and done so well, by contrast, in defence electronics, and why Japan has done so well in areas such as consumer electronics.

However, although I agree with the point the hon. Gentleman makes, I believe that someone had to bear the burden of defence spending over the past 30 or 40 years, and we would not be enjoying the slight improvement in the world situation now if Britain and America had not borne that burden. Although it is a factor in the success of Japan and Germany, other factors to which I am about to come have been far more important and significant.

The point I was making was that public spending in Germany has not been based on large public sector deficits. Rather, the spending has increased as the economy has grown; hence, the country could afford the public spending.

Another factor that links Germany and Japan is that both encourage saving, with very low taxes or no taxes at all on savers. On the other hand, neither country encourages over-consumption with tax breaks on consumption. The result is that in both countries there has been a large pool of available capital for industry. Industry has not been crowded out by high state spending. Those policies have also borne down on inflation and interest rates, because more capital has been available.

In other countries, by contrast, the encouragement of consumption through tax breaks, penal taxes on savers, high state spending and budget deficits have led, first, to a shortage of capital for industry, secondly, to high interest rates, thirdly, to inflation and, fourthly, because of high interest rates, often also to artificially overvalued currencies, which of course has been detrimental to industry.

Finally, and perhaps most important, Germany and Japan have had rigorous exam-oriented, vocationally geared and selective education systems, which have produced the highest attainments in basic literacy, maths, science and engineering.

These policies are far more significant than financial structures, takeovers or other factors which are often blamed for short-termism in industry in Britain and the United States. These policies have allowed industry to finance and plan for the long term.

None of these policies strikes me as being particularly socialist or even Labour. In fact, to the extent that we know what Labour policies are at the moment, they strike me as being almost the exact opposite of the policies pursued in Germany and Japan. As I understand it, Labour would raise state spending above what could be afforded and they would clobber savers with an investment income surcharge, just as they did in the 1970s, all of which would mean less capital being available to industry.

It is interesting that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) spent so much time talking about the importance of investment in industry. I agree with him, but he does not seem to have grasped the simple point that unless there are good levels of savings in the economy it is not possible to finance successfully that investment in industry.

The Opposition also paid lip service to the need for better education, but they would abandon and reverse the crucial education reforms which the Government are now pursuing, so industry would have no chance of matching the quality of the work force of competitors.

That is Labour's long termism. As always, rhetoric is far easier than the deed. Instead, the Opposition often offer simplistic interventionist policies, which have been tried and have failed before. We all know what happened last time Labour tried its brand of long termism: British Steel became the world's largest loss maker; British Airways was rated by its passengers below Aeroflot; British Leyland became the butt of international jokes.

Mr. Radice: The hon. Gentleman said that before.

Mr. Oppenheim: It is a good line and I am going to stick to it.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): It could be repetitive.

Mr. Oppenheim: I accept what you say, Madam Deputy Speaker.

That is where Labour's long termism led us. Interventionism and protectionism are no substitute for sound monetary policies and good education.

I know that some Labour Members are thinking that Germany and Japan have followed interventionist industrial policies, so I shall disabuse them of that misleading notion. Since the war, Germany has been one of the most liberal of the major industrial nations on trade and industry policy. For example, it has been the least rigorous in implementing the multi-fibre arrangement in Europe. Figures from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development show that Japan has given the lowest subsidies to industry of any of the major industrialised nations—well below subsidies in the United States.

I know that the mythology is that Japan has prospered because of the Ministry of International Trade and Industry and trade barriers. GATT reports show that Japan has been one of the lowest offenders in these areas, and, more often than not, MITI's industrial policies have failed. In the 1950s, MITI tried to consolidate the car industry to produce a people's car on Volkswagen lines. It failed because MITI did not get the co-operation of the car industry. There are many more such examples.

Many of Japan's most successful industries have had little or no help or guidance from MITI. Photocopiers, excavators, calculators, personal computers and consumer electronics are good examples. Many of the least successful Japanese industries such as chemicals and aluminium have received much help and guidance from MITI.

Often western politicians of all parties and western business men have used the bogey of MITI and supposed trade barriers as excuses for their failure in economic policy or their failure to market competitive products in Japan. It is too easy to forget that all western countries, including the United States, have heavily subsidised and protected industries at least as much as Japan.

Another important point about the success of the Japanese economy is that what characterises Japanese industry more than anything else is the intense competition

in the Japanese economy. As soon as a new sector comes into being, be it motor cycles, calculators or the latest example, notebook computers, 30, 40 or 50 companies pile in. They have a massive competitive battle, from which three or four incredibly strong competitors emerge. Because of that competitive honing process, when they start marketing their products on the world market they are almost unbeatable.

State-directed industrial policies are no anwer. They have failed in Britain before, and they are failing in Europe now. Decades of massive national state and EC aid to, and protection of, European computer, semi-conducter and consumer electronics industries have failed to produce world-class competitors.

Sometimes, given the way in which the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) and the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) go on, one would think that British industry had been the envy of the world until my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) came along and single-handedly devastated it. Recent OECD figures tell a different story. They show that in the 1980s the productivity of British manufacturing industry rose by 50 per cent.—far more than in any major economy, including Japan. Britain's manufacturing output has risen by almost a quarter since 1979, at a time when, according to the Opposition, the Government where laying waste to our great manufacturing industries. Our manufacturing performance in the 1980s was well ahead of Germany, France and any other major European country.

By contrast, going back to the 1960s and 1970s, OECD figures reveal that manufacturing output fell under the Labour Government of 1974-1979, despite the professions of Labour Front-Bench spokesmen that only they care about manufacturing. In the 1960s and 1970s, our performance in manufacturing output and productivity lagged behind most of our major competitors, in complete contrast to the past decade when we have at least made up some of the lost ground.

It is true that a number of international problems loom over our economy. An international shortage of capital is about to hit the world economy. The three great capital exporters of the middle east, Germany and Japan are becoming net importers of capital—Germany because of reunification, the middle east because of reconstruction and Japan because of various reasons to do with its banking system and the monetary problems that it is experiencing.

Our policies have resulted in major improvements to the supply side, the basic efficiency of the economy, in the 1980s. No one seriously talks of reversing those policies now. Our monetary policies will ensure that we can build on that in the 1990s on the basis of sound sustainable growth. Our education policies will ensure that industry has the literate, well-educated work force that it needs to produce wealth to pay for higher living standards and better, affordable public services. Nothing in Labour's policies would help long-termism or the basic productivity of our manufacturing industry. Its monetary and spending policies would starve industry of funds. Its education policies would deprive industry of the well-educated work force that it needs. Labour has no cures for our industry —rather, it is part of the problem.

8.45 pm

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Too many of the Chancellor's pronunciations in recent weeks have been in the nature of a contribution to an academic debate on how recovery or the end of a recession is defined. That is of little interest to millions of working-class people and their families, who face the continued uncertainty of unemployment. Their definition is simple: recession is when their neighhbour loses his or her job, a slump is when their own job is lost and a recovery is when the Tory Government lose their job. It is a definition with which I have much sympathy, and it has much to commend it.

By any criteria, Coventry's economy is suffering badly. I arrived in Coventry in 1971, when it was probably the richest working-class town in Britain. Sixty-seven per cent. of workers worked in factories. If Britain was the workshop of the world, Coventry was the fitting shop, the heart of manufacturing in the midlands.

On Monday, I received an answer from the Department of Employment showing that, between September 1981 and September 1989, Coventry suffered a net loss of 19,900 factory jobs. More than 29 per cent. of our manufacturing employment was wiped out in a decade. Since September 1989, the recession has arrived and deepened in our area. The west midlands continues to suffer more than the other regions. The prognosis of the regional employers' organisation, the Confederation of British Industry, is that 10 of the 11 regions will come out of recession by next February; the one that will not will be the west midlands. West Midlands Regional Forum says that the west midlands

"is one of the most pessimistic about the proximity and future strength of a recovery, sees further significant redundancies from its key manufacturing industries, shows little preparation for a recovery through increased investment, now has an unemployment rate above the EC average, is still expecting unemployment to continue increasing and employment to fall even further."

In the two years since the figures that I began with, several thousand more jobs have gone in my city. The tactics of employers have grown more outrageous as their confidence has grown, and that is certainly evident in the aftermath of the miners' strike. Coventry is paying the price today of replacing the right of workers to work with the right of managers to manage. As we saw with the redundancies that were made at GPT in recent weeks, redundancy terms have worsened. Other workers have been threatened that, if they do not accept a quick death, as in the closure of a pit last month, severance terms will be slashed.

The latest survey of the chamber of commerce, the bosses' organisation in Coventry, showed that 15 per cent. of firms in Coventry are working at full capacity. Investment in the past three months, compared with the previous three months, had fallen by 11 per cent., and orders had fallen by 55 per cent.

Twelve months ago, the chamber of commerce did a similar survey in Coventry, when it questioned 150 firms. When it conducted its survey this year, only 64 remained. Major companies in Coventry are not just shedding jobs: it is a haemorrhage. Not only is the damoclean sword of redundancies hanging by a thread over Rolls-Royce, but the sale of Parkside, the plant in my constituency, and the move to Ansty means that compulsory redundancy is rearing its ugly head.

[Mr. Dave Nellist]

Courtaulds, Matix Churchill, Dunlop, Kalmar and the Co-op—all household names—are on short-time working. At Jaguar, 2,000 jobs are going, and a couple of weeks ago its ownership transferred to America. The new owner, Ford, says that that is a technical tax matter. Workers in Coventry fear that, after the ownership has gone, development and possibly production will follow.

In the last 12 months, 8,000 have been added to the unemployment figures, and a real fear of unemployment stalks my city. Having spent three years on the dole before I became a Member, I know to my personal expense that unemployment is a degrading tragedy of almost unimaginable proportions. It is also a weapon which employers use to instil fear in their workers.

Unemployment has a cost as well. It is a "price worth paying" to get inflation down—so says the Chancellor. Officially, we have 2·5 million unemployed. That is costing £21 billion this year. Each unemployed person costs £9,000 a year in dole and income support and in the tax and national insurance lost to the Treasury. That is an underestimate which does not take account of lost production, the extra burden on the health service and other indirect costs.

Let us consider the figures in my constituency, where there are 4,500 officially unemployed. That costs £40 million a year. I reckon that there are about 30,000 in work in my constituency. Everyone in work is paying over £1,350 a year, or £27 per week, to service the unemployed. If my party still had the policy which it had when I was elected in 1983, of a programme to bring about full employment during the lifetime of a Government, not only would we lift the burden off the unemployed but those in work would have an increase in living standards of £27 a week.

Many hon. Members have spoken in favour of the European Community. I was elected in 1983 with the aim of seeing our withdrawal from the Common Market within the life of that Parliament. I am still opposed to our membership of that bosses' club, but not for nationalistic reasons. It is an illusion to think that a united capitalistic market can be created which can compete and build multinationals in Europe which are the same size as multinationals in Japan or America.

In the last five years, Japan has added to its gross national product an economy the size of that of France. Sir John Harvey-Jones has predicted that, if European multinationals are to be built in Europe in the next eight years on the same scale as those in America and Japan, half the factories in Europe will have to close. In Europe, there are 300 firms making domestic products—everything from kettles through to fridges; in America there are four. In Europe there are 13 manufacturers of trains and locomotive goods; in America there are five. In Europe there are 40 firms making batteries; in America there are four and in Japan five.

We have had two massive body blows recently. In Coventry, over half our employment is dominated by 15 multinationals. If we remain in the Common Market under current terms, with a move towards a single market, I am not sure that those 15 multinationals will survive. One example is telecommunications. GEC, the British leader in the production of public telecom systems, took over Plessey two or three years ago. Then Siemens came in from Germany and took over 40 per cent. of the amalgamated GPT. In April 1988, Coventry had 9,552 employees in GPT. By last month, that had dropped to 4,495. Last week, the biggest private employer in my constituency, GPT, announced another 320 redundancies. When will it name the people who will lose their jobs? Seven days before Christmas: 18 December is the date when the workers of GPT will find out which of them are going down the road for the last time.

It is estimated that any public telecom manufacturer needs 12 per cent. of the world market, with investment in new switching systems, to have an adequate return. Britain has 6 per cent. of the world market in its domestic market. Even with the benefits of the single market, I do not think that GEC, with Siemens, will survive the 1990s.

There is still an hour and seven minutes left of this debate. I am doing my best to represent my constituents in what may be my last speech as a member of the Labour party. Hon. Members may not know that my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields) was expelled from the Labour party two hours ago. I intend to follow him on Saturday. I am rushing as much as I can. I will finish this speech on behalf of my constituents as a Labour Member.

My constituents face the insecurity and uncertainty of unemployment. Tne other body blow we had was the closure by British Coal of the pit in Keresley a couple of weeks ago. Only 13 days after the announcement of the closure of the pit 1,300 men worked their last shift. I do not think that the pit has been closed. The buildings are still on the surface. I challenged the area director of British Coal about what was being done with the land. He said that it was not being sold. I know why. British Coal has sacked 1,300 NUM members, but it is talking about driving two roadways from Dawmill, the UDM pit, down into that coalfield, which has 40 million tonnes of coal, so that, if the Tories win the general election and pits are privatised, a privatised Dawmill can come back. That is the penalty of market forces in Keresley.

When I asked British Coal to meet the leaders of the councils and the Churches, I was told that it was not interested in such fringe groups, which were low in their priorities. It is the local authorities which have to pick up the pieces when pits close. It is the social services department which has to go to pick up the pieces in villages like Keresley, where over a quarter of the jobs are going overnight.

What shall I tell my constituents when the debate is over? Is recovery around the corner? Car production fell by 27 per cent. last year. Production for the home market has fallen by 39 per cent. That was the rock on which Coventry and the midlands were built. It is no good singing, like Monty Python,

"Always look on the bright side of life."

We should not hope, like Micawber, that things will turn up. Things have to be planned if workers are to get jobs. We are not getting that planning from the Tory Government. Workers who have been laid off or sacked cannot buy goods even if factories are producing them. People are going into debt; 250,000 are now six months in debt on their mortgages, and thousands have already lost their jobs.

I doubt whether exports will prove to be our salvation. Over half our exports go to the Common Market. Italy and France are still in recession. There is talk of a double dip in America, which is operating at only 77 per cent. of

its capacity. Germany is beset by the colossal cost of unification. There is no salvation in the capitalist system. It is a failure. I confess to plagiarism; those are not my words but the words of my right hon. Friend the Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock). Unfortunately, they were said 17 years ago.

In the year since the Prime Minister got his new job, 67,500 men and 17,800 women in my area of the west midlands have lost theirs. Since the Prime Minister moved into his new house, 13,632 families in my area have lost their houses, having had them repossessed by banks and building societies. Therefore, I look forward to a majority Labour Government taking the economy by the scruff of the neck and bending it to the needs of our people—the working class people and their families.

I want a majority Labour Government to take millions of people—possibly more than 15 million—out of the ranks of poverty, if we define poverty as living on or below the margins of up to 40 per cent. above income support levels. I want a Labour Government to eradicate low pay, and I welcome my party's intransigence in the face of all the slanders from the Tories about the inadequacy of a national minimum wage—£130 a week even on half average earnings. Conservatives would not think twice about spending that on a meal for four in the Dining Room, but when it comes to curing homelessness, the Minister for Housing knows all about that. He defines the homeless as the people one steps over when one comes out of the opera at Covent Garden. One could not get one of the best seats in Covent Garden for £130, so why should folk not get that for a week's wages?

I also want a Labour Government who redistribute wealth, because the top 10 per cent. of the people in this country now own more than half the wealth. To achieve that and to carry out the necessary building programmes for the construction of hospitals and schools, it is not enough to hope for economic recovery or to place our faith in the capitalist completion of the single market. We must plan the economy and that is why my party card still has clause IV(4) on it. *[Laughter.]* To the laughter of Conservatives, I remain an unreconstructed socialist, and I am not at all ashamed of that.

8.59 pm

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): I know that the House is looking forward to the wind-up, so I shall not detain it very long. Understandably, while there is little in the speech of the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) with which I agree, I very much respect the principles behind what he said. It is a pity that I cannot say that about many other members of the Opposition, who have already abdicated most of their principles.

We are discussing the Opposition's motion on the Government's handling of the economy and their suggestions to improve it. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith)—I am glad that he is now in the Chamber—ridiculed the fact that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister referred to anecdotal evidence. I am glad that we have begun to take notice of anecdotal evidence, because if we had done so two or three years ago, it would have been—indeed, it was—abundantly clear anecdotally that inflation was getting out of control long before it appeared in the figures. It was equally clear anecdotally that businesses were beginning to get into difficulty long before that fact showed in the figures. I welcome the move towards a recognition of evidence other than Treasury statistics.

Many of my right hon. and hon. Friends have said much this afternoon about the Labour party's proposals, which are loosely described in the motion. The Opposition Front-Bench team have ad nauseam tried to persuade us that they can increase expenditure by varying amounts—we have heard all kinds of promises—with only a minimal increase in taxation. Several of my hon. Friends referred to the 9 per cent. surcharge on savings which is being proposed. I slipped out of the Chamber for some of the debate, but I did not catch anyone referring to the other area that the Opposition have made it clear that they expect to be a source of income—the change in the past few years to a property-owning and share-owning democracy.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister coined the phrase "a cascade of wealth"—as the benefits of property ownership cascaded through the generations, everyone would benefit. However, the Labour party and the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East regard inheritance tax as a major source of increasing Government revenues, so the cascade becomes an opportunity for them to follow their basic creed of envy to spend.

This morning we heard on the "Today" programme what I can only believe was a slip of the tongue by the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett). To its credit, the Labour party has as a matter of principle opposed privatisation whenever it has been discussed in the House and whatever industry was involved. It has a declared policy that it will wish to regain control of certain industries, but this morning the hon. Lady—my right hon. and learned Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury was also present at the interview—declared that Labour would go on spending privatisation proceeds from the deferred payments which would still be coming in if Labour came to power.

I do not believe that one can have it both ways. Labour cannot be against privatisation but happily go on spending the proceeds. However, that is the nature of the Labour party, as we have seen over and over again today. It is a party devoid of principles, which seems intent on chucking out the only members who have any principles, and we heard them amply described only a few minutes ago. This country has no truck with people who discard their principles, and it will have no truck with the Labour party.

9.3 pm

Mr. Peter Hain (Neath): In the year since the present Prime Minister got his job, 26,900 men and 5,400 women in Wales have lost their jobs. In the year since he got his new home in Downing street, 8,842 people in Wales have had their homes repossessed. In the year since the right hon. Gentleman set himself up in business as leader of the Tory party, 1,760 businesses in Wales have failed. Ministers often say that Labour is talking Wales and Britain down. That is patronising drivel. Labour is not talking Wales down; the Government are doing Wales down, and that is understood by everybody in Wales.

The Government cannot see beyond the next consumer bribe or the next tax cut. They have elevated short-termism into a science, always striving to boost consumption and never resourcing investment. Consumption may have

[Mr. Peter Hain]

stalled in the past year, but since 1979 it has risen by 40 per cent. Interestingly, at the same time, production by British companies of British consumer goods has risen by only 7·8 per cent., barely one fifth of the consumption boost. As a result, consumer debt stands at a staggering £52 billion, five times what it was in 1979, and corporate debt is an even more staggering £27 billion, much of it financing the dividend payments to shareholders which have tripled since 1979 while investment has remained virtually stagnant.

Between 1979 and 1990, the real priorities of the Tory Government are clear. Manufacturing investment in Wales rose in real terms by a pitiful 10·6 per cent., whereas the market value of United Kingdom and Irish equities increased in real terms by a massive 214 per cent.—20 times more. Surely that is eloquent testimony to the fact that market forces are not working, and that institutional shareholders and the capital markets are abjectly failing British industry. Why will not the Government boost the real economy and not just the candy-floss economy which it is so keen to promote?

The issue is seen most clearly in pension funds, which have recently been exposed by the Maxwell scandal, one of a series of scandals in British industry. Short-termism is significant in this context. A handful of pension fund managers now control assets of £400 billion—three quarters of the wealth generated across the United Kingdom each year. Those managers have helped to create and promote a climate in which high dividends have been the norm at the expense of long-term investment in British industry and at the expense of pensioners and employees, whose rights have been negated as pension funds have been looted by business tycoons.

The Government have deregulated the corporate finance structure. They have turned a blind eye to the abuse of pension funds in recent years. Their announcement that they will bring forward the 5 per cent. limit on self-investment is simply not good enough. It does not address the Maxwell problem, for example, or the problem of British Steel lifting £150 billion of the pension fund money due to its workers.

All those issues point to the fact that the Government are interested only in tomorrow and not in building for the future. That is why we need a Labour Government who have the economic policies to invest in the future, to invest in industry and to invest in the skills base which has collapsed over the past 12 years. People understand that only a Labour Government have the economic policies which will put Britain back into the first division in Europe, and which will lead to rising living standards and rising prosperity for our people.

9.8 pm

Mrs. Margaret Beckett (Derby, South): This has been an interesting debate with some excellent contributions from both Opposition and Conservative Members. However, the comments on the present state of the economy by Conservative Members have been overwhelmingly characterised by the enormous gap between rhetoric and reality. The rhetoric is that there is sustained success; the reality is very different.

The figures given by my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams) bear repeating. Over the past year, 3,000 jobs have been lost every working day, 200 businesses have collapsed every working day and 300 families have had their homes repossessed every working day. We know that in every one of those groups, as the year continues, there is more to come. Manufacturing output is down more than 5 per cent. on the same period a year ago, manufacturing investment is already down 12 per cent., and the CBI predicts an overall fall of 20 per cent. over the year, retail sales are totally flat and gross domestic product is down 2·3 per cent. That is the reality that the Government have sought today to obscure with rhetoric. Faced with that, they weave, dodge and bluster. The other day, I was fascinated to note that the Chief Secretary apparently holds a special appointment as blusterer-in-chief.

What is most important is that the Government spend their time and energy not on finding ways to combat the recession, but on trying to find ways to combat the impression that they are giving and reinforcing of a Government adrift in shark-filled waters—and they are. However, the sharks that matter most are neither addressed nor affected by the Government's strategy. The sharks that really matter are our competitors, especially our partner competitors in Europe—the ones that are snapping up the export orders that Britain should be winning, the ones that are gaining the markets that Britain is relinquishing, and the ones that, whatever their problems, are still growing and still drawing further and further away from us.

During last week's Treasury questions the Government, with a fresh barrage of statistics about investment and exports, again sought to create the impression that there is no problem. On examination, almost all the new figures are based on highly-selective choices of data, not on the Government's whole record, or on bogus comparisons between incompatible figures. We can knock them down as fast as the Government can pull them up, but juggling the data to try to justify some line that Ministers will use anyway will not explain away that harsh reality.

It is less than a week—as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) reminded the House, or perhaps told Conservative Members—since the president of the Building Employers Confederation was reported as saying that he had been in the industry for 42 years and that these were the worst conditions that he had ever experienced. The conditions are shockingly depressed. How can Ministers square that with either their fountain of recalculated and re-presented figures or with the rhetoric with which they accompany them? Of late, the Chancellor has been insisting that—I quote what he said to Brian Walden—what is happening now is

"very much as I expected".

That was said in answer to a depressing litany from Mr. Walden, who said to the right hon. Gentleman that there might be

"a technical recovery, you admit that some of the figures look very bad . . . there are serious debt problems . . . you admit that the housing market is flat, you say you expect a contribution to growth from consumer spending, now Chancellor none of it sounds very upbeat does it".

That is a judgment from which the Chancellor noticeably did not dissent.

It seems that the Chancellor has perhaps been taking lessons from the Prime Minister in the art of precision. It was the Prime Minister, after all, who as a Minister in the

Department of Social Security pledged that child benefit would continue to be paid as now—a pledge which was carried out to the ha'penny for a number of succeeding years. One could not say that his words were untrue, but it is certainly not what people thought he meant at the time. It is something to be borne in mind before getting too excited about his pledge, for example, not to privatise the national health service.

Similarly, it is certainly true that in his Budget speech in March the Chancellor said that he expected recovery to begin in the second half of the year. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East pointed out, later in the debate he said that it would be towards the middle of the year. The Chancellor now says that our present circumstances are very much what he expected, that he never expected anything else at this stage and that they are very much what he expected all along. He cannot stretch that to be compatible with the impression that his further comments no doubt deliberately created.

Whatever the Chancellor's precise words either at the beginning or end of the Budget debate, on 25 April—not long after—the Prime Minister said that

"the United Kingdom is coming out of its economic difficulties, while other countries are still facing deepening difficulties."—[*Official Report*, 25 April 1991; Vol. 189, c. 1206.]

On 29 April, the Chancellor said in Washington that recovery is "around the corner". However, that is not the impression that he has been trying to create today. The Chancellor was no longer saying "in the second half" or "towards the second half"; in April he was saying, "around the corner". The right hon. Gentleman is stretching things a little.

However, one must be charitable because that was said when there was still talk of an election in June 1991. Even when the June option had faded—no doubt with an eye on the autumn—on 19 July the Prime Minister was still saying:

"I am confident that, in the second half of this year, the economy will begin to take off". [*Official Report*, 19 July 1991; Vol. 195, c. 679.]

That sentence contains an active verb. I am sure that we have all noticed that take-off coming about.

By September, the pre-election hype was again well under way and, on the 16th, the Chancellor said:

"Britain is coming out of recession . . . The statistics are highly encouraging and pointing very much in the right direction".

What a contrast between those statements and the one made to Mr. Walden a mere two months later—that the Chancellor never expected anything else but the position in which we now find ourselves.

I am trying to believe the right hon. Gentleman. I do not think that he did expect anything else, but he did his best to make the electorate expect something else. With that record, not just on recession but on recovery, it is better to look to others for their judgment on where we stand and for the real signals that we should be considering.

The Government have been saying that with the technical recovery will come the end of all our problems. Some light was inadvertently cast on that today when the Chancellor, under pressure from my right hon. and learned Friend, conceded that, technically, the recovery was indeed here. "Technically", he said, "the recovery is now ended." We all recognise, however, that the problems have not ended. Others, of course, apply a rather more stringent judgment. The Chancellor quoted Professor McWilliams of the Confederation of British Industry saying that output was "slowly edging up". However, the right hon. Gentleman did not quote what Professor McWilliams stated in a letter to the *Financial Times* only last week about real recovery. He wrote that,

"the onset of recovery does not mean the recession has ended. If you are a diver, your head may still be below water even when you are rising towards the suface . . . I prefer to define the recession as over when the economy has recovered to its previous level of output . . . the recession will not end before the second half of 1992, even using the Chancellor's own forecasts as published in the Autumn Statement."

Professor McWilliams identified the right hon. Gentleman's forecasts as more optimistic than those of other commentators.

The Government still take no responsibility for Britain's real needs and conditions. They boast—many Conservative Members have done so in this debate—about bringing down inflation over the year from 10·6 per cent. to 3·7 per cent. Hands up whoever is taking the blame for putting it up. Are there no volunteers on the Conservative Benches? After all, it was the CBI that referred to the Government's "inflationary own goals" in the year that resulted in inflation at 10·6 per cent. It was the Governor of the Bank of England who referred to "administered price rises" as a result of political decisions. I note that the Government will take the credit when things improve, but none of the blame when they worsen. The Government took all the credit when unemployment was falling. Do any of them take any of the blame for its rise today? [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] That was a truly rhetorical question—one that expected no reply.

The Government have talked about worldwide recession, undoubtedly in an attempt to find someone to blame. However, I concede that the Chancellor was more accurate than usual today. He spoke of either "recession" or "falling growth" among our competitors. He sought to give the impression, without explicitly saying so, that somehow or other somewhere in the world sinister influences had brought about our recession.

It is only right to remind the Chancellor of what Peter Morgan of the Institute of Directors said earlier this year. He said:

"this awful recession, which has caused so much grief, is a failure of government economic management."

Undoubtedly he is more than a socialist.

Let us look further at who is to blame for the recession. On the question of recovery, the London business school, which again is not hostile to the Government, has said:

"The economy will do little more in 1992 than make up for the output losses of 1991".

The Government have given up on ungrateful harsh reality, as they gave up on it in June and November when twice they chickened out of calling an election. It is increasingly evident that, having run away from an election twice, the Government are spending their time worrying about presentation rather than performance, script in lieu of substance. The Prime Minister tells *The House Magazine* that the Government have abolished the poll tax—yet it is alive and well and at the heart of the council tax, for which the legislation had not even been published when he spoke.

The Prime Minister told us that the Government had "got inflation licked" in the autumn when he thought that perhaps they were about to have an election. Yet in the autumn statement the Chancellor murmured quietly that inflation

[Mrs. Margaret Beckett]

"may rise slightly early next year".—[*Official Report*, 6 November 1991; Vol. 198, c. 452.]

I understand that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the chairman of the Conservative party, told us on Sunday what the Government had achieved in negotiations on the social charter. The next day the Secretary of State for Employment was on the airwaves telling us how he was off to conduct the negotiations on the social charter, on the result of which the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster had commented. I think it was McLuhan who said that the medium was the message. Under this Government, the massage is the message. The concentration is all on public relations.

There was a revealing announcement last week. It conveyed the Government's sense of priorities better than perhaps most of the things that we could say in the House. They announced that they were putting £2 million more into extra help to relieve national health service waiting lists. That is terrific; we are all delighted. It could have been £4 million if the Government had not wasted at least as much—according to their figures—on sending us all a copy of the patients charter.

When it comes to the crunch and the Government are asked what action they intend to take to promote economic recovery, the answer is always the same, as it was the same today—they will wait and see whether it happens. Any approach, on any time scale, to economic and monetary union requires us to be able to compete on equal terms with the Germans, the French and the Italians. What do the Government intend to do to bring that about? They will wait and see whether it happens.

When the Government are forced to say what they would do if they were re-elected, they tell us that they would do it all again. They want to cut income tax again. To fund those cuts, they want to cut the proportion of national income which goes on public services—again. The Government tell us that they have got the inflation rate and interest rates down. They say, "If you want to know what we will do, just look at our record." Well, let us look. The Government cut income tax, yes, but they put up national insurance contributions and value added tax twice. This year they have got inflation down nicely in time for the election. That is very welcome, but is it unprecedented? Well, no, as a matter of fact it is not. In June 1983 inflation was 3·7 per cent.; within two years of the election, in June 1985, it was 7 per cent. In June 1987, when there was an election, inflation was 4·2 per cent.; within two years, in June 1989, it was 8·3 per cent. As we know, it continued to rise.

This year the Government have got interest rates down nicely in time for the election. Is that unprecedented? No, in June 1983 interest rates were at 9·5 per cent.; within less than two years, in January 1985, they were at 14 per cent. By June 1987—and an election—the Government had reduced them to 9 per cent. again; within another two years, in October 1989, they were at 15 per cent.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: I do not have very much time. I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman if I have time later.

The Government make much of their record on interest rates and inflation, but under them we have had a roller-coaster ride between boom and bust. Whoopee, we are going round again. I do not believe that the country can afford a repetition of those policies or a third Tory recession.

Economic debates have two consistent features—yet more dubious statistics and greater strength in their advocacy—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. One debate at a time.

Mrs. Beckett: In our motion we call on the Government to initiate targeted tax relief, to promote investment in manufacturing, to reverse the cuts that they are still making in training, to establish a new skills programme and to offer support for research and development. Those are exactly the policies being called for by the Engineering Employers Federation and the Confederation of British Industry, whose members I seem to recall the Chief Secretary describing as "a few out-of-step people with old-fashioned ideas" during the last Budget debate.

Those policies are also called for by the Machine Tool Technologies Association, in a document produced a week or so ago, which argued that

"there is a role for Government in closing this investment gap . . . The correct balance and level of . . . investment needed . . . will come if policy provides: a stable economic environment; more innovation and training; greater availability of funds for investment; and the appropriate incentives from the tax system."

All those are Labour party policy, for which we have consistently called.

Yet the Government Front Bench and Conservative Members consistently claim that the Labour party has no proposals. When commenting on the speech by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East today the Chancellor said:

"If he had constructive ideas he kept them to himself. He has no policies, he never has and he never will have."

Later he said:

"There is nothing in the way of serious economic proposals."

[HON. MEMBERS: "There is nothing new."] Indeed that was not new. The Government say that in every debate on the economy. I find that fascinating.

All over the world there are Governments who do not know that such proposals are not part of the policies for running their economy, that they are outdated and do not work, as our Government claim. All over the world there are Governments who believe that while keeping inflation and interest rates as low as possible is necessary for economic prosperity, it is by no means sufficient. All over the world Governments are carrying out precisely the policies that we advocate and call on our Government to pursue for the sake of the country, yet the Chancellor accuses us of being

"locked in their isolationist world."

All over the world there are Governments, lacking the wise counsel of the British Conservative party, who do not know that they are getting it all wrong—grievously misled as they are by the fact that they have higher growth, higher investment, are more prosperous, and have better public transport, health, training, and education than we have. That has misled them to think that what they are doing is not an economic policy. I do not care what the Conservative party call it—*[Interruption.]* The Chancellor is pathetic.

Nowhere else in the world are there parties or Governments who do not recognise that the policies that we have consistently advocated for years from these

Benches are not part of a proper planning and direction for the economy. Only on the Conservative Benches are they so foolish, so "isolationist"—to use the Chancellor's word—and so locked in their own determination to listen to no one that they will not pay attention.

As the Chancellor has made crystal clear, while this wait-and-see Government are in power, our only hope of competing with those who follow, and are successful by following the policies that we advocate, is that they lower their standards to our levels. The British Government's idea of competing in Europe seems to be for Britain to crawl in at the bottom of the heap, when British people have the skills and the capacity to hold up their heads at the top.

All that the British people lack is a Government with the understanding, determination and policy to help them reach that place. When the Government are finally forced by the date to stop running away from the electorate, they will get them.

9.30 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. David Mellor): Mr. Speaker—*[Interruption.]* I have not even started and Labour Members are laughing. I do not know what is to become of them. They might let me get a few sentences out first. I see laughing on the Opposition Front Bench the hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng). I remember when he was a power in the land and chaired committees at the GLC. It seems that his only function these days is to come into the Chamber twice a day, for the opening and wind-up, and to laugh and make animal noises. It is a sad deterioration in what was once a rather good career.

Mr. John Smith: That is unfair to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Mellor: I am sorry that the right hon. and learned Gentleman thinks I have been unfair to his hon. Friend, who I am sure will grin and bear it. Indeed, knowing him, he will probably jeer and bear it.

I have been puzzled by today's debate. I assumed, since the Labour party had initiated it, that Labour Members had something significant to say. So it was with some expectation that I attended to hear what new thoughts the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) wished to convey. One can only say of his speech that it was environmentally friendly in that everything in it was recycled; we had heard it all before.

We have had a lot of negative criticism of the Government—what my right hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark) rightly called talking down Britain—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members may find, particularly when they see what the opinion poll in *The Daily Telegraph* says tomorrow, that the British people do not find comfortable the rubbishing of the efforts that millions of people throughout the country are making to come out of a recession that has afflicted many of the world's developed economies. Finding themselves increasingly in the position of having to talk down any good news for Britain and cheering at anything they can remotely distort into bad news is not an appealing platform for Labour Members and they must be seriously concerned about that fact.

We have had today only a sorry old rehash of the usual charges based on misconceptions about what has been happening. As usual, there has been from Labour Members an exclusive focus on manufacturing rather than on any other part of the economy. Not that I resent that. I am not disposed to being shy about our record in manufacturing—*[Interruption.]*—but I wonder when they will start talking about the other 80 per cent. of the economy.

I am not ashamed of manufacturing when 22 per cent. of our national output for manufacturing is more than that in the United States or France, when our exports are at an all-time high, even during a recession, and when, for the third year running, we shall be increasing our share of world trade in manufacturing. I am not embarrassed by that record, notwithstanding the obvious difficulties that we know many businesses are facing here, just as they are in the United States, Canada, Sweden, Australia and in a number of other countries which are suffering equally from an economic downturn.

I was interested to note how much reliance the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) placed on the CBI in the somewhat selective reading to which she treated us from the recent CBI report "Competing With the World's Best." For instance, she did not quote the following passage from that report:

"most of those responsible for running British industry believe there has been a marked improvement in performance during the 1980s which has been more than a temporary phenomenon. While there is no concealing the seriousness of the current recession, most manufacturers believe that their companies are in much better shape to weather the current downturn than was the case a decade ago."

I wonder whether the hon. Lady has the same document, because the whole of it is worth reading. At the end of the document, the CBI said:

"To sum up the Group's conclusions to this point, the state of the Manufacturing Nation is better than is generally recognised. Many of Britain's manufacturers have shown that they can compete with the best in the world, there is a sound base on which to build".

Mr. Jeff Rooker (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Mellor: The hon. Gentleman, who has not been part of this debate but has just joined us, is obviously unaware of the fact that the hon. Lady constantly referred to the CBI. I am perfectly happy to share the CBI's opinions with the House. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman is becoming very excitable. Had he been here for a number of hours, any excitement would have died rather quickly.

Mr. Rooker: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Mellor: No, I shall not give way if the hon. Gentleman cannot contain himself. The hon. Gentleman squawks, but I shall give way only to hon. Members who have taken a serious interest in the debate. On a generous estimate, that might even include the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East.

The Opposition's portrayal of the CBI as a damsel in distress waiting to be rescued from the Government by the Labour party is absolute nonsense. The CBI is about as anxious to have a Labour Government as we would all be to have our daughters go to an all-night party at the Kennedys.

The CBI's document says:

"It is quite clear in recent years that central government should not be in the business of picking winners, or of engaging in direct intervention in the strategic direction and management of companies. Experience has shown"—

[Mr. Mellor]

the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East should focus particularly on this point—

"that Ministers and civil servants do not have the necessary skills and experience".

If anyone is in doubt about how the CBI feels about the Labour party, he or she should look at the interview given by John Banham to *The Guardian* on Wednesday, 30 October. He said:

"Labour means an explosion of public pay settlements without increases in productivity; it means the minimum wage (causing up to a 300,000 increase in unemployment) and other social initiatives in line with the EC social action programme; it means business diverting resources from investment to meet rising local government bills unprotected by a retail price index cap.

The other threat is devaluation, even though this is one which Labour has gone out of its way to stress is not real"—

unlike the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), who was all for it in today's debate.

"We're very much opposed to devaluation but there are siren voices in the Labour party talking about that, he says.

All these add up to inflation, each percentage point increase in which he says costs business £5 billion a year."

That is what the CBI thinks of the prospect of a Labour Government. It is not impressed by the 283 quangos which Labour would invent, and does not want social audits, contract compliance, work force monitoring and other such stuff. Mr. Banham has no doubt noticed what Conservative Members have noticed about the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East—he says nothing about inflation. The hon. Member for Derby, South mentioned inflation only to make a trivial point about marginal changes of fractions of a percentage point between just under 4 per cent. and just over 4 per cent. When she was last a Minister, inflation averaged 15·5 per cent. and peaked at 28 per cent. Therefore, I do not find that very convincing.

No doubt, when Mr. Banham mentions public sector pay, he is also aware that there has never been a strike during the Government's lifetime that was not fully supported by the Labour party. He is aware of the Labour party's proposals for the minimum wage. The only thing that independent commentators disagree about over the minimum wage is how much unemployment it will cause. It is a case of, "You pays your money and you takes your choice." Nomura Securities starts low and says it will cost 145,000 jobs, James Capel says that it will cost 166,000, the CBI says that it will cost 200,000 to 300,000, UBS Phillips and Drew says that it will cost 400,000 for stage 1, up to 50 per cent., and 1·25 million for stage 2, up to 66 per cent. Even the Fabian Society says that it will cost almost 900,000 jobs. No wonder the CBI is not struck on the minimum wage. We only have to think what the national minimum wage would cost the national health service—at least half a billion pounds. The total cost to the public sector would be about one and a half billion pounds, without any increase in the productive capacity of the economy.

Mr. Banham is not impressed by the Labour party's proposals to remove the caps from local government expenditure.

Mrs. Beckett *rose*——

Mr. Mellor: Oh, yes, I shall certainly give way to the hon. Lady.

Mrs. Beckett: I was not going to bother to intervene, but, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman keeps going on about Mr. Banham, I shall ask him the following question: is he aware that Mr. Banham still supports the poll tax? Would he like to say more about that?

Mr. Mellor: I was about to tell the hon. Lady something even more interesting. It is all very well the hon. Lady criticising Mr. Banham, now she knows the real nature of his views, but she was giving an entirely misleading impression to the House about what the CBI thought.

In his interview with *The Guardian*, Mr. Banham was referring to the fact that, although the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East has been extremely coy about saying what the Labour policy will be, one or two Labour spokesmen are not so coy. The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) still occasionally plays the part of wild, colonial boy. In a debate with the Secretary of State for the Environment he said:

"Unlike the Secretary of State, I shall be precise. There will be no provision for capping in any legislation that we introduce."—[*Official Report*, 6 November 1991; Vol. 198, c. 472.]

It remains to be seen quite what will happen to the British economy and British business if there is some outrageous increase in the already outrageous spending of most of the Labour councils.

The Labour party has made a great deal of investment and training, which seems to be its answer to every difficult question. If we have a flu epidemic this winter, its answer to it will no doubt be investment and training. However, the Government's record on investment is extremely good. Business investment at constant 1985 prices—comparing like with like—is £36·6 billion in 1979, £56·7 billion in 1989, £56·4 billion in 1990. Even though, as the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East said, there has been a falling-off in investment, it is still forecast that investment will be more than £50 billion this year. For business to be investing this year, even in a recession, almost 40 per cent. more in real terms than in 1978-79, which passes under a Labour Government for a good year, is an astonishing sign of how much investment has increased.

A former adviser to the Labour party, Mr. Gavyn Davies, said in his column in *The Independent* the other day—[HON. MEMBERS: "Who?"] It is no good Opposition Members asking, "Who?" They know only too well who he is, and if they do not, they should ask his wife, who works for the Leader of the Opposition. Mr. Gavyn Davies—the Opposition know who I mean now—said that business investment had settled at 14·1 per cent. of GDP in the second half of this year, which was a remarkably high level bearing in mind that we are in a recession. When we consider the figures for investment in plant and machinery, they seem even more significant. At constant 1985 prices, the investment was more than £32 billion in 1990 and less than £20 billion in 1979.

In addition, because low corporation tax has given businesses the incentive to invest where they see fit, the quality of investment has improved. The productivity of capital fell by 1·5 per cent. per year under Labour, but it has risen on average during the lifetime of this Government. It has risen more than in the United States, Japan, Germany, France or Italy where it fell during the period of this Government.

If one wants a real comparison of investment in the British economy with investment in the rest of the Group

of Seven, in the 1970s growth of investment in the British economy was 2·3 per cent. a year while in the Group of Seven it averaged 3·1 per cent. In the 1980s, growth in the United Kingdom each year on average was 6·7 per cent. while the G7 average increase was 4·6 per cent.

Honest to goodness, I do not think that we need any lectures from the Labour party on investment. It is a bit like being lectured by Miss Elizabeth Taylor on the sanctity of marriage.

Mr. John Smith: Not that one again.

Mr. Mellor: I have not used that one before as it happens. I am not sure whether anyone else has, but I have not. I shall not use it again. That is its final appearance. If only the right hon. and learned Gentleman could say the same about most of the points that he makes.

I was up in the north last week and we saw the Nissan plant—*[Interruption.]* No, well north of Watford, almost in the territory occupied by the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). I was not quite brave enough to stick my nose into his constituency, but I was almost there. There is the Nissan plant at Sunderland and the Fujitsu plant at Aycliffe which has created 1,500 jobs and had £600 million worth of investment. That is the kind of thing that the Labour party should be jumping up and down about saying, "Jolly good thing too that more than 50 per cent. of inward investment in 1990 from the United States and Japan came to Britain." But at the Trades Union Congress a motion was passed saying that that investment is alien. The motion was proposed by that dreadful old Stalinist, Mr. Ken Gill. Mr. Jack Adams, the number two in the Leader of the Opposition's own union, the Transport and General Workers Union, has just been elected and takes up his post next March. He is a communist. Why worry about communism in the Soviet Union? Communism in the Soviet Union might have gone, but in the TUC it is alive and well and passing motions.

The sad thing is that, notwithstanding the outrageous nature of that motion which Mr. Gavin Laird said was sheer hypocrisy and racism, not a word of criticism of anything like that strength has been levelled by the Opposition Front Bench about it. The Opposition should not talk to us about investment when they talk in that way about major countries investing in Britain.

Then we have all the points about training. Once again, we will have much more sympathy with the Labour party's view on training when the Leader of the Opposition's union, which also sponsors the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), who leads for the Labour party on these matters, stops passing motions to boycott employment training, youth training, employment action and TECs. It would be much more convincing if the Labour party could persuade the TGWU to co-operate. Then we might believe that it would do something about the country if it was ever given a chance to run it.

The Labour party has not told us a jot about what it would do. What is the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East so bothered about when it comes to telling us what the Labour party would do if in office on the crucial issue of economic management? Is he worried that we might pinch his ideas if he tells us what they are? The only thing that we would do is to pinch ourselves to make sure that we were not dreaming.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman is an eloquent man and, like me, has a previous incarnation at the Bar. I cannot help feeling that he has all the eloquence necessary to deploy his case if he sees fit, but that he takes the same attitude that we used to take at the Bar when representing a particularly dodgy client who, when one realised that his story would not stand up but that he was determined nevertheless to plead not guilty, would be advised not to give evidence on his own behalf. That is precisely the attitude that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is taking towards the Labour party's economic policy. It is all pretty blatant.

I have with me a document—it is well-thumbed, because I recite it to myself of a night, when I am bored—entitled "Meet the Challenge, Make the Change: A New Agenda for Britain." On page 8 there are some solemn words, given added solemnity by the fact that there is a facsimile signature at the bottom of them. It is in joined-up writing, which is suspicious, but it purports to be the signature of the Leader of the Opposition. The presence of that facsimile signature is obviously intended to give added value to the words set out therein:

> "At the time of the next General Election, we will set out the accurate costs of our manifesto proposals in the light of the economic situation we are likely to inherit and the priorities which we consider most urgent."

What could be clearer, yet on 26 September the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), who is Labour's campaigns organiser, told us that that pledge was inoperative, and that Labour is not going to do that. I will be corrected if the hon. Gentleman did not say that.

Why the change? I will give way if any member of Labour's Front Bench will tell me. Was the hon. Member for Copeland right when he said that, despite that facsimile signature being put to those solemn words, Labour do not intend to do what they say?—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer."] We are used to Labour breaking its promises after a general election, but to do so even before the next general election campaign begins really is something else. It was worth giving up the Mozart death night concert that I planned to attend just for that.

Although the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East is eloquent, plainly he has lost his voice. And well he might. What does Labour party policy amount to? Its interest rates policy used to be known as Monklands law—whatever interest rates are, Labour will take 1 per cent. off them. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East seems to have changed his mind as the evil hour of the election draws near.—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] The evil hour for him, not for me. I am looking forward to the general election.

When the right hon. and learned Gentleman was asked about interest rates on "The World at One" on 15 November, we did not get the 1 per cent. figure, but these words:

> " I would have to take advice about it, and see what the situation was. I would be pushing to try to get it, but the timing of it is of course always a matter of judgment."

What is the reason for that sudden change of tune? The right hon. and learned Gentleman used to sound ever so certain that 1 per cent. off interest rates would be the answer to everything.

Perhaps it has dawned on the right hon. and learned Gentleman that the real problem for Labour is not how much they can take down interest rates, but by how much they will have to put them up because of the collapse of confidence that would be the consequence of a Labour Government being elected.

[Mr. Mellor]

The hon. Member for Derby, South trailed her coat a bit. She started doing that on the "Today" programme this morning. I will come to that later. She continued that process this evening, by quoting Professor Douglas McWilliams, chief economic adviser to the Confederation of British Industry. However, she did not quote his words from *The Independent* on 6 September, when he warned that if Labour won the next general election,

"interest rates would probably have to rise for several months, in order to convince the currency markets that devaluation of the pound was not in prospect."

Let us have a little parlour game at this stage in the proceedings, to liven things up. Who on the Opposition Benches can answer this? What do the following groups have in common—James Capel DJB, Goldman Sachs, Midland Montague, NatWest, Nomura, and UBS Phillips and Drew? They have in common the fact that they have all warned against higher interest rates under a Labour Government. That is the prevailing view that Labour must deal with. Small wonder that Monklands law has been abolished. However, it is not only that law which has died lately. We also have to mourn the death of Beckett's law, which is that whatever other promises may be scattered to the four winds—and there have been many of them—Labour makes only two pledges. They are to increase pensions, and to increase child benefit.

On the "Today" programme the hon. Lady made an appearance, which I hope all hon. Members heard, in which she commended a motion which contains a number of expenditure commitments, not one of which is part of Beckett's law, and made it clear that this was what the Labour party was committed to. But she said that it was cost free.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman has not got quite the brass neck to say that it is cost free. He admitted on an earlier occasion that one element in it would cost £900 million. He admitted that

"Reinstating the training programme"—

these are his exact words on Radio 4—

"and bringing in the temporary work programme, we calculated in terms of the budget of somewhere about £900 million."

Then he went on to say these wonderful words, which show that, despite the fact that he may look like a bank manager, he does not always act like one:

"which isn't a great deal actually in the context of public expenditure."

That is a wonderful attitude. A billion here, a billion there; soon he will be talking real money.

Then we had the hon. Lady's celebrated passage on privatisation. Here we really do have an extraordinary instance of the left hand not knowing what the left hand is doing. The hon. Lady is now engaged in an exciting conversation with the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East. She is opting out at this point, but it will get more interesting if she will bear with me. She may be against privatisation but she said that she was looking forward to pocketing the proceeds in order to balance the books if her party was elected. Indeed, she sounded as if she quite relished the idea, and she ran off the names of the organisations to whose privatisation she referred, despite the fact that her party is committed to renationalising them. Furthermore, if she had read *The Guardian* before she got into the radio car this morning she would have seen that the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) was accusing the Government of wasting taxpayers' money subsidising the £5·5 billion sale of shares in British Telecom, the proceeds of which seem to be a key part of her policy for meeting expenditure if she is elected.

Indeed, when it comes to the question of renationalisation, the Labour party gets ever so coy. On Saturday *The Times* did a survey. It was excitingly headlined "Spotlight on Labour's financial wares". They wanted to ask questions about renationalisation. Apparently all the members of the shadow Cabinet were at lunch or dinner or otherwise unavailable, so a gentleman called Geoff Mulgan, senior research assistant to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, was put up. He could be a distant relative of Dave Spart, who knows? He was asked first about electricity renationalisation, and he said—hon. Members must listen to this:

"There will be no need for cash. We will make use of the complex web of debts and stakes in other generating companies. There will be no increase in the PSBR."

One would have thought that he had been asked a question about the Maxwell empire.

Then the going got a bit hot for Mr. Geoff Mulgan, cousin of Mr. Dave Spart; he was asked about buying back the water companies. Here he got ever so hesitant and said this:

"I can't say how we will do it. The uncertainties that exist here would make it foolish of me to be more specific."

That is the ringing manifesto on which 12 years of Tory misrule are to be brought to an end.

The only thing that is worse than that is the right hon. Gentleman's statement when producing his £2 billion package for manufacturing. When asked where the money was to come from, he said that it would come from better collection of tax revenues, the idea being that the Inland Revenue would collect the taxes as well as most Labour councils collect the rubbish. He got the idea of those £2 billion of tax revenues just waiting around for the election from the tax inspectors' union. The reality, as I understand it from the Inland Revenue, is that it is most unlikely that those proceeds would be available. If they were, it would take between 1,650 and 5,000 extra tax inspectors to collect them, and it takes four to five years to train a tax inspector. Yet that is to pay for the Labour party's manufacturing policy in its first year of government.

I end by thinking—[HON. MEMBERS: "More."]—but I think that they have had enough.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland) *rose in his place and claimed to move*, That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly. That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 204, Noes 312.

Division No. 22] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*	Begg, Roy
Allen, Graham	Beith, A. J.
Anderson, Donald	Bell, Stuart
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Bellotti, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy	Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack	Bennett, A. F. *(D'ht'n & R'dish)*
Ashton, Joe	Benton, Joseph
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Bermingham, Gerald
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Boateng, Paul
Battle, John	Boyes, Roland
Beckett, Margaret	Bray, Dr Jeremy

Brown, Ron *(Edinburgh Leith)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell, Ron *(Blyth Valley)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Eadie, Alexander
Enright, Derek
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Faulds, Andrew
Fearn, Ronald
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
Garrett, Ted *(Wallsend)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Hume, John
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rooker, Jeff
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Batiste, Spencer
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Browne, John *(Winchester)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buck, Sir Antony
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Fallon, Michael
Farr, Sir John
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, Sir George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*

Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Rt Hon David
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Rt Hon Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Sir Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rumbold, Rt Hon Mrs Angela
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. David Lightbown and
Mr. John M. Taylor.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 30 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House welcomes Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer's Autumn Statement, which reaffirmed the Government's forecast of a modest recovery in the second half of 1991, with growth gathering pace in 1992; notes that the total output of the British economy rose in the third quarter of 1991, providing further confirmation of this forecast; and congratulates the Government on its sound and prudent economic policies, which have reduced inflation from nearly 11 per cent. to under 4 per cent., have allowed interest rates to be reduced from 15 per cent. to 10½ per cent. and have laid the foundations for sustained non-inflationary growth.

ESTIMATES

Resolved,

That this House agrees with the Report [3rd December] of the Liaison Committee.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

CONSOLIDATION, &c., BILLS (JOINT COMMITTEE)

Ordered,

That Mr. Graham Allen and Mr. Frank Cook be discharged from the Select Committee on Consolidation, &c., Bills and Mr. Derek Enright and Dr. Ashok Kumar be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

PROCEDURE

Ordered,

That Mr. Graham Allen and Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours be discharged from the Select Committee on Procedure and Mr. Eric Illsley and Mr. Gordon McMaster be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

PETITION

Beer Supply Orders

10.15 pm

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): I present a petition on behalf of 332 of my constituents who are residents of Stockton-on-Tees and who protest:

That high rents and business rates have created high bar prices at a time when people can ill afford to pay them. Licensees are having to leave their pubs in their thousands, and more and more pubs are being closed down. The Beer Orders have allowed brewers to ride roughshod over the intention of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission to lower beer prices, allow greater competition and greater choice for customers.

That we the undersigned, wish to protest at the current activities of the major brewers who are increasing bar prices or forcing tenants out of their businesses and homes.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House carry out an immediate review of the Beer supply orders and give proper compensation for licensees forced out of their pubs.

To lie upon the Table.

GPs (Computer Costs)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

10.17 pm

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Computers and their use are not a normal subject for debate in the House. The subject of the computerisation of our family doctors' practices has almost never been raised, and has never been raised as an individual subject for debate. Basically, I come to praise the positive steps taken by Health Ministers over the past five years, although in a minor way I will ask for reconsideration of a wrong done to a medical practice in my constituency.

Taking major steps further to encourage medical practices to use computers and various software packages in dealing with medical records has brought, and I hope will continue to bring, benefits to the patient, and it is the patient who matters. The accurate presentation to any doctor seeing a patient of that patient's record, the full and easy referral to past treatment and the ease of transfer of records are obvious benefits. The screening of procedures, the control of prescriptions and the identification of patient groups are further benefits for doctors and for patients.

The Government have set aside £44 million for the period 1989-92 to aid and to stimulate the installation of computers in doctors' practices and that must be welcomed by all of us. I am worried that, certainly in the beginning, all those funds were not used. Therefore, the Government's record in general terms has been good. I urge them to continue to meet the necessary level of funding to maintain and update where necessary what has been achieved.

However, there is one specific item in respect of which I believe—nay, I know—the Government have fallen down. What are the facts? A large and excellent doctors' practice in Axminster, which is within my constituency, with Drs. Church, Sutton, Vann, Evans, Hodges and Taylor as partners, decided to computerise the practice. The doctors examined carefully the hardware necessary to provide access for each doctor and also for the pharmaceutical dispensery. They spent time arriving at a decision on the correct software. They were not opting for a particularly expensive scheme. It was not a Rolls-Royce, but a practical working and adaptable system. Following my automobile analogy, it was a Rover system. They based their decision on a clear statement in a Department of Health approved document, entitled "Funding General Practice 1990". According to that document, non-fundholding practices such as the one to which I am referring were entitled to reimbursement of computer costs from April 1990. They were entitled to 50 per cent. of maintenance costs, 50 per cent. of purchasing, leasing or upgrading costs, and 50 per cent. of the first year of staff costs. That document—I now quote from it so that I can make certain that I am not misleading the House—states:

"Special software packages are being developed commercially and will be available before April 1991. They will:

Enable practices to run budgets on a day-to-day basis

Account for expenditure incurred

Produce monthly and annual reports and statements for the FPC

Keep track of hospital referrals

Further guidance on software will be issued in the Spring of 1990."

[Sir Peter Emery]

There was no mention of a restriction on the cost or repayment that a practice could obtain. The Under-Secretary of State for Health acknowledged that fact in a letter to me of 31 January 1991. In the second paragraph he said:

"During our discussions I accepted that there had possibly been some scope for misunderstanding. Even though Dr. Vann's practice has not applied to become a fund-holding practice you mentioned the GP fundholder brochure which, while mentioning the 50 per cent. maximum contribution, did not specifically mention the additional list size criteria on the same page."

What are the facts? A large, excellent doctors' practice proceeded—how many doctors did the same?—and made a claim for the reimbursement that they expected. Having spent £25,775 on computerisation, the doctors might reasonably have expected a 50 per cent.—£12,800—reimbursement. They were amazed and "aghast" when they received only £4,830 from the family health services authority. In this instance, the Department of Health is diddling general practitioners.

I have pressed the Minister on this matter both in correspondence and in a visit to the Department when he and his officials told me that they would reconsider it. Our correspondence culminated in a letter on 14 August, stating:

"From 22 July 1991, family health service authorities (FHSAs) have been given management discretion to target funds in order to maximise value for money and service to patients. The limits that previously existed within the Statement of Fees and Allowances (SFA) which related reimbursements to list size have been removed."

Hooray, I have won. However, the letter continued by referring to non-fundholding practices, which do not affect this case.

The letter then continued:

"With regard to Dr. Vann's request for retrospective payments"—

"retrospective" is the Minister's word not mine because the payments were not retrospective. They were demanded when the doctors installed the system. The letter reads:

"With regard to Dr. Vann's request for retrospective payments to be made to GPs who have been reimbursed under the previous arrangements, the object of the scheme, as has been explained in the past, is to ensure the widest possible spread of computing within a cash-limited budget."

I emphasise the words,

"within a cash-limited budget."

The letter continued:

"In the light of this, there is no provision to make further payments to those doctors who, like Dr. Vann, feel that the scheme which operated when their claim was made was less generous than the present. If Dr. Vann wishes to upgrade his system, then the reimbursement for his upgrade costs will be assessed under the revised arrangements. I am sorry that, despite the delay, I cannot be more helpful."

The Minister's argument seems to be, "It is impossible to act because the costs have increased above the Treasury total for computerisation." Therefore, on 13 February 1991, I tabled a written question:

"To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many general practitioners in previous years, in complying with his wishes to move to use computers, applied for a grant for the installation of a computer system that was above the figure of payment set out in the published computer cost reimbursement schedule."

That was accepting that the scheme, to which I did not think that reference had been made, might have been applied.

The Minister's reply to me stated:

"No figures are held centrally either in respect of individual claims made by GPs or individual amounts reimbursed by family health services authorities".—[*Official Report*, 13 February 1991; Vol. 185, c. *512*.]

I found that interesting because it appears that the Minister does not know how many doctors made a claim that was above the amount of the reimbursement schedule or, if he did know, he was unwilling to tell me, so I must presume that he did not know.

One can imagine my indignation when I finally received a copy of a letter that had been signed by Mr. Ian Fleming, one of the Minister's officials, clearly stating in annex A:

"The scheme was introduced in April 1990 (but took into account in its first year any systems obtained by GPs since April 1989). £24 million was made available in 1990-91 (to cover the two years) but was significantly underspent".

It was not a case of there not being any money, but simply that the Minister would not darn well apply it. I believe that that money has been carried forward, which means that funds are available today if the Minister should decide to pay the Axminster practice.

I have been a Minister and I know that there is a difference between Ministers being in charge and Ministers who are run by their civil servants. If the practice had not done the efficient thing and had installed only part of the structure, to a value of £8,000, it would have received 50 per cent. of that £8,000. Last year and this year they could have upgraded it at a cost much greater than the initial expenditure and much less efficiently. In that case they would have obtained 50 per cent. of their total extra computerisation costs under the new scheme. The doctors are being held to account for being efficient. They are not being fairly treated by the Department.

Therefore, I say to the Minister, "Gird your loins. Tell the office that a way must be found to pay the balance of slightly less than £10,000. Do not allow the civil service to say that there are ways in which it cannot be done. Any civil servant will find ways of not doing something." I am confident that if my hon. Friend the Minister wants to do this, he can. I expect him so to do.

10.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): I am grateful for the confidence of my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) in my competence. I do not dispute that if I chose to instruct that the payment be made, it could be made. On that proposition I have to agree with my hon. Friend. But before I talk about whether I should use that discretion, I should like to say that, as my hon. Friend said, I have known about his concern about the Axminster practice virtually since I arrived in the Department of Health 18 months ago.

My hon. Friend has been an effective and persuasive advocate in private and now in the House of the interests of his constituents. The arguments, as he has presented them to me both on earlier occasions and tonight, are, indeed, seductive. However, I will seek to set them in the wider context of the Government's commitment and programme for the computerisation of general practice. I shall show why I do not think—it is not what my officials think, but what I think—that I would be right to use the discretion which he correctly said lies with me.

I agree with my hon. Friend about the substantial benefits which computers can bring to a modern general practice. They can perform simple administrative tasks which were previously both dull and expensive. Indeed,

they can do so more accurately than traditional methods. Registration and administrative and financial returns are all functions which computers can carry out in a modern general practice.

In addition, and more important, computers can keep clinical records and, therefore, be of direct clinical value to the general practitioner. They can keep records of the attendances of a patient at the surgery, the clinical condition of the patient and the prescriptions written for the patient. They can produce repeat prescriptions when the doctor so authorises. So computers are a valuable tool for a clinician in general practice, as well as being a valuable administrative tool to a partner in a practice.

Therefore, the Government see the extension of computerisation in general practice as an important part of our commitment to the growth, modernisation, expansion and development of primary care in the NHS. That has been a consistent record of the Government since 1979. Our commitment is much wider than computers. We have shifted substantial sums of money into the extension and development of primary and community care in the NHS.

The primary and community health care sectors of the national health service have increased their share of the health service budget from 28 per cent. in 1979 to 33 per cent. today. That represents a growth of expenditure in those sectors of roughly 80 per cent. in real terms. That money has been used to increase the number of lay staff, practice nurses and other professionals available in general practice and to improve the physical facilities in which general practice is offered. It is a substantial record of investment in the expansion of primary and community health care. Computers have an important part to play in that wider programme.

As recently as five years ago only 10 per cent. of general practices had access to computers. On 31 March 1987 there were 942 practices in the national health service which used a computer. Four years later, on 31 March 1991, that figure had risen to 6,130, which represents 63 per cent. of all general practices within the health service. The practice that my hon. Friend mentioned is typical. Computers tend to be concentrated in larger practices. On 31 March this year 76 per cent. of all general practitioners in the NHS had access to a computer.

That is a substantial record of success in support of a much wider strategy of developing primary care as an essential part of modern health care delivery. How was that expansion of computerisation brought about? Substantial encouragement for the computerisation process in the primary care sector was developed by the scheme which my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton criticised.

Until I changed it earlier this year, the scheme had four essential elements: it met 50 per cent. of the system costs and 70 per cent. of the initial staff costs. However, both those were subject to a ceiling, determined by the practice list size.

Sir Peter Emery: It was not clear.

Mr. Dorrell: I shall come to that in a moment.

The fourth key point was that for the first two years of the programme, between April 1989 and March 1991, we committed a budget of £24 million to the programme.

My hon. Friend had two criticisms of the way in which the programme was put into effect. First, he is concerned about the application of the list size criterion. He is concerned about its merits, but, perhaps more important in the context of his constituents' practice, he is concerned about whether they knew that the limitation on the payments due existed within the scheme that we were operating.

I have told my hon. Friend in private and I am happy to tell him in public that if the doctors concerned say that when they installed the computer they did not know that the list size criterion existed, I am happy to accept that as a statement of fact. I am happy to accept that they did not know that the payment that they stood entitled to receive was limited by the list size criterion.

However, even if Dr. Church and his partners did not know of the operation of that rule, many others in primary health care knew. The correspondence files of my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr. Freeman), my predecessor, stand witness to the fact that the existence of the list size limit was known and was the subject of substantial criticism from representative organisations within the profession.

I answered my hon. Friend's question about how many payments were made to practices—where list size criterion limited payment—saying that I did not know the answer. That was a statement of fact because the totals were not available to me. However, I know that substantial numbers of doctors invested in computers, while complaining about the operation of that rule.

I am absolutely confident that Dr. Church and his partners are not unique and that many other doctors are in the same position, in the sense that they made financial investments during 1989-91 and the payments that they received from the fund were limited by the operation of the list size criterion.

Sir Peter Emery: So I am fighting for the profession.

Mr. Dorrell: Indeed, my hon. Friend is fighting a wider battle than purely that of Dr. Church and his partners.

My hon. Friend's second criticism of the way in which the scheme has worked is that the £24 million budget which was set aside for the two financial years—and I emphasise two years—1989-91 was underspent. The actual amount disbursed under the scheme in the two years for which it ran was £17 million, not £24 million. My hon. Friend says that cash is available which could be used at least to make some payment to doctors who had their payments limited by the list size criterion.

I considered that point during the summer, when we were considering the rules of the scheme which should operate for the current financial year. I decided on a different approach, and I will explain that approach and why I adopted it. My hon. Friend, and the medical profession more widely, seemed to me to have made a powerful case against the rigid operation of the list size criterion. That is why, for the current financial year, it has been abolished. I recognise that that provision has limited payments to my hon. Friend's constituents, but it is no longer limiting payments to doctors because, as of April of this year, it no longer applies.

The next facet of my approach was that I wanted to see more flexibility in the hands of local family health services authorities over the application of funds and the use of the substantial sums of money that are available to them for the development of primary health care. So for this year I made the computerisation funds part of the wider fund

[Mr. Dorrell]

available to FHSAs to support not merely computerisation but the extension of ancillary staff in general practice and the development of new accommodation facilities for primary health care.

Those three elements now all come out of the same fund, with discretion in the hands of the FHSA to use the fund for any one of those three purposes, but with a clear steer that the amount for the current year should be roughly £20 million, which my hon. Friend mentioned.

I believe that the spending levels that we are now seeing, through the new scheme that I announced in the summer, vindicate the judgment I made because the £17 million that was spent in the two years of the initial scheme represents an average spend of £8·5 million. The initial budget for the current year was £13 million, which was increased to £20 million to take account of the £7 million underspent in the first two years. So the budget fixed for the current year was £20 million and the £7 million underspent in the first two years of the scheme did not go back to the Treasury—it was not lost to computerisation—but was committed to the further development of GP computerisation.

I inquired of my officials—those officials who are supposed to have such total control over everything I do—what the experience would be of the new scheme during the current financial year. I am pleased to tell my hon. Friend that the latest estimate we can make for the spend on computerisation this year will not be £20 million but £25 million. So there will be a £25 million spend in a single year, in the current financial year, against an average of £8·5 million in the two previous financial years.

That will be possible because I made the scheme more flexible, so the FHSAs are allowed to use the funds that would previously have been limited to practice premises and ancillary staff to support the continued development and expansion of computerisation of primary health care.

Sir Peter Emery: At the cost of my constituents.

Mr. Dorrell: Not at all. It is a constant of any Minister's experience—my hon. Friend referred to his experience as a Minister—that when a new scheme is introduced, there will always be somebody who did the same thing on his own initiative in the previous year and who feels that those who benefit from the newly introduced scheme are receiving an unfair advantage over the individual who took the real risk and did it himself.

Sir Peter Emery: My hon. Friend has been most fair, and I understand the argument that he propounds. However, will he give one undertaking? If, at the end of this year, the total funds—I reckon those to be £44 million, but that figure may not be quite accurate—are underspent, will my hon. Friend advertise for people who, from 1989 to 1991, did not receive their full allocation and allow anyone, including my constituents, to apply to help them use up any unused balance? That would be very fair.

Mr. Dorrell: I said that my hon. Friend's arguments were always powerful, persuasive and seductive and he has just demonstrated that fact once again. Unfortunately, he double counts in quoting a figure of £44 million——

Sir Peter Emery: Over four years.

Mr. Dorrell: For three financial years. The budgets that we announced were £24 million and £20 million, which my hon. Friend has added to make £44 million. But he forgets that the £20 million included a £7 million carry-over from last year's underspend, so the amount is not £44 million but £37 million.

As the spend over the three years will be more than that—last year's spend was £17 million and I expect this year's to be £25 million, making a total of £42 million—I suppose that I could give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks, but even if our figures were so way out that I could be caught on that commitment, when I consider the matter next May—assuming that the burden still falls to me to do so—I would have to make the same calculation as I made this year. I would have to ask whether it is right to use the measure to reward people who did something two years ago, or whether it would be better to use the money to encourage people to continue the process in the future. This summer, I concluded that the latter was better than the former and I can give my hon. Friend no assurance that I would not reach the same conclusion again.

Sir Peter Emery: I do not accept absolutely my hon. Friend's final factor. If a balance were left over, it would be reasonable for him to try to use it to repay those who have set the trend. Those are the people from whom the doctors are seeking advice and asking, "How has this worked with you?" Therefore, I believe that the Minister should give me the assurance that I seek.

Mr. Dorrell: As I said, the assurance would cost me nothing, because I am confident that it would not be activated.

Sir Peter Emery: Then give it to me.

Mr. Dorrell: Politics are partly about applying principles, as well as stitching up deals. The principle must be whether it is right to use public money to reward something that has happened anyway or to encourage something that might not happen if we do not use that public money. When faced with that choice this summer, I chose to encourage people to continue to develop computerisation in primary health care rather than simply to reward directly those who did something very valuable—there is no doubt about that, or about the fact that they did it at their own risk—some years ago.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at thirteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 6 December 1991

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

RU486 Drug

9.34 am

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): I beg to present a petition against mifegyne, which is known as RU486, to the honourable Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled from Father Michael Hopley of St. Benedicts Parish, Ealing Abbey in his name and in that of Agnes Grist of 142 Argyle road, W13 in my constituency, from many other of my constituents and others who live beyond my constituency but in the parish of Ealing Abbey. The humble petitioners of Ealing Abbey showeth

"that we the undersigned wish to note with regret that the Abortion Pill mifegyne (known as RU486) has been granted a product licence. We believe that drugs and medicines should be used only to save life. We deplore the fact that this drug causes the death of unborn human beings and we express our grave concern that it will damage women physically and psychologically."

As one who believes that life exists from the moment of conception and is in the image of Christ, I support the petition and am opposed to anything that damages life in the way in which this pill is alleged to do.

The petition states:

"Wherefore, your petitioners pray that your honourable House, which is committed to upholding respect for human life and protection of the weak and vulnerable, will do everything possible to prevent the distribution and use of mifegyne (known as RU486) and any other drugs which, like it, are produced with the deliberate intention of destroying innocent human life. And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray &c."

To lie upon the Table.

Regional Government (England)

9.36 am

Ms. Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): I wish to call attention to the need for regional government in England, and I beg to move,

"That this House deplores the excessive centralisation of government in the United Kingdom since 1979 and the failure to decentralise and devolve power to the nations and regions of the United Kingdom; notes that this is in direct contrast to the general trend towards decentralisation evidence elsewhere in Europe; furthermore deplores the severe cuts in the regional assistance budget since 1979 together with the failure to enact dynamic and effective regional economic policies which would have promoted balanced economic growth and prosperity; expresses alarm at the regional divisions which continue to characterise the United Kingdom economy; and considers that the creation of a regional tier of government in the English regions as well as national devolution to Scotland and Wales is now vital to the United Kingdom's future economic and political well-being."

I am pleased to have the opportunity to raise this subject which has interested me for a long time. The privilege of addressing the House on a Friday morning and of winning the ballot to present a private Member's motion is, however, something of a mixed blessing for hon. Members like myself who represent constituencies a long way from London. We often look forward to Fridays as a day that we can spend with our constituents.

None the less, I am delighted that many of my hon. Friends who I know have a keen interest in the subject of regional government are in their places this morning. Indeed, many of my hon. Friends find it frustrating that regional issues are seldom debated in the House. That is something which we should like to be changed in the future.

Unfortunately, regional policy could hardly be described as one of the current Government's priorities. I believe that that is one reason why regional policy is so seldom debated here. Indeed, we often think that it does not figure at all on the Government's agenda.

I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) is in his place on the Opposition Front Bench. He deals with regional government as part of the shadow environment team. During the debate, I shall obviously be referring to matters that come within my hon. Friend's remit, although I shall also be speaking about some of the important issues relating to regional economic and industrial policy which fall within the remit of the Department of Trade and Industry. As a member of Labour's trade and industry team, those issues are of particular concern to me in that capacity.

I have been in favour of regional government for as long as I have been in politics. I stress that point because the fashionable view of some London-based political commentators is that regional government has become popular among Labour party members in England only as a response to the position in Scotland. That is far from true. We are not here simply in response to what has been described as the "West Lothian question" in deference to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell).

When we arrive to take up our seats in the House of Commons, we are obviously strongly influenced by the constituency that we represent and the part of the country from which we come. Indeed, all the experiences that we have had before coming to the House influence us. That is

[Ms. Joyce Quin]

certainly true in my case. The experience of coming from the north-east of England is an important influence on my views on the issue with which we are dealing this morning.

When one grows up in the north-east, one is aware that the region is a long way from the English seat of power in London. Many people in the north-east often feel marginalised and that their views are not taken into account. Geordie humour sums that up in the phrase, "The English divvent want we and the Scots winna have we." Whether or not that is true, the fact that it is said shows that there is a feeling of isolation in the north-east. The region has many characteristics in common with Scotland, perhaps as many as it does with England. It certainly has characteristics of both, which are evident in such things as its folk music tradition.

The north-east of England and the lowlands of Scotland are also ethnically similar, if one can put it that way. Certainly the same surnames are evident on both sides of the border. However, I do not pursue the ethnic argument to too great an extent because in the United Kingdom our backgrounds are very mixed up. Indeed, the irony of someone with the surname Quin introducing a debate on the north-east should be borne in mind. I have Irish and Scots ancestry as well as many Geordie and northern England forebears. As many of us have mixed backgrounds I would not like to say that ethnic reasons are the main reasons for tabling this motion. I and many others of us believe that a regionalised system is sensible and efficient, both economically and politically. That is one of the main motivations behind my motion.

The history of devolution has been a chequered one in our country, perhaps since the second world war. Whether we were Members of Parliament in the 1970s or not, many of us will remember the many debates on devolution that took place in Parliament at that time. The position is different today and there are many more reasons to pursue devolution further. The debate has moved on and new elements have crept in which make devolution attractive to many people who perhaps did not feel so strongly about it or were even hostile to it in earlier days.

The first difference between now and the 1970s arises from the experience of the past 12 years, during which we have witnessed a growing and marked centralisation of power. Local government has had its powers and influence greatly curbed. The metropolitan counties, such as Tyne and Wear, in which I live, have been disbanded, basically because the Government did not like their political complexion and the fact that people in those areas consistently elected Labour authorities. More and more decisions seem to have been concentrated not merely in Westminster or Whitehall but, increasingly, and particularly during the period of office of the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), in No. 10 Downing street.

The degree of centralisation was particularly marked in England. The regions of England, unlike the nations of Scotland and Wales, do not have their own Cabinet Minister, separate structures or, indeed, such elements as a separate Question Time in the House. That has led to an unbalanced position. We have about 45 million people in England, whereas there are only 5 million in Scotland and slightly fewer than 3 million in Wales. That is an imbalance in population terms. It is not healthy for the 45 million people of England to be so dependent both economically and politically on decisions made at the centre. It makes England one of Europe's most centralised states.

During the past 12 years the Government have shown a lack of interest in regional economic policies. For example, regional aid and selective assistance have been dramatically cut. The cuts were considerable in the early years of the Conservative Government when the country was suffering a deep recession. It was a tragedy that the very regions that needed support and had previously enjoyed a generous level of regional assistance suffered those cuts. It was at the precise moment at which they needed the assistance that it was cut.

That regional neglect has fuelled a feeling in many regions that perhaps they should be empowered to assist themselves in the face of an unsympathetic central Government. I can quote some of the figures on the cuts in regional selective assistance in the period in question. Between 1978-79 and 1990-91, regional selective assistance declined in the north by 78·8 per cent., in Yorkshire and Humberside by 68·8 per cent., in the east midlands by 36 per cent., in the north-west by 80 per cent. and in England as a whole by 75 per cent. Those severe cuts were inappropriate and harmful, in view of the recession of the early 1980s, to the prospect of economic recovery in those areas.

Throughout the past 12 years the regional gap has widened. I admit that the present recession is somewhat more complicated and is biting fairly hard in the south-east of England. None the less, it is clear from the figures for average per capita gross domestic product that the northern regions, Scotland and Wales have a smaller share of the nation's per capita GDP today than in 1979. Several figures, including the Government's own, document that clearly.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): My hon. Friend rightly highlights the problems caused by what the Government have failed to do in the regions. Is it not also a fact that, because industries in the north and north-west and other such places have increasingly been taken over by industries based in the south, the north has always been last for investment and first for cuts? That factor, on top of the Government's failure actively to pursue policies to attract manufacturing industries to the regions, has made the position even worse.

Ms. Quin: I am happy to endorse my hon. Friend's comment. He is right. That is one of the reasons why the Opposition are so keen to get measures going which would enable the regions to promote their own economic development and regeneration for the future.

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Will my hon. Friend also take into consideration the disappointing development on the RECHAR money that is available to regions, especially those where mining, steel and textiles and, indeed, shipbuilding and defence in the south, have suffered as a result of the Government's policies? We are being denied that money by the Government's policies. Will my hon. Friend address that point?

Ms. Quin: I assure my hon. Friend that I was going to come to that issue, which is important. It is significant that the regions that would be eligible to benefit from RECHAR are supporting the European Commission's attitude and not the Government's. They know that the

European Commission is blocking that money for sound reasons. Unless pressure is put on the Government, they will simply substitute that money for money that they were going to spend in the regions anyway, and the regions will not receive any direct benefit, although that was the whole purpose of the RECHAR regulations.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): I believe that the figures that the hon. Lady gave earlier were for regional development grant rather than for regional selective assistance, which has been in existence for only about three years, as she will recall. Under the last Labour Government was not a subsidy of more than £1 million a day given to British Steel and to a number of other companies through regional development grant? It was disguised as if it were some form of regional assistance, whereas it was bailing out uneconomic, old industries which ought to have been modernised. Is not the success story of the present Government's policy the fact that they have managed to turn British Steel into a profit-making industry? Other industries such as shipbuilding, which were previously heavily subsidised, have ceased to take subsidies, with the result that the figures for the northern region appear quite different. A large number of smaller companies there have been receiving regional selective assistance since the middle 1980s.

Ms. Quin: The figures that I quoted were given in a written answer to a question that I put down about the cutbacks in regional preferential assistance. Obviously I strongly believe that industry has to be modernised—none of us is against that—but during the Government's term of office the restructuring in many of our industries has been far too savage. It has cut down our industries in comparison with those of our competitors to too great a degree.

The hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) mentioned steel. Our steel industry is only a fifth the size of even the steel industry in what was West Germany. It is very much smaller than the Japanese industry. While I welcome the modernisation and some of the measures taken within British Steel, I should like the United Kingdom to have a much larger share of the European steel industry.

As I am sure the hon. Member for Stockton, South is aware, I regret the tremendous contraction in our merchant shipbuilding industry. If regional governments had been in place, greater efforts would have been made to modernise and to retain the valuable parts of the shipbuilding industry, for example the yards of North East Shipbuilders Limited in Sunderland. A southern-based Conservative Government were not able to understand the importance of shipbuilding to the industrial future of this country. It is sad that we have allowed our industry to decline. The Japanese are the largest shipbuilders in the world and Japan is hardly a less-advanced or a backward industrial country. We have neglected sectors such as shipbuilding. Regional governments would have evaluated the economic strengths and weaknesses of their region and would have stood up for those industries far more vigorously than the Government have.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): Perhaps it is also relevant to the debate and to the area that the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) represents that during the 1980-81 recession ICI—a large employer and a flagship in the area—lost one third of its suppliers. That does not sound like sensible restructuring but slaughter. I am sure that it would not have happened if we had had a more sensible regional government at the time.

Ms. Quin: I am happy to concur with my hon. Friend's telling comments which certainly describe the situation in the constituency of the hon. Member for Stockton, South.

During the Conservative Government's period of office there have been high levels of unemployment. Those levels have varied widely and dramatically from region to region. Even today there are fewer full-time jobs in the northern regions, Scotland and Wales than there were in 1979. Again, the Government's figures make that absolutely clear.

The current recession has affected all areas, including the south-east. I should not like to give the impression that I think that the south-east of England is uniformly prosperous and everywhere else badly off. I know that it is more complicated than that. Even in London there are great areas of poverty. There are wide differences between the well-off and the least well-off in all regions. The widening of the prosperity gap has been a strong feature of the Government's period in office and is amply documented in their statistics, such as those in "Regional Trends".

Despite that and despite the fact that the south has been hit by the present recession, regional divisions continue to characterise the United Kingdom economy. If we are interested in achieving balanced economic prosperity that should be a matter of concern to all of us.

Interestingly, during the Conservative Government's period in office regional economic disparities have been paralleled by regional disparities in voting patterns. General elections in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s tended to be characterised by fairly uniform swings across the country. If one party was doing well, it tended to do well throughout the country. Since the Government came to office their regionally divisive policies have explained the marked differential patterns of voting. In the 1987 election there was a larger swing to the Opposition in areas such as the north, Scotland and Wales, whereas in the south there was a slight swing to the Conservatives. We must take regional differential voting patterns seriously. They have a message for democracy and for the Government. The case for regional devolution is reinforced, because the views expressed by the majority of people in each region would not be overlooked. They would at least be heard at regional level, if not at national level.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): It is certainly true that in Scotland and Wales, which are rather different from the English regions, what the hon. Lady told us was true, as it is true of her part of the world, the north-east. However, I do not think that there was a significant swing against the Conservative party in the north-west or Yorkshire and Humberside in 1987. The hon. Lady may have the detailed figures, I do not. I believe that we held on to our position rather well in Yorkshire, Humberside and the north-west.

Ms. Quin: I think that what the hon. Gentleman says is less true of Yorkshire. I do not have the detailed figures with me, although I have studied them. It is true that there is more support for the Government the further south one goes.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Stretford): On behalf of the north-west I must point out that my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) is right. While the Conservative party held on to seats in the north-west, despite a swing against it, there were massive swings against the Conservative party in the industrial belt from Liverpool to Manchester, which is the most dispossessed part of the north-west. That simply emphasises my hon. Friend's argument.

Ms. Quin: It is also true that in areas which were already held by Labour there was a further swing to Labour, which shows the polarisation between regions, and within areas where people felt that the Government had failed to understand their economic problems and difficulties.

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): The hon. Lady talks about there being a polarising effect as one comes south. If she looks carefully at the whole north-west region she will find that it is roughly divided, with nearly as many Conservative as Labour seats. In Lancashire there are 15 seats. Twelve are Conservative and three Labour. The same situation arises in Cheshire. The only strength that the Labour party has in the north-west is in Greater Manchester and Merseyside, and the only reason for the movement towards Labour in 1987 was the demise of the Liberal Democrats, who disappeared virtually without trace in our region.

Ms. Quin: In many towns and cities where the Conservatives were once strong they have become an endangered species. In Newcastle, for example, the Conservatives controlled the city at times in the 1960s and 1970s, but they have now been reduced to a humiliating third place. That is because the people of the north-east feel that the Government have failed to address their problems or understand their difficulties. An examination of the figures confirms the polarisation that I have been describing.

Mr. Pike: As a Lancashire Member, I assure my hon. Friend that her argument on polarisation—which is shown markedly by local council changes in Lancashire—will be revealed even more starkly at the next general election.

Ms. Quin: I am happy to agree with my hon. Friend.

Mr. David Nicholson *rose*—

Ms. Quin: I will give way once more and then I must make progress, because many hon. Members wish to take part in the debate.

Mr. Nicholson: The point that the hon. Lady makes about the cities is valid, but I suggest that it is more of a social than a political problem. In the regional cities of England—it is not true of Edinburgh—the middle class has left the city area, and that is a social problem. It is not true of London, where the Labour party has been in steady decline for a long time and has been driven out of areas such as Fulham and Putney, which used to be Labour or marginal seats. The hon. Lady cannot apply her argument to the capital.

Ms. Quin: The social problem which the hon. Gentleman describes has been greatly increased by the Government's divisive policies.

I have referred to the Government's lack of interest in regional support and policies. That was reinforced in a letter to me from the Department of Trade and Industry, in which it was admitted that the assisted areas map of Britain had not changed since 1984, although the economic situation of areas had changed greatly over those years.

The regional structures that have been allowed to survive—in some cases new ones have been set up—in the last 12 years have tended to be quangos with little or no local involvement. For example, regional health boards have been filled with Government-approved appointees rather than people who would reflect the majority view or majority political view of the region. There is great resentment about that in many regions. Indeed, people feel that some areas are being treated rather like colonies. In my county of Tyne and Wear, 80 per cent. of the elected councillors are Labour, yet Labour is practically excluded from all the quangos that are governing a large part of the county's activities. That is not good for democracy.

I point out in my motion that in terms of regional development the United Kingdom is increasingly out of line with other European countries, where there has been a move towards decentralisation. In Britain there has been greater centralisation in recent years.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that, as a general principle, the nearer decisions are made to the people over whose lives they have an effect the better those decisions are likely to be, and that the further away those decisions are made the worse they are likely to be? Does she further agree that our impending closer union with Europe makes it even more urgent for us to have regional government?

We in Sunderland have already suffered over the loss of our shipyards because a decision was taken in Brussels, not in London, that overrode not only local public feeling but all logic. We in particular understand the need for regional government, so that we may have some power over our own lives.

Ms. Quin: I strongly support my hon. Friend. He describes the principle of subsidiarity, an ugly word which nonetheless describes an important aspect of our lives. Decisions should not be taken at a higher level than is necessary, and I find it ironic that the Government should say that they worry about centralisation in Brussels when they are so good at centralising power here at home.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): Will the hon. Lady explain how, if she agrees with her hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) that it is retrograde that decisions about, for example, ship building should be taken in Brussels, a regional government or assembly would make a ha'porth of difference?

Ms. Quin: Under the German structure it would have been harder for that shipyard decision to have been taken. I assure the Minister that I do not hold the Government guiltless in the closure of the shipyards. Instead of meekly accepting the agreement that had previously been signed in Brussels, the British Government should have done much more to challenge the decision, which was no longer appropriate to the circumstances.

Mr. Mullin: It is not a question of the Government simply having meekly accepted the decision. It emerged in the case of the closure of the shipyards that the Government did not even know that Brussels had taken

the decision. The Secretary of State was among the last to learn of it. Had we had regional government, such decisions would have been more open——

Mr. Key *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Mullin: The Minister is wrong. I do not believe he knows the facts. There is no point his coming to the House posturing when the Secretary of State at the time—as I believe he would admit in private, if not in public—did not know that an undertaking had been given that the shipyards would never open again, regardless of whether an offer came forward. In the event, an offer did come forward and it would have been commercially viable. An offer made by a Greek shipping company was rejected, not because any loss of public funds would have been involved but because a deal had been made of which the Minister was not even aware.

Ms. Quin: My hon. Friend is right and in raising that important issue he dealt with another important point. The Council of Ministers in Brussels makes decisions in secret and it is difficult to know precisely what is decided at those meetings. I understand that under the German system there are observers representing the regions at those meetings. Had we had a similar system, it would have been more difficult for the NESL yards to be closed in the circumstances in which they were closed.

Mr. Radice: Is it not a fact, on the link between the European regions and Brussels, that a number of the German Länder now have offices in Brussels from which they are able to find out what is going on and influence decisions in Brussels?

Ms. Quin: Yes, and it is important, and will become even more important, for regions to have a presence in Brussels to argue their corner and ensure that their valid interests are recognised before decisions are taken.

While the example of the German Länder is important, it should be remembered that, ironically, Britain and the allies set up the regionalised system in Germany after the war. The Germans were initially not too keen on having the system, and it is illustrative to examine the results of opinion polls in Germany on the regionalised system there.

In 1949, only a few years after the system had been set up, about half the German population was unhappy with its regionalised structure. That figure has now plummeted to less than 10 per cent. It was significant that, when East Germany was reunited with West Germany recently, the regional structure was adopted in eastern Germany without difficulty. It was one of the smooth elements of the transition—it certainly seems to have caused few significant problems.

We should also consider the economic successes of some of the German regions, which are varied in size and in other aspects. Tremendous efforts have been made in Baden-Wurttemberg in technology transfer, for example, which has been influential on thinking within the Labour party about regionalised structures in the future. Nordrhein Westfalen spends about ten times the amount that the Department of Trade and Industry spends on research and development. The Saarland is a useful model for our traditional industrial regions because it was traditional industrial region, yet its regional government have developed their own strategy for getting to grips with problems of over-dependence on one or two specific industries and have successfully tackled problems that are familiar to many parts of Britain.

Decentralisation has also taken place in other parts of Europe. Spain is a newer recruit to the European Community and it has already achieved considerable regionalisation. It has economic difficulties and I do not seek to disguise that, but the political tensions to which a centralised Spain was prey, particularly in the Basque region and Catalonia, have been greatly eased by the fact that those regions can affirm their own identities and have their own relationships with the European Community, and can develop their own economic potential.

Even in formerly centralised France, where the joke used to be that all school kids were learning exactly the same thing at the same time in whatever part of France they lived, important decentralisation and regionalisation reforms have taken place. They have helped France's economic effort and created impressive "technopoles" which are centres of technological excellence based in different regions, working with industry in those regions to ensure that they are technically and technologically efficient and effective for the future.

Italy, too, has had its regional successes despite the intractable problems of the south, where special factors have been at work. In other regions of Italy, for example Emilia-Romagna, the regional government have worked with local authorities to promote the creation of small businesses in an area where there were few small businesses previously. That has been a particularly striking success.

European countries outside the European Community also have impressive regional models. Last year I attended a conference in Austria, which was also attended by my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice), and I found that even in that smaller country there was none the less an extensive regional network which people of all parties felt was beneficial to their political and economic success. Japan also has a regionalised structure, which is important in the operation of its economy. That fact is sometimes overlooked by western observers.

Despite the many examples of successful regionalisation, for success to take place at a regional level, it is important for the efforts of regional governments to be backed up by a strong regional policy at national level. That is certainly the case in the German system, for example, which has a financial balancing mechanism that favours less-prosperous regions. That commitment at national level needs to be carried on even once the regionalisation process has taken place.

Many of us feel that one of the good aspects of the European Commission is that it seems to be more regionally minded than the Government. It is clearly trying to promote the participation of the regions in European decision making and I am afraid that the United Kingdom will simply be left behind in that process. As my hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North said, many German and other regions have offices in Brussels and thus have a higher profile than many British regions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Normanton mentioned the dispute between the European Commission and the British Government over the RECHAR scheme. Local authorities criticise the Government rather than the Commission because they believe that Europe is more a friend of the regions. They feel that pressure from Europe may eventually result in an unwilling Government being

[Ms. Quin]

forced to give the regions the direct extra help to which they are entitled. However, it is a tragedy that the RECHAR scheme is already going ahead in France and Spain but not in the United Kingdom.

I urge the Minister to take those points on board and perhaps use his influence with his ministerial colleagues. I understand that the Department of the Environment is in favour of accepting the Commission's rulings on the matter, but that the Department of Trade and Industry and the Treasury are the obdurate departments in refusing to unblock the money. If so, I hope that the Minister will use his influence with those other departments to ensure that a sensible decision is taken and that the areas that need those funds can have them in the near future.

Despite—or perhaps because of—increasing centralisation in Britain in the past 12 or 13 years, important initiatives in the regions have sought to redress the imbalance. I pay tribute to the work of the Northern Development Company, which has been set up by industry and trade unions with the support of local authorities in the northern regions because they felt that a development body was important to the northern region as a whole. At first, the Government were reluctant to see that body set up and gave it very little or no help, but subsequently they have been persuaded to help the Northern Development Company by awarding it a grant.

The initiative took place within the region and is an important example of how regions want to help themselves in an unsatisfactory national situation. The company was recently named development agency of the year as a tribute to its efforts, despite the fact that it was greatly underfunded compared to the Welsh or Scottish development agencies.

I also pay tribute to the enterprise boards that have managed to survive in the new climate and to continue their work with a great deal of entrepreneurial skill. The Yorkshire, West Midlands and Greater London enterprise boards have all continued in different ways to encourage regional economic development in their areas.

Business people, too, increasingly see the value of organising at a regional level. The chambers of commerce in the north-east have taken some important initiatives recently. Separate chambers of commerce on Tyneside and Teesside now seek to come together for the good of the region as a whole. The Government should pay greater attention to the fact that chambers of commerce now see the need to group in larger units to exercise more economic clout. The more I consider such developments, the more it appears that the Government are out on a limb and everyone else is coming round to a regional perspective.

Mr. Devlin: I also applaud the work of the Northern Development Company and think that it has a valuable role to play, but why is it necessary to go further and impose on the people of the northern region an extremely costly extra level of government which will presumably have powers to increase taxes and will also have a capital in Newcastle and a bureaucracy which, according to the Labour party's only document on the subject, would seem to be expected to run everything from sport to hospitals? Why is all that necessary and how would it be financed?

Ms. Quin: I do not know why the hon. Gentleman seems to be so worried about the costs involved. We are talking about the simplification of government—decentralising government—which would bring cost benefits. We are also proposing a regional tier of government, with one tier below that. We would not intend to add an extra tier, but want to make the system more effective in future.

I caution the hon. Gentleman about making wild statements on costs, because when the details are considered and the process implemented, it will not be seen as a costly, huge bureaucratic effort, but a more effective one than we have at present.

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Langbaurgh): What about the poll tax?

Ms. Quin: My hon. Friend mentions the poll tax—I agree that we should not take lessons from the hon. Member for Stockton, South about wasting public money.

Most political forces in Britain—apart from the Conservative party—favour a regionalised system. I note that the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) is present. I know that the Liberal Democrats' spokesman on local government recently argued strongly in favour of regional government in England, as well as devolution for Scotland and Wales. The Government should consider why there is such a large weight of political opinion in favour of regionalisation.

The Labour party's commitment to regionalisation goes back a long way, certainly in my region. Resolutions calling for regional devolution were passed at the 1945 regional conference, and there has been a strong feeling in support of regional government at all the regional conferences that I have attended.

I pay tribute to some of the initiatives on regional government taken in the House by my hon. Friends. My hon. Friend the Member for Durham, North presented a Bill on behalf of the northern group of Labour Members shortly after I came into the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) presented a Bill calling for a north-west regional assembly. I also pay tribute to the work done on regional policy by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn). He does a great deal to co-ordinate the work of different policy sectors that would be influenced by the introduction of a tier of regional government. I wish him well with his further efforts in the months leading up to the general election.

The inspiration for our commitment to regionalisation lies partly in our experience of overcentralisation, and its economic and political disadvantages, and partly in the fact that we have seen successful examples of regionalisation elsewhere, to which I have referred. The Labour party believes that much can be achieved in the regional sphere economically as well as politically. We are convinced of the need to set up regional development agencies, building on existing initiatives such as the Northern Development Company, but allowing the work of those agencies to be greatly expanded so that they have a proper investment arm, can properly assess their region's strengths and weaknesses, and take appropriate action to remedy some of the imbalances.

We believe that the Department of Trade and Industry should be far more decentralised. We want matters such as export services to be organised on a regional level so that there is immediate input into the system, with the regional level acting as co-ordinator between the various sources of advice and information that can be given to both small and

large firms on their exporting efforts. Even if only about 10 per cent. of the companies that at present do not export did so in future, there would be a huge difference in the balance of payments deficit, and this country would take a great step towards improved economic performance.

A recent report from the Confederation of British Industry, entitled "Competing with the World's Best" showed that we should have a regionally organised system of technology transfer, as outlined in various Labour party documents. Obviously, however anything that happens at regional level will not detract from the necessity of taking action at a sub-regional level when there are specific economic problems.

It is clear that in the northern region, districts such as Barrow—which is geographically distinct and has a particular dependence on specific industries—may well need sub-regional efforts to ensure that they are given the necessary assistance in future. Nothing that I say detracts from the necessity of having task forces, action teams and organisations that will also tackle the problems at a sub-regional level.

I believe strongly that we must involve local people in such processes, and not simply impose solutions from above as has been done in so many ways during the past 12 years. The regional economic measures that we propose must have a democratic underpinning. Therefore, I strongly support the Labour party's proposal to set up regional assemblies. I also welcome the party's proposals for a sensible transition towards regional assemblies—involving the elected members of local authorities throughout a region in a regional forum so that they become used to working together before the regional assemblies are set up.

I realise that I have spoken for a long time—[HON. MEMBERS: "Carry on."] I shall now move towards a conclusion.

I believe that the Government have wasted a huge opportunity by not introducing the regional agenda before now. It is a great tragedy that the current local government review seems to have entirely ignored the regional perspective. The Government may well find when they look at the results of the review that many people want a regional organisation, not simply a change in local government boundaries of the sort that the Government seem to envisage at present. If the Government are not careful, they will simply repeat the disastrous local government reforms of 1974 that imposed many new authorities on people without proper consultation. The Labour party is committed to consultations on the establishment of regional structures and to ensuring that people will be working together by the time the regional structures are in place.

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): Does my hon. Friend recall that a considerable battle developed over the issue of the northern region, particularly in northern Cumbria, and the BBC? The activities of the people of northern Cumbria were so sustained that the BBC changed its mind and once again included the northern part of Cumbria in the northern region. The people of Cumbria identified with the northern region, not the north-west.

Ms. Quin: I fully accept what my hon. Friend said. His point is important; the BBC cannot be in any doubt of the regional feelings that exist in the northern region as a result of the campaigns that we have fought. There was also a strong reaction when it looked as though we would lose our regional news programme based on Newcastle and simply receive a merged programme emanating from Leeds. It was not that we were anti-Leeds, but we wanted to have our own regional identity and receive the news affecting our district.

Perhaps if representatives of the BBC are listening to this debate they will realise that many of us do not like the fact that so many BBC decisions now seem to centre on the mega-northern region that does not correspond to regional and local identities. We believe that there is no point in having a regional structure unless it corresponds to people's regional identities.

I shall now deal with some likely objections by Conservative Members. One of them has already been voiced by the hon. Member for Stockton, South who said that this would be yet another tier of costly government. Conservative Members may also mention boundaries. In order to get the best system we must consult on boundaries so that people will feel happy in their regions. The present standard planning regions provide the best basis for a regionalised structure and would work well. However, I am prepared to admit that in certain cases adjustments may be needed, depending on the strength of local feeling. The structure already exists. The fact that Conservative Members have created or gone along with a structure of quangos at regional level shows that they see the need for regional structures but are not keen on their being democratically controlled.

We need a flexible system. We might even like to start with a pilot project in one region, and the most suitable candidates may be the regions that are already well advanced on the regional road. I should prefer a regionalised structure overall, assuming that people will accept that and feel happy about their future.

Another objection is that people in pubs and clubs are not talking about regional government. To a certain extent that is true. People do not rush up to me in my constituency and say that they want a regional assembly with this, that or the other power. None the less, they talk about policies imposed from the centre and have the strong feeling that the Government take no notice of their region. We should listen to those real feelings.

An ICM opinion poll published in *The Guardian* on 17 October said that electors warmed to proposals for devolution and that far more people supported than rejected the plans of the Opposition parties to devolve powers to governments in Scotland, Wales and the English regions. That is important. It may not be the highest matter on people's political agenda, but it shows that there is not the hostility to regionalisation that some people would like to claim.

Mr. Devlin: I should like to know a little more about that poll. Was not the question whether people would support devolution in Scotland and Wales and were the English regions tagged on as an afterthought? Most people are in favour of devolution in Scotland and Wales. There is not a large ground swell of opinion, even in the northern region, for regional government. There may be a demand for Scottish independence.

Ms. Quin: It was a national poll and it stated:

"Some political parties are proposing to set up regional governments for Scotland, Wales and the English regions

[Ms. Quin]

which would take over responsibility for some services run by central government. Do you oppose or support these reforms?"

For the English regions the figures were: 43 per cent. in favour, 28 per cent. against, 29 per cent. don't know. Strangely enough, the figures were fairly similar for Scotland and Wales. The hon. Gentleman should bear that in mind.

Mr. Devlin: The poll carried out in *The Scotsman* more recently showed that 45 per cent. of Scots were in favour of outright independence and that a further 39 per cent. were in favour of some form of devolution. That means that over 80 per cent. of the Scottish people favour some form of devolution or independence for Scotland. If that question was posed to the ordinary man in the street in Teesside, Newcastle, London, St. Albans or anywhere else, he would immediately focus upon Scotland and Wales and consider what should be done with them rather than considering whether he should be governed from Taunton or from some other place with which he did not identify.

Ms. Quin: I think that I have already answered the hon. Gentleman. I read out exactly what was stated in the newspaper. Fortunately not all Conservatives seem to be uniformly hostile to regional Government. I was interested to read in the "European Parliament EP News" this month that Sir Fred Catherwood the Conservative MEP for Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire North concludes:

"the centralisation of power in Britain . . . is not at all healthy for society. Contrasting this with the strong regional governments found in Germany and Spain, he feels that regional loyalties—not only in Scotland and Wales, but also in many parts of England, should be reflected in more appropriate and identifiable levels of regional and local government than the current administrative local government areas."

That speaks for itself.

Mr. Hind: Will the elected representatives of the regional assemblies be full time and salaried or will a proportion be full time and the rest part time?

Ms. Quin: I can give the hon. Gentleman my personal opinion, which is that they ought to be full time, given the importance of their work, and they should be salaried. I should not like to think that those who did not come from wealthy backgrounds would be inhibited from becoming members of their own regional assemblies.

In recent years there has been a huge and growing interest in constitutional questions in our country. The growing interest in regionalisation is an importan part of that trend. Regionalisation and regional government can both enrich our democracy and make us more successful economically. I look forward to a Labour Government making that possible.

10.36 am

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): It is no surprise that the motion is proposed by a Labour Member from Newcastle, which has pretensions to be the regional capital of the northern region. Labour is trying to overcome its frustration at not being able to form a Government in England and is trying to break the kingdom into manageable chunks which it hopes it can take over one at a time.

It is also no surprise that Labour, which is in hock to the Scottish Labour party, is trying to free itself from a very difficult hook. It knows full well, as we know, that the Scottish people and particularly those in Strathclyde are greatly over-represented because that region has smaller constituencies than any other region in the kingdom.

A growing cultural change is taking place in Scotland and it demands some form of political expression. Through its constitutional convention north of the border, Labour has been forced into a number of promises to the Scottish people and those promises are incompatible with Labour's continued presence in the United Kingdom Parliament. Labour is in a difficult position. It is trying to square the circle or, as the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) said, trying to answer the West Lothian question. Labour seeks to find a way by which, after all responsibilities for Scottish home affairs have been devolved to a Scottish Parliament, Scottish Members in this House would still have some basis to come here and vote on domestic matters on all subjects in order to support any future Labour Government. Labour cannot have it both ways and I urge it to make up its mind.

As I said, a significant cultural change is taking place in Scotland. That is evidenced by the fact that there is renewed pride in Scottish institutions and cities; Glasgow was the European city of culture. There is now much interest in the speaking of Gaelic. Bands such as Runrig and Capercaillie are singing in Gaelic and their concerts are sold out everywhere they go in Scotland. That does not necessarily mean that the same cultural change that is taking place north of the border is to be seen in the region from which I come or in others in England. Scotland has a separate, national identify—and many Scots would balk at the hon. Lady's reference to Scotland as a region. Many Scots refer to their country as a nation.

I have urged upon the Scottish Conservative party that the Government should find some way of consulting the Scots on what they want and ask whether they want independence and to opt out of the United Kingdom, or to remain part of the United Kingdom—in which case, they must do so on the same basis as the rest of us. That would mean a reduction in their representation in respect of the smaller Scottish constituencies, so that Scotland had the same number of Members of Parliament per head of the population as the rest of the kingdom.

I represent a constituency which has the same population as two Scottish constituencies put together.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I do not disagree with the hon. Gentleman's views on representation, once devolution is brought about. However, why does he suggest that there are only two options—independence for Scotland or remaining in a centralised United Kingdom on the present terms? Most other European countries have found ways of maintaining regional and even national differences within one state.

Mr. Devlin: There is a way out, which is to devolve the powers of the Scottish Office to a Scottish Parliament and then to disallow all Scottish Members of Parliament who sit in this House from voting on any matters on similar subjects relating to England and Wales—while permitting them to vote on issues of foreign policy, defence and national economics. If right hon. and hon. Gentlemen think about that carefully, they might consider it an acceptable solution.

Mr. Beith: Why did the Conservative party never once do that in the history of Stormont, when Ministers who were Members of Parliament for Northern Ireland constituencies served in a Conservative Government?

Mr. Devlin: I am proposing a way round the problem for the future. Stormont is a long-running question and I do not particularly want to be sidetracked by it today.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): The hon. Gentleman might learn something if he did.

Mr. Devlin: I am sure that the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) will have his say later, because Northern Ireland regards itself very much as a separate region of the United Kingdom.

The hon. Member for Gateshead, East referred to the experience of other European countries, but they have very different histories. For example, Spain was brought together under Ferdinand and Isabella as a single kingdom fairly recently, in the 15th century.

Mr. Trimble: Before the United Kingdom was formed.

Mr. Devlin: Let me just point out that it was brought together from separate, distinct entities whose populations spoke different languages. If one travels round Spain today, one finds that the inhabitants of the different parts of that kingdom still speak many different languages.

My point about Scotland holds true for the United Kingdom. England and Scotland are distinct entities, but the north and south of England, or the north and the midlands, or the north and north-west, are not sufficiently distinct to merit separate Parliaments. Similarly, France only recently became a united nation and Germany was the most recent of all, in 1860. Those countries embraced different ethnic groups, having marginally different languages.

Mr. Jack Thompson *rose*——

Mr. Devlin: I am coming to the subject of geordies, if that will help the hon. Gentleman. I know that geordies refer to themselves as being slightly different from the rest of us. When I watched the English and Scots playing each other at the recent international at Murrayfield, I noticed that the geordies cheered for the Scots. I do not know how that would score on the cricket test of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit), but when I asked the geordies about their support in the pub afterwards, they told me, "Well, man, we geordies are only Scots who have been sent south of the border to guard it."

Mr. Jack Thompson: As to other European countries, Germany and France have a regional structure and that of Spain was specifically developed during the post-Franco period, when the central Government negotiated for each region its own form of regional structure. That is the sort of arrangement that could be devised for English regions.

Mr. Devlin: The attempted coup in Spain was a significant element in propelling that country towards regional government.

Mr. David Nicholson: We obviously need to address the histories of other European countries, but is not there a significant contrast between England—which is the subject of the debate—and the countries of Europe that my hon. Friend mentioned? I hold certain views on Scotland and Northern Ireland which may not commend themselves to all my right hon. and hon. Friends, but England is much smaller in area than united Germany, France or Spain. A form of regional assembly may be possible in countries of that size, which also have different histories, but it would be a ridiculous innovation for this country.

Mr. Devlin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, because that was to be my next point—the smallness of our country and the fact that our people live together compactly within small areas. With modern communications—high-speed trains, telephones and fax machines—it is possible for me as a Member of Parliament to have my only office, which also services my Westminster work, in the northern region. Everything is conducted from there. Many businesses run their affairs from locations in the north, west, south-west, or other areas of England and they are perfectly able to communicate, so talking in terms of separate regions is increasingly nonsense.

How much does the hon. Member for Gateshead, East think that it would cost to establish and to run regional assemblies? I am happy to give way to her if she can answer that question. The Treasury conservatively estimated that it would cost at least £20 billion a year to run——

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): Is that figure net or gross?

Mr. Devlin: I am sorry, I misread that figure—it is early in the morning. I meant to say that the cost would be at least £200 million a year. Labour's document, "Devolution and Democracy" does not say where the money for regional government would come from, but suggests that in the early years it would be paid for by a block grant which presumably would be deducted from national taxes. Labour says that regional government would also get a share of the new fair rates that it proposes to introduce. I will give way if I am wrong on that. That means a block grant of we know not how much—and I will give way to any Labour Member who can tell me.

Mr. Caborn: Can the hon. Gentleman say whether that figure of £200 million would be net or gross? What is the basis of the Treasury calculation? What was fed into it? Many of the services that are currently run from Whitehall and Westminster would be developed in the regions. I presume that they are not provided as freebies at present and that costs are incurred in providing them.

Mr. Devlin: The Treasury forecast was on the basis of additional cost, so it must be a net figure. One is considering the establishment of 12 regional assemblies comprising various salaried members and their secretariats, plus the cost of the Scottish and Welsh assemblies. It will be an extremely expensive exercise.

Mr. O'Brien: Can the hon. Gentleman tell the House what is the cost of regional health authorities, regional transport, regional environment offices, regional training, training and enterprise councils, regional employment units and regional travel-to-work areas?

Mr. Devlin: Those costs will still be there. What the hon. Gentleman and his party fail to point out time and again is that the Government already have an active regional policy, in that central Government provide integrated government units in various regions. The hon. Member for Gateshead, East referred to the regional

[Mr. Devlin]

composition of many Departments of state. Those costs will not be subsumed into the new regional council costs——

Mr. O'Brien: Why not?

Mr. Devlin: Because the running costs of the new regional councils will include regional bureaucracy, members' salaries and allowances, members' secretarial allowances, and so on. The costs currently borne by the national taxpayer of the regional employment service will be passed on to regional government. The hon. Gentleman and his party propose a block grant from the national Exchequer, which presumably will roll up the cost of each regional Department of state, as currently constituted. In addition, there will have to be a block grant to pay for the establishment and running costs of the various assemblies.

Moreover, the hon. Gentleman and his party have not made clear what is to happen to the Government's extremely valuable inner city regeneration programme, headed, in my region, by Tyne and Wear development corporation and Teesside development corporation. The document published by the Labour party says that they will become democratically accountable. Only last week the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Dr. Kumar) said in his maiden speech that he looked forward to the day when they were made democratically accountable. Is it correct that, according to the Labour party's plans, they will be subsumed within the regional councils' purview?

Mr. O'Brien: Existing regional officers and their expensive bureaucracies will no longer, under regional government, be responsible to central Government. The buildings used for that purpose could then be used for regional operations. The hon. Gentleman's point is misleading. He has not thought through the implications.

Mr. Devlin: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, even though he did not answer my question. The Labour party would presumably want to take over regional government in my area. It would then try to run directly all the regional services and put them under the control of such luminaries as Councillor Paul Harford of Cleveland county council. We should have to wait and see just how well they would do. I suspect that that would be to the enormous disadvantage of my constituents. Moreover, I suspect that there would be a great deal of ill feeling in my part of the world about regional government being run from Newcastle. Traditionally, there has been great rivalry between Teesside and Newcastle over matters relating to the northern region. I see no attraction in the prospect of regional government for my area being run from Newcastle.

During the Langbaurgh by-election the hon. Member for Langbaurgh alleged that people had said that they might not vote for foreigners. My experience on the doorsteps was that that was sounding back very much against Michael Bates, the Conservative candidate, who came from outside the area but from only 30 miles away—Newcastle. He was regarded on the doorsteps of Langbaurgh as a foreigner.

Ms. Quin: The hon. Gentleman insists on referring to Newcastle when he means Gateshead. If there is such rivalry as the hon. Gentleman suggests between Teesside and Tyneside, why are the chambers of commerce of both Teesside and Tyneside coming together in the regional form to which I referred?

Mr. Devlin: As I have explained before to the chamber of commerce in Teesside, the attitude of modern business men towards international and national travel and regional identities is entirely different from that of the people in the street. I find that there is no feeling of identity in my constituency with the people of Newcastle. My constituency is the only one that straddles the River Tees. Half my constituents want to go back into North Yorkshire; the other half want to go back into county Durham. None of them likes being in county Cleveland. Most of them would be happy to see the demise of the Teesside entity. They are hardly likely, therefore, to be happy about the prospect of a joint entity that stretched from the River Tees, or even further south of the River Tees, right the way up to the Scottish border. The differences between the proud Yorkshireman and the guy from the border region of Northumberland are immense. There is very little identity between the two.

I was interested, therefore, to hear what the hon. Lady said about boundaries. I am sure that when we come to consider where these regional governments are to be established, the boundaries will be absolutely essential. If the hon. Lady is promising us consultation on these matters, perhaps we should leave the whole question alone until after the next election when this Government have been returned for their fourth term in office. A local government commission will be established in every area of Britain, starting in Cleveland, which will have as its mission consultation with local people regarding what they believe would be the most appropriate local government unit for them. If they all miraculously stand up and vote for regional government to be run from Newcastle, the hon. Lady and her party can cheer and be happy, but I suspect that they will be sadly disappointed.

What is going to happen to the poor old Members of Parliament? The hon. Lady and I spend time lobbying individual Ministers at the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department of the Environment and other Departments of state. We do so because we know that that is where the power lies and because we want to get something done for our constituents. There is a direct link between my constituency surgery, held at the weekend, and Ministers' offices in Westminster where the decisions are made. What will happen if there is some form of regional government that is responsible for different layers of government?

If we follow the Labour party's model, there will be a local authority, which will be the main purpose authority, a regional government, which will be responsible for strategic decisions, and the national Government. If a group of my constituents came to me and complained about the continuing road delays on the A19—there is a road bridge that should never have been built and which has been constantly under repair since it was started—what would I say to them? Should I say, "I'm sorry; although I'm your Member of Parliament, you really should go and see the local main purpose authority"? Or do I go and see the regional government, in which case I will need to get hold of the regional councillor for the area and bend his or her ear? Or do I go and see the Minister, who would promptly tell me that the strategic authority for roads in the north of England falls under the

responsibility of the regional government? Instead of simplification, I see obfuscation of the issue as different layers of authority vie with each other for authority over, say, the A roads in the region. I see people arguing about who is responsible. Even now there are great arguments between Cleveland county council and Stockton borough council or Middlesbrough borough council about who is responsible for the level of the poll tax, or for the way in which the housing department has done something, or for matters relating to the fabric of schools. The imposition of an even more remote layer of government will lead to further complication.

If the hon. Lady is so keen on regional government, I strongly suggest that she goes up to Scotland, which is not very far from where she lives, and talks to people about what they feel about it. My Scottish relatives, of whom there are many, are deeply unhappy about the disappearance of the old traditional counties with which they felt they could closely identify and about the introduction of regions such as Borders, Central, Highland and other massive areas. They do not like them because they feel that they are too remote and because they do not know whom to ask about the provision of services.

Page five of Labour's document mentions the development of regional centres. Interestingly, it states that Edinburgh is an example of the success of regional financial centres. I spent some time studying the centres with a Scottish bank, so I can tell hon. Members—exclusively for those who wish to know—that Edinburgh's success as a financial centre has nothing to do with regional or developmental authority, but is 100 per cent. down to the enterprise and ingenuity of Scottish entrepreneurs.

Let us look at the tangled web of bureaucracy that we shall have if the Labour party wins the next election. First, Labour will be our landlords, will run the English Industrial Estates Corporation and will collect the business rates. Secondly, it will be the regional investment bank, which will simply mean that instead of proper decisions being made on what is best for the future needs of the region, it will once again be in hock to its union paymasters. Thirdly, it will wind up the urban development corporations, which have been the most successful entities in achieving the economic regeneration of the north-east.

The hon. Member for Gateshead, East said that the Government had failed to provide for the north-east, but let us see what my predecessor—hon. Members will recall that I defeated him at the last election when he was an Alliance Member of Parliament—has to say about it. He is the new chairman of the Teesside branch of the CBI. He said:

"The North is poised to make a further stride down the road in its development as a modern, forward-looking, prosperous region."

Even Labour-controlled Cleveland county council agrees that there have been successes. It says:

"Cleveland has seen a great deal of change in the 1980s. More of its people own their own homes. They have higher incomes and live longer. They have more choice as consumers, and demand better service and higher quality."

The hon. Member for Gateshead, East relied much on the views of chambers of commerce, so let us see how the Association of British Chambers of Commerce feels about taxation being handed to the northern region. It said:

"The Uniform Business Rate gives vital benefits which businesses can't ignore. Predictability in rate bills."

What will happen to that under a Labour regional authority? I suspect that we shall be back to the bad old days when, in March, companies did not know whether they were going to get slapped for half their profits. The association further says:

"A cap on rate poundages increases to an inflation level or less . . . A level playing field in the effect of rates on business costs removing distortions between neighbouring areas. The chief unfairness of the previous system was that businesses in the North and Midlands had for many years paid more than they should. This wrong is now being put right."

I remember campaigning hard for the uniform business rate because I did not understand why a shop selling jewellery in Stockton high street should pay more than a jewellery shop of the same size selling the same items in Bond street. That absurdity resulted from our having two expensive layers of Labour government, which stopped at nothing in milking business to pay for its excessive spending promises but found, to its surprise, that businesses were moving to neighbouring areas. How does one explain the fact that companies in a thriving business park in a nice quiet market town such as Northallerton in North Yorkshire are called Yarm Engineering or Stockton Fabrication? Those businesses have been driven out of Stockton-on-Tees and Teesside, a main industrial manufacturing area, by the high cost of maintaining their plant and factories in the centre of the area.

We still have not heard from the hon. Member for Gateshead, East or her party where the regions will be. We have heard that there will be consultation on boundaries. We have not been told where their capitals will be, which will be a highly contentious issue. Would any Opposition Member like to hazard a guess on whether Ipswich or Norwich would be the regional centre for East Anglia? I wonder what the people of Norwich or Ipswich would say about it. Should Shrewsbury, Taunton or Plymouth be the capital of the south-west region? I can foresee nothing but grief in such decision making.

Mr. Hind: What about Liverpool or Manchester?

Mr. Devlin: I should be interested to stand on the sidelines and watch the blood running down the walls as that is sorted out between the two ruling Labour groups.

I am interested to see that the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) would not balk at the prospect of having to sort out those knotty problems. He said that that is not just an early priority but an immediate one. How immediate? Would it be done in the first year of a Labour Government, in the first Labour Parliament, or in two or three terms, or will there be an exchange rate mechanism-type growing process whereby we get used to the idea over 10 or 15 years and the Scots can have it immediately because they are culturally and politically ready for it, but the people of the north, who are not that bothered, will have to wait 15 years until they see the advantages that will supposedly accrue to Scotland and then will mount the barricades and demand the same for themselves? It is clear that no one in the northern region is demanding that yet.

Labour wants to set up a Parliament in Scotland, where public spending is 23 per cent. higher per head than in other parts of the kingdom. If it had to finance that by raising its own taxes, Scotland might become a socialist state along Albanian lines with high taxes, centralised planning and everyone living in council houses and enjoying the beauties of the socialist system in its most

[Mr. Devlin]

untrammelled form. The people of the north-east might look across the border, full of envy, and say, "Not for us, thank you very much, please rebuild Hadrian's wall."

I can foresee that scenario. What will the Labour party do? As the hon. Member for Dagenham says, it will have to begin such a system in the first year of a Labour Government. Unless it starts us down that road fairly quickly, the people of the north-east and the other regions will not want to follow.

I should be interested to hear how that will be paid for, because in addition to giving £200 million a year the Labour party is committed to regional development agencies, to investment in first-class infrastructure for the area, high-speed rail links and other exciting prospects for the region. It is quite happy to hand the promises out, but not so happy to tell us how they will be financed.

That perhaps gives us some idea of what the regional taxation profile will look like. I rather suspect that the present regional disparities to which the hon. Member for Gateshead, East referred, not least the voting disparities, will change as one moves further south. As one goes further north, taxes will get higher as people are more likely to vote Labour. As one goes further south, people will be paying lower regional taxes and will vote Conservative. I suspect that rather than looking north, the people of the north-east will look south and say, "Hang on, why are they only paying such a small amount in the midlands or south when people to the north of us, who are experiencing the full generosity of the Labour party's form of government, are paying much more?"

I do not think that the Labour party has anything to crow about, because Labour-controlled local authorities have the most empty homes available and have the highest community charges. I am sure that my constituents are mindful of the fact that not everyone in the country pays £440 in community charge. They were extremely grateful to the Government for stepping in with a £140 rebate because they saw their aunts, uncles, friends, cousins and others elsewhere in the country paying a great deal less. I suspect that if ever the day came when we had the misfortune of the Labour party inflicting regional government on us from Newcastle, those people would be wondering why their income tax or whatever other form of tax that Labour would seek to impose was so much higher in the northern region than elsewhere.

One reason why people in our area consistently vote Labour is that they are told by the Opposition that the whole country owes them a living and that everything that has happened to them—the economic misfortunes of past years—has been inflicted purposely by a Conservative Government. That is the impression that is given and Labour likes to think that one should never say anything good about our region. We can perhaps refer to the superior working-class culture and superior beer, but we are not allowed to refer to the economic or industrial successes. We must sit back and say how awful everything is, blame the Government and say that they should hand out more money to the regions to assist them. That does not mesh with the reports from the region at the moment.

It is interesting that the present recession is much deeper in the south than in the north. Indeed, the CBI northern region economic situation report states:

"The northern region, one of the last to experience the effects of the recession, will also be one of the first to enjoy the benefits of the recovery. This is based upon the knowledge that Northern business is now genuinely far more broadly based and will be able to respond quickly and positively to future improvements in both national and international economies."

The idea of a home-grown recession is ludicrous. I am currently trying to assist a company in my constituency with export credit guarantees. That company is having difficulties exporting overseas because of the sluggishness of other economies—it does not sell its products in this country.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): As someone interested in trying to promote industrial regeneration and further growth in the north-east does my hon. Friend agree that the additional burdens laid on businesses in regions such as his own by the absurd idea of the imposition of a regional tier of government and the increased taxation necessary to pay for that tier would have an adverse effect on local business, would increase costs, would reduce competitiveness and would help to drive business and jobs away from his region?

Mr. Devlin: One of the great pleasures of the north-east is that we attract the second-largest amount of outside investment after Wales. We do so because business conditions in the north of England are excellent and the work force is highly trained. There are many attractions to the area and the Government offer a comprehensive range of incentives and other packages for people who want to invest in it. That is why there are so many Japanese, American and other foreign investors in our area. We rarely hear anything about that from the Opposition.

Mr. Jack Thompson: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that in my constituency there has been no major industry since 1979, except for last year when two British companies sold their businesses to the Taiwanese? Glaxo sold its factory, as did Gresham Lion, and its successor, Dowty, which could not make the business succeed, sold to the Taiwanese. I am not criticising the Taiwanese, because they were better than the British. There has not been any real investment in that region since 1979.

Mr. Devlin: When I spoke to the Conservative association in the hon. Gentleman's constituency I heard only a litany of problems caused by the Labour-controlled council, which has done absolutely nothing to promote the area.

Let us consider the region as a whole. The chairman of the Northern Development Company—Sir Ron Dearing—said in *The Northern Echo* on 17 September:

"I am not saying the recession hasn't hurt. It has. But in terms of the rest of the country, we have survived better than anyone".

The road to recovery is now clear. A recent regional survey by the accountants KPMG Peat Marwick McLintock concluded that small and medium-sized firms, which have been encouraged by the Government, would set the pace, blazing a trail for others to follow. That view is shared by the assistant regional director at CBI Northern, Mr. Neil Etherington, who said recently:

"The North East will pull us out of the recession. And I do believe, because this region's economy has a broader spread, that it will be the small- to medium-sized companies which will lead to economic recovery".

Ms. Quin: The hon. Gentleman refers to Sir Ron Dearing, the chairman of the Northern Development Company, but is he aware of his recent speeches in which

Sir Ron lamented the lack of a structure in the north-east which, he was worried, would weaken that area in Europe in the coming years?

Mr. Devlin: Sir Ron Dearing heads one of the most successful regional development companies in the country. He is entitled to his view, but I do not accept the case—and the Labour party has yet to make it—for imposing a very large and costly bureaucracy on people in the north-east of England. If Labour wants economic regeneration and redevelopment, why cannot it support the development corporations that already exist? Some hon. Members from Newcastle and Teesside have nothing but ill to say about development corporations. One of the startling omissions from the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Langbaurgh was any mention of Teesside development corporation. That was quite extraordinary.

The CBI also found that more of the region's businesses expected new orders to increase rather than to decrease. It said:

"Firms remain optimistic about demand prospects for their industries . . . Growth is expected in both domestic and export orders."

Similarly, it said:

"Survey respondents indicate that by UK standards Northern investment levels will hold up quite well over the next 12 months."

Indeed, it continued:

"Investment intentions are now worst in the West Midlands and South West and best in the North and . . . Humberside."

When one considers the whole spectrum of economic indicators one finds that the north looks surprisingly healthy. Unemployment, which is in decline in the north and has declined significantly since 1987, is rising fastest in East Anglia, which is currently supposed to be the most economically successful region.

The survey by international management consultants A. T. Kearney—produced in association with but not by the CBI—reported that businesses in the north were the most optimistic in the country. Figures for receivership were less positive, but entirely consistent with the view that the region has suffered a much shorter and less severe recession than any other. The restructuring that has taken place during the Government's tenure of office has been remarkably good for the region.

The Government's economic role in the north-east—as elsewhere—is to create a climate in which businesses can prosper and, in turn, generate strong and sustainable employment growth. However, in view of the region's deep-rooted difficulties—such as its overdependence on declining industries—the Government have sought to underpin the policies with substantial central support. Indeed, the north-east region has benefited to the tune of more than £3·5 billion since 1979. Much of that public sector support has been designed also to attract investment from private enterprise. Teesside urban development corporation, for instance, is an example of the Government using pump priming to attract private sector money and skills to help in the process of urban regeneration. In 1991-92, the TDC had a budget allocation of £51 million, which it is using to great effect.

If the hon. Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson) wants to know about urban regeneration, he should know that the most exciting urban regeneration project probably anywhere in western Europe is that on the river bank in my constituency. The next time the hon. Gentleman is on the train for Newcastle he should get off at Darlington and I will arrange a guided tour of that project for him. He would be most welcome.

The hon. Member for Wansbeck believes that no inward investment has come to his constituency and, if that is the case, I am sorry for his constituents. However, Dr. John Bridge, the NDC chief executive, said recently:

"Since 1985 some 25,000 jobs have been either created or safeguarded in the North of England as a result of inward investment."

I have great doubts and misgivings about the concept of regional government. I believe that it offers no benefits to my constituents. The Labour party is trying to prop up its popularity in Scotland by seeking to impose a similar solution on the rest of England. We are a happy, contented, compact little country with 48 million people who live together in perfect harmony with their own local, often county, loyalties. Yorkshiremen who currently live under the authority in Cleveland would have no inclination to join the northern region. Geordies and tykes have never got on particularly well—they are always friendly to one another, but they are distinct groups.

I do not believe that the case for regional government has been made. The motion should be rejected.

11.21 am

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central): First, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) for initiating this debate, which is extremely timely. When my hon. Friend was a Member of the European Parliament she did a tremendous amount of work to promote not only her region, but the concept of regional government for England. She also did a lot to develop that concept within the European Community. Unfortunately this debate has revealed the narrow and naive view held by the Conservative party—illustrated graphically by the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin).

Although the single currency and the new powers for the European Parliament continue to grab the headlines, they are not the only issues to be hammered out at Maastricht next week. A new role for the European regions is also on the agenda. During the summit, Heads of Government will decide whether the European regions should be given a greater role in decision making in the Community. No doubt the rest of Europe will say yes to that, but the British Government will, as usual, drag their heels on such a development.

The new article 198(a) to chapter 4 of the draft treaty on the union, on a committee of regional and local authorities, has not been opposed by the British Government. Consultations were held with regional and local authorities on the new article and the Commission submitted evidence to it. On article 198(a) it stated:

"The members of the Committee shall be elected representatives at regional or local level. They shall be appointed in their personal capacity and shall not be bound by any mandate."

When the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment replies to the debate, I hope that he will tell us how the British Government will apportion the 24 delegates from the United Kingdom who will represent us on that new body, the committee of regional and local authorities. Many people on the other side of the English channel believe that that may become an important institution for the future development of Europe. Initially, the committee will be a consultative body, but many of our European colleagues hope that its role will be enhanced.

[Mr. Richard Caborn]

Given that we have no true regional representatives, I hope that the Minister can tell us how the Government believe that the committee will operate.

Just because the regional dimension has not received the attention afforded to monetary union, that does not mean that it is less important to our future economic well-being. We believe that regional government has proved to be a key economic regenerator of many of the European regions. Our lack of a regional strategy has acted as a brake on our economic development and, in the future, it will be a barrier to competing in the single market.

The lack of fuss about regional policy in the United Kingdom is not in tune with the rest of Europe. The lack of attention devoted to it by the British Government and, in particular, by the British press, in terms of the discussions at Maastricht, is symptomatic of our isolationist approach not only to Europe, but to the development of regional policy.

In every other European country, regional policy has become a hot political issue, particularly in the past decade. In the current debate about Maastricht that policy is worthy of public and Government interest. If there is a move towards monetary union, convergence across the Community must take place. The first part of the mechanism for developing and delivering that convergence will be regional policy.

It is unfortunate that the Government have adopted such a negative approach to regional policy. That was amply demonstrated by the speech of the hon. Member for Stockton, South, as it was by the chairman of the Conservative party who produced a document in July entitled "Regional Red Tape". That document was in response to that produced by my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) on devolution and democracy. At least Labour's document tried to lift the debate about Europe and the regions and their inter-relationship. It also sought to initiate a debate on how we can start regenerating the north of England and develop a more balanced nation. That would assist all our regions.

The chairman of the Conservative party, the right hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Patten), and the hon. Member for Stockton, South have tried to knock down the political and economic case for regional policy that has been advanced by the Labour party. Unfortunately, all the Government have done is to ask why we did not support the purchase of council houses or the provisions for grant-maintained schools. The level of debate has been poor. The Conservatives have not put forward one constructive alternative to the Labour party document. Those outside the political arena believe that the Government have made a poor attempt to answer some searching questions. Those in industry and those who are concerned about our future in Europe have been disappointed at the level of debate.

Mr. Devlin: The Conservative party's vision on this issue is clear. We want a single tier of local authority in each area. Therefore, we shall establish a local government commission to consider the needs of each area. We shall allow single-tier local authorities to be established within the boundaries considered necessary by that commission. That is a clear policy statement.

Mr. Caborn: I accept that. It is important to consider the role of the Government in terms of economic regeneration, the role of local government and, by implication, the need for strategic levels of government. Those issues were raised by the Secretary of State for the Environment, especially when he was running for the leadership of the Conservative party.

Mr. David Ashby (Leicestershire, North-West): There is one thing I cannot understand about the Labour party policy. In my area the local district council is Labour controlled. That district authority and I agree entirely on the future of local government. It wants a unitary authority and it wants it to be based upon its present framework. It believes that it should be free to unite with other district councils, as it sees fit, to provide wider services, rather than have them imposed by Whitehall and central Government. In my part of the world, therefore, the Labour party is agreeing not with the hon. Gentleman, but with the Conservative party.

Mr. Caborn: I do not know to which local authority the hon. Gentleman is referring, but may I try to explain the context of the debate to him, because it seems to be going straight over the heads of Conservative Members, as was evident in that intervention which I shall now try to answer.

What the hon. Gentleman's local authority is saying is absolutely right. There will be all-purpose authorities for the delivery of services. I do not think that there is any disagreement between us on that. Indeed, the Secretary of State for the Environment has said that we should remove the county council layer of government and move down to all-purpose districts, the size and boundaries of which have yet to be decided. It is clear that such districts should be the point of contact with the local population. That is the point at which the services will be delivered. That idea is wholly compatible with the argument about subsidiarity. We are saying that there is a structural weakness in the United Kingdom and that we need a strategic authority, not for providing services, but for developing and co-ordinating——

Mr. Ashby *rose*——

Mr. Caborn: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will allow me to develop my argument and I shall then come back to him.

Such a strategic authority would have an economy of scale of about 5 million people. If the hon. Gentleman looks at what has happened in Europe in the past decade ——in France, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden and Italy——he will see that all those countries have devolved their powers down to regional authorities. On average, their economy of scale is about 5·7 million people. Those countries are co-ordinating their industrial and economic strategies at the regional level. We are not talking about removing powers from the layer of government below local government and sucking them up; we are talking about taking power from the centre.

I stress that a council of the regions will be agreed next week which will probably become operative in January 1993 and on which the regions of Europe will be represented. The regions will then have some control and not only over such things as regional grants. They will start to have an impact on the regulations and directives that come before the House and our Parliament and become

part of our statute book. We must understand what regional government is all about. It is not local government; it is part of the government of the nation.

Mr. Ashby: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, because I had misunderstood him a bit. Does he agree, however, that what my local authority wants is a wider authority for strategic services, for the delivery of those services, and that local authorities can group themselves as they see fit in providing what may be different services, but that what the hon. Gentleman wants is another tier of central Government, which will impose on the regions what central Government do? Is he not seeking to impose another burden on our people? Is not that what we are really talking about?

Mr. Cabora: Yes——

Mr. Ashby: I thought so.

Mr. Cabora: If that is the description of regional government, yes, but the hon. Gentleman has highlighted the negative part and, unfortunately, that thinking is prevalent among Conservative Members. The Opposition take a totally different attitude. Obviously, the hon. Gentleman will argue his case and people will come to a judgment—that is what debate is about—but our judgment is that there is a need to bring decision-making nearer to the people. The hon. Gentleman may choose to ignore developments in Europe, but what has happened there means that a different form and structure of government, a newly developed decision-making arena, will result from the Maastricht discussions. I am asking the hon. Gentleman whether he wants to go down that road. This country has so far gone in the opposite direction.

I shall seek to show clearly where the hon. Gentleman went wrong on public expenditure and how other nations, which are much more balanced, have been able to develop their real economies, their manufacturing bases and their wealth-creating processes so much more effectively than we have been able to do in the United Kingdom. Regional government has provided the framework for other European countries to develop the entrepreneurial atmosphere and spirit that are necessary for the development of small and medium-sized businesses.

I hope that I have answered the hon. Gentleman's question. We are not talking about local government; we are talking about a strategic layer of government. That layer would not be an imposition; it would be democratically accountable. It would encompass the many quangos that the Government have set up in many areas, the operations of which have been highly criticised by the Public Accounts Committee and the Audit Commission. We would bring all that together in a strategic authority, which would not be dictated to by Whitehall and the mandarins down here.

A few weeks ago we had a classic example of that in a debate on the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill. How do I, as somebody from Yorkshire, know what Cardiff wants? It would have been far better if a decision on that matter had been taken in Wales. Such decisions should not be made here. We criticise the European Commission for its interventions about our roads and about the development of the channel tunnel, but the people of Wales and of many of our regions should also say, "We should be making our own decisions, not people down there in London with little or no interest in us." What is even more frightening is that the decision-making down here—I am not talking only about the Government, but about the media and the City of London—is conditioned by the thinking of the south-east and of London in particular. In many cases, such thinking has no bearing on what is happening in the regions. Many industrialists and people from local authorities on both sides of the political spectrum are saying, "We should have more power over the decisions that affect our lives", instead of being subject to arbitrary decision making from institutions down here. I repeat that in the past 10 years there has been a devolution of power down into the regions right across Europe, not only inside the EC.

I was interested to read an article on local government financing in the *Financial Times* of Monday 28 October by the Controller of the Audit Commission, Howard Davies. Referring to the Government's Green Paper, he stated:

> "The word 'Europe' does not appear in the green paper on introducing unitary authorities. Yet the European Commission is open about its desires to create a Europe des régions. There's a European Assembly of the Regions and regional social policy is oriented towards regional needs.
>
> It's certainly arguable that without some sort of regional structure, the UK will be increasingly disadvantaged with no way of influencing Community regional policy. My feeling is that we probably need to create a set of interlocutors on a regional basis who can have the right kind of influence on EC regional and social policies."

That interview was part of an in-depth report on a person who is well-respected in the House.

Mr. Ashby: I was interested to hear the hon. Gentleman say who wrote that article. The hon. Gentleman has completely failed to understand that he has not yet asked himself the question, "What is a region?" Throughout Europe, regions have evolved into states only recently. Europe has a completely different concept from this country of the question, "What is a nation?" It is completely different in Germany and France and throughout Europe where there are new nations, most of which are not more than 100 years old. Those nations are made up of regions. We are talking about a return of local nationalism, which is something that we do not have over here. That is the difference. The hon. Gentleman is trying to impose regions here, whereas Europe has regions.

Mr. Cabora: I am not trying to impose anything. I am trying, within the context of the debate, to identify how we can move forward from the 1990s to the 21st century, the problems that we as a nation will have to face, our relationship with Europe and how we can learn from the nations that we have said are the best, such as Germany, and develop a sound strategic regional policy. We need a delivery mechanism to deal with many of the issues that have been raised, such as convergence.

I shall come to what the Audit Commission has said. It answers some of the questions posed by the hon. Member for Stockton, South.

Mr. Devlin: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Cabora: I wish to go through the argument and then I shall willingly give way to the hon. Gentleman.

In 1989 the Audit Commission published a series of documents on the local government dimension of urban regeneration and economic development. The critical part of one of the reports said that the Government had some 30 or 40 different schemes in operation. It said:

[Mr. Caborn]

"The Commission reported that individual programmes such as Urban Programme assistance from central government were unnecessarily bureaucratic."

The commission also said that the Government's many schemes, including the urban development corporations, were

"a 'patchwork quilt' of complexity and idiosyncrasy."

That was further underlined by the Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte report which referred to "confusion and uncertainty" and "absence of co-ordination."

The Public Accounts Committee also examined the wide band of assistance for regeneration, especially of the north. It spoke of

"insufficient liaison between departments at national level."

It described the multiplicity of bodies and initiatives as

"potentially a recipe for confusion and overlap."

I ask hon. Members to compare that with what is happening in Scotland and Wales. The simple co-ordination through development agencies in both Scotland and Wales does not receive the criticism that the Audit Commission has levelled against the system in England.

We must consider the way in which some Departments operate. We have the most departmentalised approach to many of the complex issues that we seek to resolve. There is in-fighting in Westminster and in the regions. That was most graphically illustrated when Sheffield was arguing about an urban development corporation. I do not want to go into that argument; I simply wish to illustrate my point.

The chamber of commerce, the local authority, the trade unions and the Members of Parliament came down to London to see the Secretary of State. We all sat on one side of the table and the Secretary of State sat on the other. The person who sat at the side of the Secretary of State was the regional officer from Leeds. As he saw it, his role was not necessarily to support the region but to be the earpiece and branch line for the Secretary of State. That is where the influence is and remains. That branch line of decision-making is there.

Opposition Members argue, with a great deal of support from industry and commerce, that such decision-making should be at a lower level.

Mr. Key: I shall deal in my speech with the importance of the regional offices. The hon. Gentleman has got the wrong end of the stick about how they work. The article in the *Financial Times* to which the hon. Gentleman referred was a good article. He also quoted from Audit Commission reports, but he has not quoted from the Audit Commission response to our consultation paper on the structure of local government. As he said, it makes some criticism of the European dimension, but in paragraph 8 headed "Europe" it also says:

"While local government structure in the UK cannot be determined by the nature of European structural funds and the case for regional authorities with power over service delivery has not been made out, the European dimension must nonetheless be considered in the longer term."

That is a slightly different gloss.

Mr. Caborn: I am sure that the Minister will recall that I said a few moments ago that in our view the role of regional government is not delivery of services. We believe that that should go to the lowest level. Regional authorities should be strategic bodies to co-ordinate and enable. That is what happens in many other European countries. I do not necessarily disagree with the Minister. Where it is possible to deliver services at the lowest point, one does just that. That is why we examine the expanded role of all-purpose authorities. Even the Government accept that all-purpose authorities will have a wider role; but the local authority delivers services.

There is a major difference of opinion about the centralisation of government and the state. The Government want to continue to centralise. That was illustrated during the Conservative party leadership contest in an article in *The Sunday Times* of 18 November 1990. The right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), the present Secretary of State for the Environment, laid out how he saw the development of local government. He said:

"I know enough of our local government to know that if there is a cash pool out there, they go for it. Within no time at all, the directly elected mayor of some industrial town or city in the north would spot that if he came along with imaginative ideas for raising standards and delivering services, he would get support, he would be the one that would claim the credit and the central government would be proud to let him have it. This would give value for money, a competitive sense between community and community and a new surge of local independence and pride."

That illustrates the thinking of the Conservative party. It must always be community against community. There is a big pot of gold down in Westminster for which we all scrabble. We all get into the trough and try to grab a bit for ourselves. What a way to run a country—an advanced industrial nation! The Conservative party's attitude is epitomised by that statement and followed through by the Audit Commission.

Is not it more sensible to say that we have responsible people out there with whom we have developed partnerships? We should create a synergy of activity in which local small and medium-sized companies can develop, technology transfer can be operated and academic institutions can be brought in. One of the great incentives for development in Germany has been the ability to bring academic institutions into the real world of production to allow technology transfer, aided, abetted and assisted by the Länders and the local authorities.

In Britain, public sector-led investment has taken place down the M4 corridor and in the south-east. It is not surprising that there has been such growth in the south-east. It has been aided and abetted. That has been illustrated. The points that have been made about public expenditure are as far from the truth as one can imagine.

Let us look at the figures for central Government expenditure per head of population in the north and the south. In 1989-90 expenditure in the north of England was £1,707 per head. In the south-east of England it was £1,876 per head. The figures for expenditure by the Ministry of Defence and the Departments of Trade and Industry and Transport in 1989 were £248 per head of population in the north of England and £546—almost double—per head in the south-east. That is the amount of public money per head of population spent on overheating the south-east of England. That imbalance has become progressively worse in the past decade. In the past eight years, the amount has increased by 15 per cent. in the north of England but by 24 per cent. in the south.

Mr. Key: The hon. Gentleman puts his finger on an extremely important issue which has absorbed an enormous amount of my time in the past year. I should be happy to have a five-hour debate on this part of his speech

alone, let alone the rest of regional policy and government. The real problem that Governments always face anywhere in the world is how to distribute central funds to regions and localities as far down as possible. The hon. Gentleman appears to argue that it would be better to use a method based on population, irrespective of need or possibly even a sensitive formula-driven system which would take account of different needs of different regions. That is exactly what the standard spending assessment system has been designed to do. It has been refined over many years. The hon. Gentleman's party does nothing but criticise it. What is the hon. Gentleman's answer then?

Mr. Caborn: As the Minister well knows, we have had this argument about standard spending assessments many times—whether on the police authority, transport or the local authority. I could debate standard spending assessments for five hours.

With no disrespect to my colleagues from the north-west, how can one have a position in which Manchester gets 35 per cent. more than Sheffield or South Yorkshire? Why is it that Rotherham, Doncaster and Barnsley have been charge-capped? Why is the standard spending assessment for South Yorkshire considerably lower?

The figures that the Government used for their calculations were based on the 1981 census. There have been massive changes. If that is the extent of the sensitivity of data used by central Government for determining a major part of public expenditure, I suggest that they find a different calculation and that they do not bring the poll tax into it either.

Mr. Devlin: If people in the regions blame the Government for the inequitable distribution of resources from the centre, what will happen under regional government? Presumably, as I outlined in my speech, there will be an argument about which town should be the regional centre, and the other towns will feel that they are not getting their fair whack of resources from for instance, Newcastle, Leeds, Manchester or Liverpool. There will be ill-feeling between the two. Will one area, if it is composite, be allowed to opt out of the regional government and go to another, or will it have to stay and take its medicine?

Mr. Caborn: The hon. Member for Stockton, South always has centralised thoughts. Things have to be centralised in Newcastle, Leeds or in Westminster. Has he ever thought that regions that contain about 5 million people could devolve within the region, not unlike the Germans have been doing for the past 40 years?

North Rhine Westphalia and the other Länder try to devolve within their regions. Funnily enough, they have a co-operative attitude. What is happening in Brussels? If there is a problem or a new directive or regulation has been introduced, the German Länder meet their representatives—whether they are Christian Democrats or Socialists—at the regional offices which have been set up in Brussels. The problem will be brought to the attention of the Länder and there will be a co-operative approach to it. They are not battling against each other, but battling "Germany Limited". It is about time that we got rid of the mentality that everyone must be at each other's throats and that there has to be confrontation, whether in industrial relations or with one community fighting another for the pot of money. We should think how we can best maximise the wealth of our nation and its talent, instead of setting one community against another.

For the past 10 years everything that has come out of the Conservative Benches has been confrontational or has played one community off against another. The great Secretary of State sits in his plush office in Whitehall saying, "I've got my pot of gold", à la right hon. Member for Henley. Until there is different thinking on the Conservative Benches we shall continue to be confined to the margins of Europe.

The facts and figures are clear, if one compares any of the main economic indicators—GDP is down 2·3 per cent., manufacturing output is down 5·3 per cent. I wonder at the cheek of Conservative Members talking about small and medium-sized businesses, saying that one or two have moved out of their constituencies, when 200 of them are going under each day. In the past 12 months there have been 45,000 business failures. They are not merely moving out; the Government are putting them out of business.

The hon. Member for Stockton, South told us that one or two businesses were moving out. He ought to have an audit of his area and find out how many have gone out of business.

Opposition Members argue that there must be some restructuring of our government if we are to bring it back into balance. I have quoted the public expenditure figures. Another indicator is unemployment. An article by Edward Balls in the *Financial Times* on Friday 8 November, entitled "Recession cannot close the divide", said:

"The north-south divide is one of the few realities of economic life in Britain that were more deeply entrenched at the end of Mrs. Thatcher's premiership than at the beginning. The divide has appeared to go into reverse over the past year—but appearances can deceive. The frontiers of prosperity may be becoming blurred; but regional economic discrepancies remain as stubborn as ever . . . One result of the growing divide in the 1980's has been much of higher unemployment in the north than in the south . . . The reason is the collapse of manufacturing industry in the north in 1980-91. By 1985 the regional spread of unemployment rates was wider than at any time since the 1930's. The difference in unemployment rates between the north and the south increased from 1·4 percentage points in 1974 to 6 percentage points by 1986."

That is an indictment. The hon. Member for Stockton, South knows the problems that that has created. Those are the statistics, but considerable deprivation results from them. Take any economic indicator—they all show a massive imbalance. We must start to tackle that and consider how we lock into Europe in a more effective way.

It was also interesting to read the CBI report "Competing with the World's Best" which was rushed out to demonstrate that it is still acting for industry. It gave the correct analysis and asked for more training, more innovation and more stability in terms of investment. However, the CBI did not have the guts to say how those could be delivered. On the one hand it was saying that it did not want government—whether local, regional or national—to pick winners or losers, but on the other it said that it wanted a framework within which industry could grow. It did not say what the framework would be, and how it would operate. The CBI's analysis was correct, but it did not offer a solution. At the time, the *Financial Times* said that the CBI ought to start getting its act together, rather than being an apologist for the Government, and should say what British industry requires and how it can be delivered.

[Mr. Caborn]

I know that a number of my hon. Friends wish to speak. My speech has been longer than I anticipated as there have been a number of interventions from the Conservative Benches.

The discussions in Maastricht next week will have an impact on our nation into the next century. We shall be making decisions for our kids and grandkids. The Government must start to face up to those realities. We must ask ourselves seriously why we are the most unbalanced nation in the European Community—we still have an overheated south-east and an under-utilised north. How can we start bringing the country back into balance? How will we play our role in Europe as far as the regions are concerned? It is becoming patently obvious that the Government must change their thinking about how we lock into Europe and influence it. One of the mechanisms must be some form of decentralisation to regional government because the new institution will be set up, will become influential and will ensure that it impacts on regulations and directives.

Secondly the Government must give some credit to, if not agree with, people in the regions who believe that with a looser arrangement the regions could deliver better economic growth and quality of life for their people. They ought to be given the right to be able to represent their people in Brussels without going through a centralised Department of Trade and Industry. We ought to be able to ensure that we have regional representation in Brussels, as other countries have. Spain came into the Community in 1986 and by 1988 every region in Spain had set up an office in Brussels. They were set up not by public funds but by private funds, in co-operation with local and regional authorities.

We are on the margins of that type of decision, but we are not influencing it. That makes this debate even more important, not only in terms of subsidiarity, in which many of us believe, but in terms of how Britain can begin to have real influence on some of the major decisions that will be made in the coming few years. We must resolve that problem not simply for ourselves and our children but for our grandchildren.

I hope that the Government will consider the issue in that context, rather than in the narrow-minded way they have been looking at issues nationally, playing one area off against another. Such a form of administration will not and cannot work, so we must have a different form of government in Britain.

12 noon

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I hope that when we get regional assemblies, we shall dispatch our business reasonably quickly and manage to get through more than three speeches in the first two and a half hours of debate, which seems to have been our rate of progress so far today. With northern determination, I am sure that in our region we will get through the business promptly.

I welcome the motion and congratulate the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) on choosing the subject and on putting it forward in terms which my hon. Friends and I warmly endorse. Having regional assemblies and devolving power from central Government to the regions has been the policy of the Liberal party, and then of the Liberal Democrats, for nearly 50 years. We have argued consistently for it time and again.

I welcome the change that seems to have taken place in the Labour party on this issue in the intervening years, since the 1970s, when it was in government and set about the task of providing devolved government in Scotland and Wales. Labour Members were driven to that task by electoral considerations and that led them to misunderstand how they needed to do it and the revenue-raising powers and electoral system that would be necessary.

At that time, northern Members were among those who put blockages in the way of achieving devolved government for Scotland. They were divided between those, such as the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice), who was in his place earlier, who were genuinely in favour not only of devolution but of regional government in England, and those who were violently opposed to the whole idea of devolution for Scotland and any part of England. They were opposed to the lot.

It was a pity that at a time when we were pressing the Labour Government to introduce not just devolution for Scotland but powers for the north of England as well, those Members did not use the bargaining power that they had in the Labour party to say, "Our support for devolution for Scotland, about which some of us may not be happy, will be conditional on getting a deal for the north of England at the same time." That was a missed opportunity.

When Conservative Members talk about the regions of England as though they do not exist, they are ignoring the practice of their Government. The Government are in favour of regional institutions, so long as they appoint and control them and tell them what to do. They are opposed only to elected regional institutions. They are prepared, for example, to have regional health authorities, so long as they appoint all the members and make sure that as many as possible are card-carrying members of the Conservative party. They are prepared to have substantial regional offices of Government Departments—such as the shared offices of the Department of the Environment and the Department of Transport in Newcastle—so long as the orders for what those offices do are given by Ministers in central Government. The Government are perfectly prepared to see regional institutions of various kinds develop—indeed, they are prepared to co-operate with them—so long as there is no elected element about them. If there is anything elected, such as local government, their objective is to reduce its powers as much as possible and restrict its freedom to act independently on behalf of its region.

That is at great variance with the practice in other countries. It will not do for us to be told that this is a small country or that the affairs of one part of a region do not impact on another. I was amused to hear the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) arguing that his part of the northern region had nothing to do with the rest of the region. Only yesterday, during Home Office questions, there was a question about the Northumbria police authority, the area of which the hon. Gentleman does not represent any part. But I welcomed his asking a question in which he pointed out that the Northumbria police spent much time getting bodies out of vehicles involved in accidents on the A1, in my constituency, because of the inadequacies of that road. He rightly perceived that the A1 in the north of Northumberland was an important

strategic road from the point of view of the whole northern region, including his part of it. He was taking a genuine interest in a regional matter. He cannot now pretend that there are no such issues, when he took part in discussing one of them.

People in the north of England resent having so many decisions about their affairs determined by people in London. It is a constant theme which people raise with me. It is not true to say that people do not talk about regional needs. They never call it regionalism; they just say, "Why should somebody in London decide to ship away the sand from the beach at Druridge bay in Northumberland?" They wonder why someone in London should have been able in past years to say, "We do not care what local people think. We, central Government, decide that that sand can be taken away." That is precisely what happened. The decision was taken centrally. Why should someone in London decide that we do not need any more houses in Alnwick or in other towns in the north-east of England when people locally can perceive the need? It is not good enough for decisions of that sort to be taken centrally.

I see the Minister wagging his finger at me as I speak about that local housing project. He recently came to visit a revitalisation project at a housing estate in my constituency. It was not the building of new houses but a revitalisation project and an extremely welcome one. Again, it is extraordinary that decisions about whether we could have such a project had to be taken in London by Ministers centrally. I do not mind the Minister coming to my area to see what is happening there—and perhaps taking some of the credit for the fact that the Government allowed the project to go ahead—but what system of government is it under which the decision whether a family in Elm street in Alnwick should have their kitchen renewed must be taken centrally?

Mr. Key: The hon. Gentleman is adducing a respectable argument, but I invite him to appreciate that the decision is taken in London because United Kingdom taxpayers' money is funding the project. Is he arguing that his regional government would have tax-raising powers as well, in which case it would be a different argument from the one being argued today?

Mr. Beith: Any regional government scheme, in our submission, requires tax-raising powers and an equalisation mechanism. Those two components are an essential part of it. It does not make sense to us that decisions of such detail affecting, for example, a revitalisation scheme in Alnwick should have to be taken by civil servants in London, who must assemble the necessary information to ensure that it is a right decision to take.

As hon. Members have pointed out, Britain's attitude in this matter is uncharacteristic of the rest of the Community and much of the rest of the world. We have the clear example of Germany, which we advised after the war. We pressed the Germans to set up a decentralised system of government, just as we told them to have a fair electoral system, to reform their trade union system and to give workers participation in industry. They did all those things and now people such as the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) complain about the Germans being more successful than we are. They took the advice which we gave them—advice we never took ourselves. Apart from Germany, countries with a long centralised tradition, such as France and Spain, are also now using more regional devolution and creating institutions to ensure that decisions are taken more locally.

Support for the development of regional assemblies is stronger in some regions than in others. It is obviously stronger in the north, in Yorkshire, in Cornwall and in London, which lacks any voice for Greater London. I do not regard that as an obstacle to allowing regional government to develop. It is not necessary to obtain total evenness and complete bureaucratic tidiness. Some regions could proceed before others to having full-scale devolved government. There is no serious obstacle to that.

It is instructive to remember that the so-called West Lothian question was advanced by a Labour supporter who was passionately opposed to there being any devolved government in Scotland. It is a nice intellectual device, but it does not represent an argument for denying power to people. In a family, one does not say to a member of the family who is older than the other children, "You cannot have control over the way in which you spend your pocket money" because another member of the family is neither old nor wise enough to be given that power.

It is not reasonable for parts of the country that have a good case to have the powers to be denied them because others do not see that case or do not feel that they need to develop in that way. I believe that once the system develops, most regions will want to follow the north and others in the vanguard, but any unwillingness on the part of some regions is no argument against the north.

Supposed problems about Members being able to ask questions about matters affecting some parts of the country that are devolved are not new to the House. They existed throughout the history of Stormont and still exist in relation to the police. There is no devolved police authority in London, but there is a devolved police authority in every other part of the United Kingdom. It is therefore possible for an hon. Member to ask a question about the Metropolitan police force in the House, but not about the Northumbrian police force because the system is different. The House does not fall apart because of it. It is not a national constitutional crisis, but a recognition of different ways of proceeding. I believe that there should be a devolved police authority in London, but the fact that there is not and the discrepancy in the way police affairs are handled have not created a problem for policing in Northumbria or a reason to deny those powers to areas that have a devolved police authority.

As the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) said, regional government is not a substitute for, alternative to or part of local government. The case for regional government does not rest on taking powers away from already denuded local authorities, some of which are too large to provide reasonable local government for the areas that they represent. Previous local government reorganisations, not least those carried out by the Conservative party, have produced local government areas that are much too large and unwieldy. I welcome the fact that the Government have now accepted that they should consult local communities much more widely to establish the future pattern of local government. No local government powers should be taken over by regional government. Those powers should be exercised at a genuinely local level and, in many cases, more locally than at present.

[Mr. Beith]

The object of regional government is to take power away from central Government—our excessively centralised system—and to have those powers carried out at a much more regional level. So many of the policies currently carried out by central Government or their agents at a regional level, such as housing, health, social services, roads, public transport, education, training, planning, water supply monitoring, tourism and recreation, should be carried out under the democratic accountability of regional assemblies. The existing regional structures in our cities—the outposts of central Government Departments—should in future be accountable to the elected regional bodies.

Another key feature is that a written constitution should provide a basis for regional government. Shortly after the Government abolished the GLC, I was travelling in the United States. People there constantly asked me how the Government could abolish London. They could not understand now the power of an area could simply be taken away and they asked whether we had constitutional safeguards to prevent that. There are no such safeguards, agreements, understandings or conventions to prevent the Government from taking over every single power of local government tomorrow. The Government have already gone a long way in that direction.

That brings me to the word that the Government find so discomforting in the Maastricht treaty—the dreaded word, federalism. I now know why the Government do not like it. It is not so much that they are worried about the transfer of power from Britain to Europe, but that they recognise that the European concept of federalism involves power being decentralised within nation states to their component regions. In all the other countries, there is a clear concept that some powers should be exercised at a regional and local level and that central Government in the nation state should have no right to take them away. That is why the Government did not want to sign the Council of Europe convention on local self-government. They do not like the idea that any part of the country would have powers that they could not snatch away.

That is one legacy of the Thatcher years. The right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) could not conceive that voters in any part of the country could vote for and have carried out policies with which she did not agree. She did not conceive that some parts of the country might decide to follow a more socialist or liberal path, or even a more Heathite Conservative or Majorite Conservative path than the path that she wanted to take. The logical answer of any democrat to the possibility of that happening is to go to the region concerned and, with the help of his party, seek to persuade voters not to elect a socialist majority or Liberal Democrat council in the regional assembly. However, the response of the right hon. Member for Finchley was to say, "I won't let them; people will not be allowed to vote for policies which central Government do not like, so we shall make sure that there is no power to carry out those policies". That is not a democratic or federal system, which is why the Government find the word "federal" so uncomfortable.

We need a written constitution to safeguard the autonomy of the regions and nations of the United Kingdom. We also need a fair electoral system to elect regional assemblies. That is important, as shown in the campaign for a Scottish assembly. One reason why the referendum did not achieve the weighted majority required by the Government in the Scottish devolution referendum was that there was no fair voting system. The majority of Scots voted for a devolved Scottish Parliament, but they were denied it because of the artificially weighted majority that was introduced. The majority was not bigger because of fears in some parts of Scotland that one party would dominate the assembly on the basis of the first-past-the-post voting system and that that party would represent one region of Scotland. In a regional system, it is important to have a fair electoral system.

Reference has already been made to the RECHAR row and the fact that money is being denied to communities in the United Kingdom that have suffered from the privations of the decline of the coal industry because the Government will not treat those revenues properly. They will not recognise that those funds must be additional to the expenditure that they have allotted to those regions. I cannot imagine that regional assemblies and goverments dealing with the European Commission would have got into such a mess or would have failed to recognise the nature of additionality—that those European funds are designed to be added to existing Government commitments, not replace them.

I know that the Under-Secretary of State has taken a keen personal interest in the matter and today's debate is an opportunity for him to take the matter a little further. He came to my constituency and listened to the views of members of the local authority from different parties, all of whom felt strongly that the area was being denied the help to which it was entitled. If there is a row between Departments, I hope that he will be successful in the pursuit of his arguments and that the Secretary of State will be thrust into the heat of the battle, with all his formidable powers of argument, to deal with anyone who stands against the logical answer to the problem: that he should accept the European Commission's view, clearly expressed by Bruce Millan, that those funds must be additional and that only on that basis can they be paid to the regions.

I am glad that the issue has come before the House today because Britain cannot for much longer stand against the trend of the whole of Europe and the wishes of people in the regions and nations of this country to have more power over their affairs.

12.17 pm

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): It is a great pleasure, for the first time in this Parliament, to follow the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). I hope that I shall not destroy my prospects or embarrass him or horrify my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State if I confess that, some 25 years ago, when the hon. Gentleman was at Nuffield college, I received tutorials on local government from him. He is about to see the benefit that I derived in the longer term from those tutorials. I shall not follow him on matters of written constitutions, except to say that most of the horrifying regimes of eastern Europe and the third world all seemed to have written constitutions, which were completely useless in protecting opposition parties, political dissidents or individuals from human rights outrages.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) on raising this interesting and relevant subject.

It is particularly relevant for European reasons because of the important discussions that will take place at Maastricht next week. It is also relevant because of the Scottish and Welsh implications of any debate on the English regions. I also welcome the presence of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for reasons that I shall make apparent towards the end of my speech.

Earlier the debate seemed to be turning into a discussion on regional government for the north-east. There is an apparent lack of interest in the subject within the Labour party which initiated the debate: at present, one Labour spokesman and two Labour Back Benchers are in the Chamber and we have not heard and do not seem likely to hear from the Labour party's west midlands or east midlands representatives about how keenly the party there supports regional government.

Mr. O'Brien: What about Conservative Members?

Mr. Nicholson: My hon. Friends are absent because they are not particularly interested in or supportive of regional government, for reasons that I shall make clear. The Labour party is in such terminal decline in the southern part of the country that it contains only one representative for the important regions of East Anglia and the south-west.

I believe that there are good historic reasons for regional development in some European countries. Reference has been made to Germany and to the structure which, for very good reasons, we helped to introduce after 1945. The authoritarian central Government in Germany had brought the world into two dreadful wars this century. The allies were determined to break up Prussian-centred authoritarianism in Germany. Others had more drastic plans: the House may remember the Morgenthau plan to reduce Germany to a primitive agricultural country, which would probably have involved reducing the population by half. Fortunately, that did not happen. Before 1871, when Germany was united by Bismarck, Prussia, and "blood and iron", Germany had a considerable regional structure. It was inevitable that the regions of Bavaria, Saxony and others should seek to retrieve their identities when proper democracy was restored.

The history of Italy before unification in the mid-19th century is similar to that of Germany. There was, before unification in the mid-19th century, and still is a massive gulf between north and south Italy not only in economic and social conditions, but on attitudinal matters. There is a growing political movement in northern Italy called the Lombard league, which looks to closer identity with Germany in order to get away from the problems, the expense and, dare I say it, the mafia domination of southern Italy. There are good historic reasons for Italy to have a different attitude to regionalism.

The position is similar in Spain. During the past 150 years there has been great resentment in Spain over central control, particularly under the Franco regime. An inevitable plank in the republican platform in the civil war was the call for greater devolution to the regions of Spain, not only to Catalunia, but to Aragon, Andalusia and Valencia. When the centre left took power in the country in recent years it was obvious that they would implement that policy.

The countries that I have mentioned are much greater in area than England—today's debate is on England. Germany—both east and west—contains 137,000 sq m, Italy has 116,000 sq m, Spain has 194,000 sq m, France has 211,000 sq m and England has just over 50,000 sq m. That great contrast bears out my argument and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) that such regionalism would not be valid here.

Mr. Trimble: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Nicholson: I shall give way now, but I believe that the Chair is anxious that our speeches should be relatively swift.

Mr. Trimble: I shall not interrupt again, but, as the hon. Gentleman was considering size and its relevance to local self-government, perhaps he will explain the position in Luxembourg.

Mr. Nicholson: I would not dream of being drawn into a discussion on Luxembourg, but I hope to refer briefly to Northern Ireland, which is closer to the hon. Gentleman's interests.

France is still the exception to the rule in Europe. A regional element in terms of economic development is emerging in France, but the new regions are very much the old provinces—the great historic provinces of France which were abolished in the revolution and cut up into departements. Therefore, the position of France helps to bear out my argument.

On Europe, I do not support the federalist case. I do not believe that the majority of my hon. Friends or even—if they think the matter through—other hon. Members support federalism, but unfortunately it has support in other European countries. It would seem to give more powers to Brussels and Strasbourg and, in the United Kingdom, devolve more powers to the regions. Inevitably, that would result in the withering away of the national state and particularly the national Parliament.

It has often been said in European debates in the House that this country has a long and proud tradition of supporting its national Parliament which our European neighbours do not have for the obvious historical reasons that I have outlined. It is important to make that point as my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary are about to attend the vital conference at Maastricht next week.

It would not be in order to refer in detail to matters relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland. There is undoubtedly some political malaise about the Conservative party in Scotland. The top poll for the Conservatives in Scotland was, I believe, in 1955 and there was probably a link between that and the subsequent decline of the British empire and Commonwealth from which Scotland had done extremely well. The Conservative party has not understood exactly what has gone wrong with the Scottish dimension since then. Despite the Conservative victories of 1970 and 1979, there were no similar political effects in Scotland.

I believe that if the Government of my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) had survived in 1974, we would probably have put forward Conservative measures for Scottish devolution. If that devolution is to command support in the House, I expect that proposals for it will have to come from Conservative, not Opposition, Members. We cannot debate those matters today, although I commend to my English colleagues the need to respect the considerable feelings of malaise in Scotland.

[Mr. Nicholson]

If there were ever to be a Scottish assembly, it would be difficult to resist pressures in Northern Ireland to have one there or, alternatively, to have Northern Ireland fully incorporated in the United Kingdom. The present limbo is not satisfactory. I promised the hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) that I would refer to Northern Ireland.

The relevance of Scotland to today's debate on English regions is that if there were ever to be a Scottish assembly there would have to be a reduction in the number of Scottish Members in Parliament as happened in Northern Ireland when Stormont existed. For obvious reasons Labour does not want the number of Scottish Members to be reduced, hence its anxiety to foist on the English regions assemblies that those regions clearly do not want.

If one of my hon. Friends from the south-east of England were to speak in the debate he would say that there is no way in which a region could be bounded in that area. I am told and my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) will confirm that in Northamptonshire and North Buckinghamshire business people look several ways. They look towards London, the east midlands, the west midlands and probably also towards Oxford. There is no regional identity in most of the home counties and in the south-east.

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): I can underline the difficulty that my hon. Friend illustrates. Even further north in my part of the world, for economic purposes my constituency is in the Yorkshire and Humberside region. For Conservative party purposes it is in the east midlands, but for water purposes the authority is Anglian Water. For electricity purposes we are covered by the Yorkshire electricity board, while for gas we are in the east midlands gas area. For telephone purposes my constituency is in the Lincolnshire telephone area.

Mr. Nicholson: My hon. Friend makes his point perfectly.

Perhaps the Minister would like to reflect on the lovely concept of Wessex and King Alfred. Where would the boundaries be in Wessex and where does one place Hampshire and Wiltshire? Would the three counties in my region of the south-west—Devon, Cornwall and Somerset—form a region, or would the rather bastardised Avon be included? I hope that the Government will speedily return Avon to its pre-1974 status. Would the region consist of seven counties including Gloucestershire, Wiltshire and Dorset? If it did, what about the disparities between those areas and what about the distances? What would be the capital of a south-western region? Some people have been kind enough to suggest that it should be Taunton. If my constituents considered the planning, developmental, housing and congestion consequences of that, I do not think that they would want Taunton to be the capital. Equally, they would not want to be ruled from Bristol and I am sure such an objection applies even more in Devon and Cornwall. Of course, Exeter and Plymouth would make even less effective capitals.

We in the south-west are not attracted to the sort of regionalism proposed by Labour and, I am sorry to say, by the Liberal Democrats. However, in planning matters regional co-ordination, assuming effective local government, is valuable. I shall come to that later. SERPLAN, the south-east regional planning authority, has played a powerful role in the south-east and those of us who are interested in avoiding excessive planning development have found SERPLAN and SANE planning in the south-east valuable. The same is true of the south-west regional planning conference, which meets regularly in Taunton. I hope that the Minister will comment on the role of regional planning conferences because they are an important way forward.

The hon. Member for Gateshead, East made an interesting reference to the role of chambers of commerce. I declare an interest in that because I am an adviser to the Association of British Chambers of Commerce. In that context, English business could be considerably enhanced if our chambers, which expect to remain voluntary, were brought closer to the strength and effectiveness of and played the same role as European chambers. That is the intention of the chamber movement and it is attracting greater support from the Government, especially from the Department of Trade and Industry.

With the exception of Belgium and Ireland, where the chamber movement is weak, all chambers of commerce and industry in the EC have public law status. I have visited them in France, Germany and Holland and I know how effective they can be in advancing and representing business and industry in the areas that they cover. The British chamber movement, together with its continental counterparts, is now giving assistance to the development of the chamber movement in eastern European countries such as Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and even Romania. That will greatly enhance economic development in eastern Europe.

That is relevant to regionalism and to the points made by the hon. Member for Gateshead, East. In effective business, lobbying and developmental representation bodies such as the larger chambers of commerce that we envisage in Britain will be valuable. I am happy to say that the need of filling an important gap in the map is being considered with the proposed development of a Somerset chamber of commerce and industry. That is largely inspired by the training and enterprise council in Somerset with assistance from the Department of Trade and Industry and the Association of British Chambers of Commerce. That would greatly help business in Somerset. Linkage is expected with chambers in Bristol and Gloucestershire which would establish an important sub-regional role. These are important developments and I am grateful to the hon. Lady for mentioning the subject.

Finally, I give my hon. Friend the Minister a warning. My rejection and that of my right hon. and hon. Friends of a regional tier of government presupposes the continuation of the historic counties in retaining certain governmental powers. I do not suggest that they should remain the same as at present. My hon. Friend the Minister knows the views of myself and some of my hon. Friends in respect of the counties of Avon, Humberside and Cleveland. However, as someone who was born in Cheshire and brought up in Lancashire, who married a girl from Devon and now lives in Somerset—I hope that my family will consider themselves a Somerset family, although by some strange quirk of the Post Office, we have a Devon postal address—I am very conscious of the way in which people still identify themselves, particularly those who live outside the great cities, with the historic counties, which in most cases go back before the Norman conquest.

The boundaries of the counties of England—apart from some interference in 1974—have their beginnings in the days of King Alfred. They are of the right size to be governed and they engender fierce loyalties.

I referred earlier to the effect of the French revolution on the historic provinces of France. I should be concerned if a Conservative Government or the Conservative party were to consider sweeping away all those historic counties. There may be pressures in some areas for districts to take over the role of certain counties. I appreciate that districts, with their responsibilities for housing, waste disposal and other community services are closer to the elector, but let us not argue against the role of counties in some educational matters, social services and planning matters in particular. I referred earlier to regional planning conferences.

If we swept away the historic counties, which I believe is both Liberal Democrat and Labour party policy, it would be difficult to resist pressures for a regional tier to interpose between the smaller-scale districts—such as those covered by Somerset—and central Government. I do not believe that the House would want all the powers and roles that counties currently have to pass to the centre. Nor do I think that it is practicable for those powers and roles all to be devolved to district level.

We are not attracted to the idea of regional government. The further from the north-west and north-east that we get, the less practicable the concept seems. I made the point earlier, in the absence of the hon. Member for Gateshead, East, that there appears to be some interest in regional government among north-eastern and, to a lesser extent, north-western Labour Members —but not among those representing other areas of the country.

I commend that warning to my hon. Friend the Minister and I look forward to hearing his comments later.

12.38 pm

Mr. William O'Brien (Normanton): Today's debate is significant and important, because the House does not often have an opportunity to consider English regional matters. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) on introducing the topic and on describing the benefits of regional government in England.

My hon. Friend said that the issue has long been an interest of hers. As someone who was born and bred in the north, she realises the need for a Government—and I assure the House that it will be a Labour Government —to review the English regions and to introduce regional government.

As my hon. Friend said, people in pubs and clubs are not talking about regional government. However, chambers of commerce, local government organisations and other business interests are talking about it. The hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) said that he is an adviser to the Association of British Chambers of Commerce. I intend to refer to reports prepared by the Leeds chamber of commerce and the Yorkshire and Humberside chamber of commerce. I am sure that all hon. Members agree that they are not supporters of the Labour party.

Conservative Members seem to live in the past. Neither the hon. Member for Taunton nor the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) referred to the fact that the regions are concerned about the position they will face after the introduction of the single market in 1992. The chambers of commerce are worried about what will happen to industry and commerce in the regions after 1992.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) referred at length to the need for the English regions to measure up to their European counterparts and for the regions to be given the opportunity to develop economically so that income can be generated there, which would provide them with additional resources. I do not intend to refer to RECHAR. That has already been dealt with adequately. Nevertheless, a way must be found to attract resources to the regions so that they have some say over their own destinies.

Mr. David Nicholson: The fact that I omitted to refer to 1992 was accidental. My point was that the business community and industry would very much benefit from much stronger chambers of commerce, on the European model. My hon. Friends and I envisage that those stronger private sector bodies might take a greater share of economic development operations from county and district councils in order to make them much more responsive to the needs of business and industry. Some say that they do not fulfil that role at present.

Mr. O'Brien: I accept that that was an oversight. Although the hon. Gentleman dwelt for some time on the historic reasons why there should not be regional government, he forgot to tell us why it is important that we should deal with the position in the regions after 1992. Conservative Members talk about minor issues. The hon. Members for Taunton and for Stockton, South both omitted to refer to major issues that need to be addressed on behalf of the regions.

There is nothing more up to date than the report published by the Leeds chamber of commerce and industry dated 2 December. It refers to a number of factors that are causing concern to business people and to those who are employed in the Yorkshire and Humberside region. It refers to international trade and says:

> "With 1992 and the Single European Market almost upon us, businessmen wishing to exploit this huge market need to start thinking in E-numbers—not the controversial food additives but hard-cash Euro-money."

Phil Dore, Barclays bank's regional international services manager says:

> "Trading in the EC may seem a daunting propect to the beginner but it is a market that no go-ahead company can really afford to ignore. Europe already accounts for virtually half of Britain's overseas trade and when the single market comes fully into effect towards the end of 1992, that figure is likely to increase."

That message is not from a Minister but from the regional international services manager of Barclays bank. If the Government want examples of why regional government should be considered, they should take note of what Barclays bank is doing.

In an article entitled "Leeds' Gateway to Europe", the report of Leeds chamber of commerce says:

> "Not many major cities have one of their major assets more than 50 miles away."

That refers to Leeds' connections with the M1 and M62 and the Humber ports and draws attention to the importance of regional dimensions and regional issues. There are not many members of the Labour party on

[Mr. O'Brien]

Leeds chamber of commerce, yet its thinking is similar to the Labour party's but miles away from that of Conservative Members.

The report says:

"The region's big cities show the dramatic turnarounds in the fortunes of rail travel for fairly obvious reasons. As more local industries—such as coal mining—have declined, so more people have been compelled to find work in the cities. Leeds, for example, has emerged as a leading provincial centre for finance and commerce."

It is saying that cities such as Leeds and Sheffield should be give more autonomy.

Mr. Rodger Bird, regional secretary of the northern regional Freight Transport Association—I do not think that he will be a member of the Labour party—says:

"The trouble is that, even before joining the single market, the UK has long suffered from an inertia that prevents policies being realised and all too often when action is finally taken it is too little, too late."

Conservative Members should take note of the reports of the chambers of commerce.

I have a report of the association of Yorkshire and Humberside Chambers of Commerce, which covers Barnsley, Bradford, Calderdale, Doncaster, Goole, Grimsby, Immingham—the area that the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) mentioned—Hull, Kirklees, Wakefield, Leeds, Rotherham, Scunthorpe, Sheffield and York—right across the broad region of Yorkshire and Humberside. It refers to a regional dimension and states:

"The general image of the region remains positive. The decision to hold the World Student Games in Sheffield, the growth of Leeds as a commercial centre and the success of Humberside in attracting inward investment are just some of the features that have caught national attention"

and which are inspired, provoked and brought about by regional bodies, local authorities and local business people. There is no reference whatsoever to central Government. The report continues:

"The interest of the construction industry in the region is unprecedented. Indeed, in parts of the region such as Kirklees and Wakefield and Bradford the problem remains of a lack of suitable acreage rather than a shortage of projects."

That speaks volumes. The lack of suitable acreage is influenced by central Government. Therefore, there is no greater call than that from the chambers of commerce in the regions who are asking for more freedom which could come from regional government.

Mr. Michael Brown: The hon. Gentleman has quoted from documents produced by the Association of British Chambers of Commerce—one national and one regional—and drew attention to the regional dimension of Humberside and the Humber ports, singling out the latter for particular attention. He then said that central Government had provided nothing for such development. I remind him that the success of the Humber ports occurred despite the fact that in this House only a year ago every member of the Opposition sought to prevent their development. I agree that there is massive economic development based on the Humber ports, but it is only because the Conservative party supported me in the Division Lobbies in the teeth of opposition from the Opposition.

Mr. O'Brien: The only reason that the hon. Gentleman supported the Bill was because it made it easier to import to Yorkshire and Humberside, which would mean the demise of the mining industry and other jobs in that region. That is why the hon. Gentleman fought for the Bill—it was not to promote jobs in Yorkshire and Humberside but to demote industry there. Had it not been for the Opposition, the devastation of the Yorkshire and Humberside regions and the midlands would have been more aggressive. However, because the Opposition fought, I can say with honesty and sincerity that it was only the numbers behind the hon. Gentleman that led to his success. He did not win on principle or on the arguments—he won on numbers.

The report continues:

"All in all, the region is successfully standing on its own two feet."

In the light of such a report, what would be the fortunes of the regions if they had more say in their autonomy and if more of their energies were applied to generating wealth and the necessary resources to provide the sports centres, the infrastructure and what is necessary for education? That is what we mean when we talk about regional development.

I also refer to another organisation that is not Labour controlled. The Association of District Councils is Tory controlled. It has an economic and development committee which considers the way in which its members are controlled by central Government.

Representatives of the ADC have had meetings with Commission officials because they want to be in contact with the EEC. The EEC is more willing to work at a regional level than with the central Government to promote regional development. The EEC appreciates the value of the regions and that is why it provides us with regional aid.

The ADC report states:

"A meeting was held with the Commission on 25 October."—

officials from the regional policy and social fund directorates were present—

"Briefly, Commission officials thought that the EEC would not be in a position to finance any new initiatives until 1993-94 when the new structural fund regime comes into operation. New funds might actually not be available until 1995-96. Officials did not consider that non-eligible areas would receive any assistance as it was expected that any areas seriously affected would become eligible during the review of the structural funds."

Because the British Government do not negotiate on European involvement—they act as a spectator—our local government authorities have to press European officials and regional Ministers for support. Because of the Government's attitude towards local government, resources have been lost not just from RECHAR, but from other regional funds which should be channelled into local government services.

It is extremely disappointing to have to argue with Conservative Members on behalf of local authorities. Those authorities are pressing for benefits to be channelled into their areas so that regional developments can take place. There is a hard-pressed need for sports halls, new schools and infrastructure, but all that is denied because of the Government's policies.

The ADC report also stated that it had given consideration to

"establishing a European presence in Brussels to promote the role of the districts".

The ADC is not Labour controlled, but it is so concerned about what is happening in Europe and by the fact that it is denied any regional representation that it is now

considering opening an office in Brussels to establish direct contact with EEC officials. ADC representatives could then try to persuade those officials to ensure that resources are available to their associate members in the districts.

The Labour party does not need to make the case for regional government, because it has been made by supporters and members of the Tory party. The difference is that Conservative Members, and Ministers in particular, pay no regard to the points made by Tory party members in local government and the regions.

The federation of small businesses—I doubt whether it is Labour controlled, although I accept that some members of the Labour party have small businesses—recently published a report on 26 November in which it says:

"It is a short-sighted Government which ignores the needs of Britain's five million small businesses. Both economically and politically it makes sense for the concerns of small firms to be taken into consideration in formulating policy. Small businesses provide a vital source of employment, wealth and the seed-corn for future economic development."

But what chance do our small businesses have, given the present Government's policies and their approach to the EEC? Small businesses face difficulties over trading in Europe after 1992 because even the policies that are designed for the English regions are decided by Tory Ministers in Whitehall. The hon. Member for Stockton, South was not in his place earlier when I commented on the fact that he did not mention what would happen to the regions after 1992, yet that is the main reason for my colleagues and myself saying that we should be looking at the issue of regional developments now. That would enable our regions to generate their own resources and to come up with the policies by which they can become involved in the new Europe of the single market.

I realise that other hon. Members wish to participate and I shall conclude by referring to the issue of regional boundaries, which was raised by two Conservative Members. I advise them that the original boundaries were abolished as a result of their Tory Government's policies. The two local government reorganisations, which brought about the demise of the English counties and of the City of London—*[Interruption.]*—were the result of the Tory Government's policies and although they are now saying that they are wrong——

Mr. Michael Brown: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. It was the Greater London council that was abolished——

Mr. O'Brien: Yes, the GLC, but I am prepared to discuss the position of the City of London, which the Minister and I discussed only yesterday. Indeed, we have spent more time discussing local government in the past few weeks than we have spent with our families.

If the hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes wants to discuss the GLC, I am prepared to do so. The Greater London council was abolished because of Government's policies—and they have been proved wrong. On the poll tax, the Government have again been proved wrong. They have been proved wrong also on education and the economy. If they do not give careful consideration and sincere thought to this motion on regional government, they will be proved wrong again in the near future, and the people who will prove them wrong are the electorate. I feel sure when the general election is called, that the Labour party will be pursuing policies on regional government that will benefit people living in our regions.

1.2 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) on being successful in the ballot, on introducing such an important subject for debate and on doing it so well.

This has been one of the best Friday debates that I have attended for a long time. Our Friday debates tend to be of rather higher quality than some of our midweek debates and all hon. Members who have spoken so far—and, I am sure, those who will follow me—have spoken to a high standard and have contributed to a serious debate on this important issue.

My response is not a traditional wind-up speech, because this is the hon. Lady's debate and I am sure that she will receive the leave of the House to reply to it at the appropriate time. However, I shall try to answer some of the specific points that have been put to me.

I start from a position of very much respecting the fact that the hon. Member for Gateshead, East was a Member of the European Parliament for 10 years before becoming a Member of this House and I recognise the expertise that she has acquired in this subject. However, I disagree strongly with some of her comments and I begin by disagreeing with her that the north-east is as isolated as she thinks it is. I see it with a rather different gloss. I am a southerner whose first job was in Leeds, whose second job was in Edinburgh and whose third job was in London. I suppose that where I live now depends on the day of the week. As a result of improved communications in every sense—be they electronic communications, our airports or any other form of communication—the regions of this country have never been closer to London than they are today. I shall develop that point later.

Of course, I recognise, respect and enjoy Britain's regional diversity, of which we can be particularly proud. The hon. Member for Gateshead, East referred to folk music. I am immediately drawn to comment on the technological superiority of the Northumbrian bagpipes over the Scottish bagpipes. As there is no Scottish Member of Parliament present, I feel that I can say that without being lynched on my way out of the Chamber.

The regional policies that have been developed, refined and improved in Britain in the past quarter of a century owe a great deal to the foresight of then Prime Minister Harold Macmillan in deciding to send Lord Hailsham, as he is now, to the north-east to make some progress. That was but a seed, but it was a seed well sown and matters have moved on a great deal since then.

The hon. Member for Gateshead, East said that we should not be dependent on central decision-making. I agree entirely with that sentiment, but I find it hard to understand how she can then be so keen to hand over so much power to Brussels on decisions that affect people at a local level, whether on farming, training or whatever. Her enthusiasm for the social programme is astonishing. Decisions will be made in Brussels on social matters whatever happens and I am not convinced that those decisions would be affected by any new form of regional government. The hon. Lady must address that point.

I am intrigued that the hon. Lady thinks that 11 regional parliaments would not be costly or bureaucratic. If only that were true. She asked for some answers to specific points. She said that large cuts were made in regional selective assistance in the early 1980s. The RSA

[Mr. Robert Key]

scheme expenditure increased during the 1980s from £86 million in 1980-81 to £177 million in 1989-90. The hon. Lady was probably referring to cuts in regional development grants, which reflected a move away from automatic grants which went into loss-making nationalised industries.

The hon. Lady also said that the Government had not supported the Northern Development Company. That is not what my evidence suggests. The Department of Trade and Industry gave three years of core programme funding to it and makes annual grants to the NDC and other regional development agencies to undertake our important and beneficial inward investment promotional work. For 1991-92 the DTI's grant to the regional development agencies increased by £0·5 million to a total of £4·5 million.

Ms. Quin: The Minister referred to the figures that I gave on regional assistance. The figures were for regional preferential assistance and were provided by the Department of Trade and Industry in response to a written question, as I explained to the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin).

The Government were not enthusiastic about the creation of the Northern Development Company. It was created from within the region. Only later did the Government decide to support it. I am glad that they did, but it was rather late in the day.

Mr. Key: We are nothing if not pragmatic and we like to see success. We are delighted to support that success when it occurs.

The hon. Lady also said that the assisted areas map had not changed since 1984. I accept that there are some anomalies on the 1984 map, but it is still focused on the areas of greatest need. I assure her that if the Government had thought that changes were called for, we would have made them. But they are not called for. Our policy remains the same. We shall not make changes to the assisted areas, at least in the lifetime of this Parliament.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) made an excellent speech, as ever. He began by drawing attention to the different histories of other countries. He was right. My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) intervened to make an extremely important point that we should all bear in mind. He drew attention to the size of England in terms of population and geography. It is quite different when dealing with a country as big as France in terms of population and area.

Mr. Cabom: On the basis of that argument, can we take it that the boundary review that will be undertaken will now be on geographical location rather than population distribution?

Mr. Key: I am sorry, I did not catch the hon. Gentleman's meaning.

Mr. Cabom: In the light of the arguments which have been put forward about the size of the constituency can we take it that there has been a change in Government principle on the boundary reorganisation? Are they going to take area rather than population as the criterion now?

Mr. Key: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will spend the weekend reading the document and will see exactly what we said about that. He is teasing me, as the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien) and I were teased occasionally in the Standing Committee on the Local Government Finance Bill during the past three weeks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South talked about the representative role of a Member of Parliament and how it had changed, which is also important. I dare say that my hon. Friend's constituents complain about their district council, county council and central Government. Who will they go to if there are regional governments as well? I can tell the House exactly whom they will go to—they will still come to their Member of Parliament at Westminster. It will be good business for Mercury, British Telecom and the Post Office, because we shall keep them busy when we are trying to sort out which tier of government we should be addressing our thoughts to on behalf of our constituents. The only beneficiaries will be the bureaucrats employed to answer the letters.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South also made an important point about choosing regional capitals. My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton talked about the difficulties in the south-west and whether Taunton should become the capital or whether it should be Bristol, Plymouth or Exeter. Manchester and Liverpool have been mentioned. Those are serious problems which will have to be tackled if that were to happen.

The hon. Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn) made a thoughtful speech, which I shall look forward to reading. I am sure that it will merit reading. He asked about the regional conference. The Commissioner, who is anxious that the regions are represented in discussions on regional policy, has announced a committee of the regions, in the context of the intergovernmental conference. It is the Commission's view that the members of that body would all be elected representatives and would advise the Commission on a wide range of policy issues relevant to the regions. It will be a huge body, approaching 200 people. I am not sure that it will be frightfully effective if it is that big. Nevertheless, we support the creation of the body, provided that it is guaranteed that member states can nominate members. No decision has yet been taken on how United Kingdom delegates will be apportioned and I would welcome the hon. Gentleman's ideas.

Mr. Caborn: Can we take it that elected members will be representing the United Kingdom on that body, but the formal distribution of that representation has not yet been worked out?

Mr. Key: That is how I understand it. We support the creation, provided that it is guaranteed that member states can nominate members of the body.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) made some generous remarks in his speech about my visit to his constituency, for which I was grateful. One of the advantages of my job as a Minister representing local government is that I travel throughout the country. I do not merely spend time in Manchester—where I spend more time than anywhere else outside London and my constituency, which is my home town. I ensure that I hear the views of parish councils in rural areas outside my constituency.

The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed said that as far as he was concerned, regional government would not take away the powers of local government. That is an article of faith for him. Therefore, he has a problem with

the Labour party, which is pledged to take some of the powers of local authorities into regional government, as well as co-ordination.

The hon. Member for Gateshead, East looks doubtful, but in a debate in the other place yesterday, Baroness Hollis of Higham said:

"Thirdly I suggest that a few functions would appropriately come up from the county councils." *[Official Report, House of Lords, 5 December 1991, c. 401.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Is the Minister quoting a speech in the other place? It is only in order to quote a Minister. If it is not a Minister, please will he paraphrase.

Mr. Key: The damage is done. It was an Opposition spokesman and I am sure that, however delightful she may be, she will not be a Minister for long. I am grateful for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The second point made by the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed was about RECHAR and I am anxious to respond positively to him. The current objective No. 2 of "Community Support Frameworks" will end on 31 December 1991. Discussions are currently proceeding with the Commission on the successors. The structural fund regulations allow for a fundamental review of the fund's operation to take effect from 1 January 1994. Consequently, member states and the Commission wish to see the minimum change in the operation of the current CSFs and programmes for the years 1992 and 1993.

There has been discussion with the Commission on the issue and it seems to adopt a similar approach. The financial allocations for 1992-93 have already been given to member states and plans and programmes are being prepared on a minimum change basis. Departments are evaluating ways in which, after 1993, the use of the structural fund could develop. That will enable officials to discuss with the Commission the way in which the fund could operate in the future.

Discussions are also proceeding on a document called "Europe 2000." It is not a master plan for member states or for the development of Europe, but it will provide a useful reference for member states and others to enable them to take decisions with due regard to the European dimension. In other words, we are continuing to discuss the matter and its development with the Commission on a no-change basis across the Community.

My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton made a thoroughly thoughtful speech and provided an honest analysis of his views. In particular, he spoke of the importance of counties. I assure him that we are not talking about sweeping away counties. Our policy is to make changes to the structure of local government in the shire counties. In some cases that may involve the abolition of councils. There is no intention to abolish either county or district councils as a whole and there is no discrimination between them.

Changes to the boundaries of shire counties or districts are also possible, as at present. We intend to ask the local government commission, which we hope to set up, to consider whether people want unitary authorities to be treated as part of historical counties for certain traditional or non-administrative purposes such as sport, a theme to which I shall return. We shall certainly not sweep away the counties. That is not our intention.

I assure the hon. Member for Normanton—with whom it is a pleasure to be debating again; it has been our daily dose for the past three weeks, and he is a worthy opponent—that my party and I are not living in the past. When I visit Labour leaders in the north-east, north-west and elsewhere I do not think that they are living in the past, either. I sometimes wonder, though, whether they speak much to the occupants of the Labour Front Bench because I see the 1990s as the decade of the north-east and the north-west. I see thrilling regeneration every time I visit Tyneside and Teesside, Manchester and Merseyside. A great deal is going on in those regions, and people in the south who have not been north of Watford Gap for a few years should go and see what is happening there.

I was delighted to hear of the conversion of the hon. Member for Normanton to full-blooded capitalism. I suspect that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) is quaking in his shoes as the Labour Front Bench is clearly in line for a takeover from Barclays Bank, I fear, however, that it would be a hostile takeover.

Mr. O'Brien: I feel that I must put the Minister right yet again. The *Official Report* will show that I said that the Government should take advice from an official of Barclays Bank because, I said, if Barclays Bank was successful with regional reorganisation, the Government should not resist regional reorganisation for the English regions.

Mr. Key: We take advice from a number of bankers, but we are not monopolists. I should be just as happy to take the advice that I read in National Westminster Bank's quarterly review, for instance. If the hon. Gentleman does not read it, perhaps he should. Wide-ranging advice is preferable to the advice of just one particular bank. Nevertheless, I have checked with my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Kirkhope), who would have leapt to his feet to speak if he were not precluded from doing so by virtue of his office, and I have read the document to which the hon. Gentleman referred. The chamber of commerce in Leeds is very positive about the future, as well it might be, and it was hard to infer from the report that the chamber of commerce felt that there was a need for a regional government, as the hon. Gentleman suggested. If members of the chamber of commerce disagree about that, I am sure that they will be in touch with me.

In proclaiming the supposed need for regional government in England, the hon. Member for Gateshead, East works from the assumption that such a system would bring government closer to the people. In fact, regional government would have the opposite effect. It would impose another tier of bureaucracy on top of local government, taking it further away from the people.

We are committed to simplifying local government, not to creating extra layers. We are committed to giving people the councils that they want—that means creating councils based on the communities with which local people and organisations identify. Such councils should be able to provide services to their communities that are more cost effective and efficient than they are now.

Our proposals for establishing a new, independent local government commission for England are currently under consideration in the Local Government Bill in another place. The commission's task will be to review the country area by area and make recommendations for improving the structure of local government, taking account of local

[Mr. Key]

views, the costs and benefits of change, and the economy and effectiveness of service arrangements. They may recommend a structure based on unitary authorities or the present two-tier arrangements. We make no presumption about the right size of authority that will emerge in an area, but we expect that in most areas a system based on unitary authorities would be the most popular and effective. We do not desire to impose a blueprint on England. Rather, we desire that the commission should recommend the most appropriate form of local government for a particular area.

Mr. Devlin: Will my hon. Friend repeat the commitment given by the Secretary of State for the Environment when he said that the new councils of Avon, Cleveland and Humberside would be among the first to receive the benefit of that new commission? I hope that that will happen as soon as possible in the case of Cleveland.

Mr. Key: If my memory serves me correctly, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment said that Humberside would be the first because it has already been the subject of a local government boundary commission report. It will be up to the Secretary of State to decide on the exact order of priority and we shall publish guidelines to help the new commission. There would be precious little point in appointing a local government commission if we then took all the decisions.

The hon. Member for Gateshead, East is right to suggest that government should be accountable and responsive—but to achieve that we need government that truly reflects local communities. The vast majority of district and county councils that responded to our recent consultation paper on the structure of local government in England expressed their desire to become unitary authorities. In contrast, only 26 out of nearly 1,900 respondents expressed a desire for regional government.

In documents outlining their plans for regional government, the Opposition state that the new tier would take its powers from Westminster and Whitehall, and be empowered to carry out only those functions of a strategic or regulatory nature, currently exercised by the counties. This is patently unnecessary. Our proposals will empower the new local authorities to exercise all the functions, including strategic planning, local planning and development control. Before any new authorities are established, it will have to be shown that those issues can be dealt with satisfactorily.

Moreover, the regional context for structure and local plans prepared by local authorities is safeguarded under regional planning guidance from the Secretary of State. The Planning and Compensation Act 1991 requires local planning authorities to have regard to any regional or strategic planning guidance given by the Secretary of State when preparing their development plans. Regional planning guidance already exists in the south-east and East Anglia. Strategic planning guidance exists in all the metropolitan districts, including Tyne and Wear. Progress is being made towards establishing regional planning guidance in all the regions. We hope that regional planning guidance for all the north, which is currently in hand, will be finalised by June 1992.

The hon. Lady has also raised the issue of the European dimension, both here and on other occasions. On 15 November she wrote to the *Financial Times*. The headline over her letter stated:

"An England of regions is the way forward in a Europe of regions".

I believe that the structures of local and regional government vary substantially between the different member states. I do not believe that our participation in the European Community implies that a level of regional government should be established here. Regional government is un-English, unworkable and unwanted.

There is no cultural identity in a region. People feel no loyalty to it. They regard themselves as English, and after —or sometimes before—they identify with their county or city, not some falsely created region. Our entire culture is built around those loyalties. Our literature and language are full of examples illustrating our pride in country and county. Let us imagine how uninspiring Shakespeare's Henry V would have been, had he proclaimed that

"gentlemen of the east Midlands, now-abed
shall think themselves accurs'd they were not here".

That is foreign to our culture.

Ms. Quin: The Minister completely exaggerates his case. If he were to ask many people in the north-east where they come from, they would say "the north-east". The expression "the north-east" trips easily off the tongue. People do have regional identities, but the Minister completely overlooks that. It is true that people had loyalties to the old counties, many of which were abolished by the Conservatives in 1974, but people do have regional identities.

Mr. Key: I would find the hon. Lady's argument more credible if I had not experienced the difficulties of trying to remember, when on Tyneside to talk about Tyneside. However, if I talk about Tyneside when I am a few miles away in Teesside or Wearside, I am in real trouble. I can identify with the north-west, the south or Wessex. But, first, people feel that there is a more local and historic dimension. People also feel proud of England, being English, and of all that has stood for over 1,000 years. Our nation's culture is bound up in that philosophy, which cannot be written off as looking backwards or day-dreaming—it is deeply ingrained in all of us.

Hon. Members will be familiar with the lines from Henry V, but imagine if they were as follows:

"I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,
Straining upon the start. The game's afoot:
Follow your spirit; and upon this charge
Cry God for Harry! the south-east regional government and St. George."

That is not very credible. It is not silly to suggest that we should consider those aspects.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: The Minister must recognise that the concept of England as a unitary nation may make much sense in the south of England, but there is a much greater feeling of distance among people in the north. Having grown up a northerner, I make no apologies for saying that I do not regard myself as a southerner who happens to live a few miles up the road. We are different. On the issue of regional government, I do not want to distance myself from English history, but I recognise that Whitehall government is a long way from Manchester.

Mr. Key: I am also from the provinces—I am glad to say that I am not a Londoner, but come from Wessex.

Therefore, I have no difficulty with what the hon. Gentleman says. Thank God that we do have regional diversity and differences, but if we are not careful, if we pursue regionalist policies it will lead to a break-up of England. If he were to reflect on that, I do not think the hon. Gentleman would want it to happen.

We can be facetious about the examples that I am using. We do not want to talk about south-west regional cream instead of Devonshire produce, roast beef and north-east regional pudding or Greater Manchester hot-pot.

Mr. David Nicholson: Given the recent record of local government in Manchester and Liverpool, constituents in Lancashire and Cheshire would be appalled at the prospect of being governed from either of those places.

Mr. Key: I spent much time in that area and I know that brighter things are on the horizon for Manchester and Liverpool. I give credit to the people of those regions who, as we have seen, are realising some of the follies of the past. Even some of their political masters in London have recognised the follies of some of the goings-on in those areas.

Mr. Devlin: Of course it is right for people in the north-east to think of themselves as north-easterners. The Minister is right to say that people think of themselves as Yorkshiremen or Durhamers or Teessiders rather than Tynesiders. I have had to pull up the Minister when he has visited Teesside and talked about companies in Tyneside which are of no interest to people on Teesside. It is not the identity that people feel. Labour has carried out a trawl of Departments in order to find something for their Labour colleagues in Newcastle to do and to justify giving them a huge bureaucracy and their own budget. It is another case of Labour trying to give jobs to the boys in the north-east.

Mr. Key: My hon. Friend is right. I wonder where the Labour party was while all these lessons were being learned. It has clearly been in hibernation as well as in opposition for the past 12 years. It is worrying that after all this time Labour appears to think that being in opposition means solely that one must oppose everything. There have been few examples of sensible, alternative ways to do things.

The Opposition argue that other European countries have regional government and we must have it as well. Why must we be the same as our neighbours? Italy may be what some people have called a geographical expression, but England certainly is not, and we have 1,000 years of history to prove it. We should not assume that because some European countries have regional government the people there want it. I have canvassed the views of my hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities who is very European, and he assures me that people who live in the southern part of Spain were totally bemused to wake up one day and find themselves in an invented region called Andalusia with a different Government from than in Madrid. They did not particularly want that, but it was foisted upon them.

Notional regions without definitive boundaries are used for the purposes of economic development, and our regions get aid from Europe without the need for a formal structure. We should ask how such a structure would work. Who would decide where regional boundaries begin and end. That topic was only touched upon by the hon. Member for Gateshead, East. As my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) said, British Gas decides its regions according to the location of its gasworks and the lie of the pipes. Electricity was privatised in regions dictated by the positioning of cables. British Telecom directories and area codes are also based on service delivery and not on the existence of defined regions.

Regionalism is not about service delivery. Labour has completely misunderstood the concept. It talks about only another layer of government and more red tape and state control, not less. That is ironic given Labour's supposed support for the concept of unitary authorities which the Government are pursuing. Our legislation is about bringing local government closer to the people, giving them the councils that they want. Our recognition of the importance of tradition and loyalties will permit the re-creation of historic counties as non-administrative entities. One does not need a council in order to prove the existence of well-established areas such as Lancashire or Somerset.

I have not forgotten Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but I shall deal with them separately, because devolution is a different issue. As usual, Labour is muddled. Regionalism and devolution are not the same. Scotland and Wales are nation states, not regions, and neither country wants nationhood. Both have voted against it. However, Scottishness exists without a separate government. Cultural identity forms over hundreds of years and cannot be imposed. There is no point in the Labour party in Scotland pretending that Grampian or Strathclyde regions have captured the affections of the people.

What would regional assemblies do? Labour says that powers would be devolved from Whitehall. Which powers? It would be very divisive to break up England in this way. There is no constitutional precedent for regional government such as that proposed by the Opposition. That would merely be another way of manufacturing extra government—no doubt to employ Labour's trade union supporters, at great expense to the taxpayers. We are told that the initial creation of the assemblies would include a strategic body for London—Greater London council mark 2. They would cost more than £200 million—imagine 11 GLCs all over the country.

Labour says that the assemblies would be financed initially by block grant, but that eventually they would be give tax-raising powers of their own. That would have a disastrous effect on economic development. No doubt the hon. Member for Normanton would confirm that business men and professionals in Leeds and elsewhere would leave high-tax Labour regions in their droves for efficiently run, Conservative regions. Inward investment from abroad would follow. That would leave some regions without investment and jobs. How can Labour argue that their plans would be benefitial to regional development?

Mr. O'Brien: The references that I made were not to Labour party documents but to papers published by the chambers of commerce. How can the Minister say that those people are not living in reasonably-rated areas—or did not do so, long before the introduction of the unified business rate?

Mr. Key: I did not say that. I said that I feared going down the road of different regional governments having different tax rates. That is an interesting parallel with the

[Mr. Key]

Liberal Democrats' proposals for local income tax, whereby local councils would be given authority to raise taxes locally—which would have a profound effect on industrial location.

I must tell my right hon. and hon. Friends that we have an ally. The hon. Member for Gateshead, East and other Labour Members who spoke should be in no doubt that by no means all Opposition Members agree with their point of view. The hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett), who is charged with improving Labour's performance in the south of England, denounced his party's proposals in forceful terms. He called them "unwise", "incoherent", and "folly". He predicted that devolution would be divisive and questioned the very motives behind the policy. I quote from *Tribune* of 10 March 1989:

"Those who advocated regional government also have little idea of the amount of managerial talent required to organise and control it. It would take at least a generation to find and train effective top management cadres for the English regions . . . Reorganisation of the management of English government on this scale would cause a decade of chaos in local services."

Someone even more influential than the hon. Member for Norwich, South disagrees with the hon. Member for Gateshead, East. I refer to the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock), who proclaimed in Blackpool that regional government would result in

"guaranteed disharmony, disunity, conflict and competition throughout the whole of Britain . . . The dominant issue of politics will be the jealousies of region against region, nation against nation, argument against argument. That will be . . . very bad news for Britain."

Or has the right hon. Gentleman changed his mind again because he wants the key to No. 10? Labour does not have its act together.

This Government's many imaginative and effective initiatives are far more helpful to the regions than any hare-brained scheme from Labour. We firmly expect that the single market will benefit all English regions. There is no evidence that they will be adversely affected by its completion.

I will briefly outline the ways in which our policies are working together to improve the quality of life in areas that face particular problems. I repeat that it would be wrong to impose another layer of bureaucracy, when a more streamlined local government structure is needed. We have done much to develop regional policies over the past decade. It is within the overall context of national development that regional development can most effectively be addressed and actioned.

This Government are committed to an effective policy of regional development, and I remind the hon. Member for Gateshead, East that much has been achieved over the past 10 years. Our city challenge and other inner-city initiatives were enthusiastically received by local authorities and the private sector—particularly in the north-east. Middlesbrough and Newcastle are among the 11 local authorities chosen to be the pacemaker front-runners in the new city challenge initiative. So enthusiastic were other local authorities, including the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South, that his council, together with Sunderland, put in a late bid. It did not want to be left out.

I should like another five hours of debate with the hon. Member for Gateshead, East, because we could learn much from it. She referred to the problems of democracy. There are severe problems of democracy that we as a nation need to face, particularly in local government. I am in no doubt about that, particularly as I have toured regularly the difficult areas in all parts of the country. The people who live in those areas have lost power. They perceive that they have no influence over their own lives, or over the quality of their own lives. They are in need of empowerment. That is the problem which faces us all.

Whether I am talking to the residents of Moss Side in Manchester, or Scotswood in Newcastle, I am left in no doubt that they dislike their local councillors and councils as much as they dislike the Government. Members of Parliament who represent those areas know that that is the problem which we face. We must address it. We must ensure that those people can play their part with local government, national government, the private sector and the voluntary organisations in creating their own future.

That is what city challenge is all about. City challenge will deliver £7·5 million of Government assistance to each authority each year for a five-year programme of concentrated regeneration—for example, in the west end of Newcastle and in east Middlesbrough. This year we are spending £42·2 million on our northern region urban programme. That is a special allocation, in addition to the normal resources made available to local authorities to support their inner-area programmes of social and economic regeneration. It is allocated to the north-east —to Newcastle, Gateshead, North Tyneside, Cleveland, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Langbaurgh and Stockton.

In addition, since we introduced the city grant in May 1988, 39 schemes in the northern region have received grant aid of £18·1 million to enable developers to undertake otherwise uneconomic housing, industrial and commercial developments.

Ms. Quin: I do not know whether the Minister has seen today's announcement about the loss of 370 jobs at the Volvo plant in Copeland in west Cumbria. Is he able to make an announcement about a review of the assisted area status for west Cumbria which was taken away from that area in the early 1980s? Do the Government intend to introduce initiatives to help that area which is, of course, part of the northern region?

Mr. Key: I do not doubt that representations will be made about that private sector decision, which I very much regret. I am very sorry about loss of jobs. The hon. Lady had the advantage of slipping out for an hour, when no doubt she managed to get hold of that news. I have been stuck here and have not received it, but I shall, of course, give it proper consideration.

There are urban development corporations in the northern region and throughout the country. The housing investment programme has allocated £99 million to the northern region this year, with an additional £20·5 million coming through estate action resources. A very good example of development is the Calgate estate in Newcastle where the Department of the Environment, the local authority and the housing corporation worked together to refurbish housing in the area, to build new homes and to raise the profile of the area. I have been there and seen the remarkable progress that is being made.

Mr. Hugo Summerson (Walthamstow): My hon. Friend knows that there is a housing action trust in my constituency of Walthamstow. Would it be possible for

other areas to be given housing action trusts, in addition to all the resources and programmes that my hon. Friend has mentioned?

Mr. Key: The development of housing action trusts is one of the most exciting ways in which central Government are helping the regions. One of the most enthusiastic authorities taking up housing action trusts has been Liverpool city council. It has seen that this is an obvious way to make real progress in the regions, using central Government—taxpayers'—money.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. O'Brien: The hon. Lady has only just come in.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: I came because I regard the debate as important. I used to work in Liverpool. I know that it has one of the worst housing problems in the country. I am delighted that it has now decided to co-operate with the Government and solve a problem that I brought the regional affairs committee of the European Parliament over to look at 14 years ago.

Mr. Key: My hon. Friend is wise and experienced, both at a European level and in her constituency. Her constituents are lucky that she has decided to stay down here today. I am glad that she has joined us for the debate.

The motion refers to cuts in the regional assistance budget. I have tried to explain why the hon. Member for Gateshead, East and I were talking at cross purposes. In 1979, the assisted areas covered almost half the country by working population. They now cover 35 per cent. of the working population and are carefully targeted on the areas most in need. Our regional policy measures are not the heavy-handed, high-spending models of the past. I remember well being an economics teacher in the awful years of the Labour Government of the 1970s. I had to change the A-level economics syllabus to take account of yet more dotty ideas that poured out of the Department of Economic Affairs, of national plans that were revised because they did not work and of huge methods of distributing money through regional policy, where more than half the country was part of a development area. I remember the ridiculous plans such as the selective employment tax. It is typical of the Labour party that it has not learnt a thing since. It still thinks that by interfering and pouring on more layers of bureaucracy and government it will achieve something that has eluded it for so long and will continue to elude it if it takes that path.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: I hear what the Minister says about regional policy in the past. I have great misgivings about what was done by the previous Labour Government. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Yes; it is not difficult to say. Government spending has a strong regional dimension. The latest available figures—they are not Government figures because they will not publish theirs—show that in the south-east Government spending per head was £1,876 but it was only £1,707 in the north—10 per cent. less. That is a strange regional policy. Unfortunately, the money is spent on the strongest and least-vulnerable economic regions at the expense of the weakest and most vulnerable.

Mr. Key: As I said to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Central, when he was here, I would welcome a five-hour debate on the distribution of grant, which is one of the hardest tasks facing any Government. I take the hon. Gentleman's point. I assert that our regional policies will more than balance the points that he makes. It would not be appropriate to pursue that now.

Regional selective assistance remains the main regional programme for industry. It is available to British and foreign-owned businesses for projects providing or safeguarding jobs and for the development of intermediate areas. There is the regional enterprise grant scheme for very small businesses and consultancy support for firms under the enterprise initiative. When the private sector is unwilling to invest in the assisted areas, factory and commercial premises are provided by English Estates. Since March 1986, it has created more than 5 million sq ft of floor space in such areas.

However, instruments and expenditure are not always enough. That is why the Invest in Britain Bureau is active in promoting foreign inward investment. The regions benefit considerably. Regional programme grants are used to encourage investment in assisted areas. In the northern region alone, there are more than 220 foreign-owned businesses employing more than 42,000 people. For example, Fujitsu is setting up a £600 million semi-conductor plant at Aycliffe, county Durham, creating 1,500 jobs. There are many more examples.

There is abundant evidence that our regional measures have had a significant impact on unemployment in assisted areas. Tens of thousands of jobs are created each year by regional selective assistance. Unemployment in the northern region has fallen by more than 52,000 from 201,000, or 14·1 per cent. at the beginning of 1988, to 149,000, or 10·6 per cent. in October this year. Far too many people are unemployed, but we are making progress. We are committed to an effective regional industrial policy.

The economic development of the regions is further assisted by structural funds, which are made available through the European Community. Since the Commission confirmed its objective 2 list in 1989, most of the assisted areas and some others have benefited under the RESIDER, RECHAR and RENAVAL schemes. These conversion schemes aim to foster industrial diversification in areas that formerly relied on iron and steel production, coal mining and shipbuilding. I responded to the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed on that point.

Another example of regional development has been in the relocation of Government Departments away from the south-east. Since we announced the launch of our relocation policy in March 1988, about 30,000 posts—two thirds of the total reviewed—have been recommended for creation in or relocation to the regions. A large proportion of the posts already announced for relocation are destined for locations targeted by our regional development or urban programme policies and we expect that about 60 per cent. of the posts will be filled by local recruitment.

For example, in the past three years 8,610 posts have been relocated to the assisted areas and 18,700 posts to the urban programme areas. Of the 24,170 posts in England, the northern region has so far received about 2,500, including 855 with the Inland Revenue in Sunderland, Middlesbrough and Washington and 1,205 posts in a number of departments in Newcastle. The others are being distributed among the east and west midlands, the north-west, Yorkshire and Humberside, East Anglia and the south-west. The full breakdown of the figures was given in a parliamentary written answer on 3 December.

[Mr. Key]

Our policies promise a bright and vigorous future for regional development and local government in England. Our plans for local government will bring decision-making closer to the people rather than alienating them by imposing an extra layer of bureaucracy on top of local government. We shall create councils which reflect local communities and which are able to predict and respond to people's needs. Building on the achievements of the past few years, we shall continue to target aid and assistance where it can be most constructive, for the regions and for the nation as a whole. Effective regional policies—not regional government—are the way forward for England.

1.51 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I shall begin—as did other hon. Members—by congratulating the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) on choosing the subject for the debate. It was potentially a valuable and interesting debate, but, as happened during the debate on constitutional reform on 17 May, which was also held in private Members' time, time has become rather squeezed, mainly because the Conservatives seem keen to spin out the debate through their speeches and interventions instead of allowing a proper debate. Consequently, I shall try to keep my remarks as brief as possible so that other hon. Members may contribute.

Hon. Members have referred to the increasing centralisation of government that has taken place, especially in the past decade. I shall not add to what they have said, but it underlines the need for a rethink. Another reason for a rethink is what has been called the European dimension. Not all of us are happy with the developments in Europe, but we cannot ignore them. References have been made to the impact that the regional policies and structure in Europe will have and to the desire of the regions to have some direct representation in Europe. Whether or not the Government facilitate that, it will tend to happen.

Regions are increasingly arranging for their own unofficial representation—such as happened recently in Northern Ireland where local industry and local authorities banded together to establish their own local office—because they recognise that existing Government channels have let them down in that respect and that the worst tendency will continue. The tendency will be apparent at both ends. It will come from the regions, which will want effective direct representation in the centre, and from the centre, which will want a body in the regions—a viable interlocutor—with which it can deal.

It has been said that we must look to the future. Other factors in addition to Europe are leading us in that direction. The subject of additionality has been mentioned and will continue to be a source of friction until we have found a way to resolve the problem. Increasing the autonomy of the regions is one solution. Cohesion is another term which has come into vogue. I understand that the Government are reluctant to adopt the measures for cohesion suggested by the European Commission and to be discussed at Maastricht. I accept that cohesion within Europe is important, but we must also consider it in terms of the United Kingdom.

In terms of single markets and their evolution, reference was made by the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) to the way in which Italy and Germany evolved into unified nations in the 19th century. I understand that economic integration took place rapidly in Italy, within a decade of that state becoming unified in 1870, but the speed of that integration helped to perpetuate regional disparities within the country. In Germany, a fair degree of economic union had been achieved in 1844—decades before political union—and relatively slow pace of economic and political union meant that the same degree of regional disparity as that in Italy did not exist. Unfortunately, for various reasons, other European countries are set on the faster approach towards economic and political union, but that is likely to accentuate regional differences. A rush towards a single market in Europe will hurt the regions, particularly the peripheral ones. I am concerned about that, and the serious impact of that market on the economy of some of the United Kingdom regions, particularly my own.

It is also important to consider the way in which the single market within the United Kingdom has operated. I was interested to study the table produced by *The Guardian* two months ago which showed trade movements in terms of gross domestic product per capita as a percentage of the United Kingdom average. Of the 11 regions of which people talk, that is the eight English planning regions, and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, eight have fallen behind in the past 10 years. Three—East Anglia, the south-west and the south-east—have gained, and it is from those areas that opposition to the development of regions is expressed, as revealed by contributions today. However, the growing disparity and lack of economic cohesion between the regions of the United Kingdom is a motor towards the development of regionalism.

Diminished political uniformity has also been discussed today. That has been an issue for many years, not just the past decade. A number of Conservative Members displayed an important misunderstanding of the nature of the political unit within which we operate. There was a constant reference to "this country", "this nation" or "this state" as though it were a unitary one. That is wrong.

The United Kingdom is not and never has been a unitary state. Conservative Members think in terms of the closely-knit, integrated society which developed in southern England a thousand years ago. That society has been the greatest and most influential element within the state which subsequently developed, but it is a particularly southern English phenomenon and the same is not true of northern England.

Conservative Members referred to various historical examples and I should have loved to take some of them up, including the palatinate in Cheshire and the north-west, the Council of the North which once existed and the separate arrangements on the Welsh marches and elsewhere. Conservative Members believe in the concept of a tightly knit, integrated, unitary state, but that is only true of southern England. That area is now the dominant element in population terms and, based on that experience, people from southern England make mistakes about the United Kingdom as a whole. It is not a unitary state but consists of a number of different national and regional groups. It is said that it has existed with a single legislature for most of its existence, but it has certainly not done so for all of its history because this single legislature is less than 200 years old.

There is a tendency to think that our institutions have greater antiquity than is, in fact, the case. Although we have had a single legislature, underlying that have been understandings between the regions and, underlying them, a series of treaties between the major constituent elements of the Union. We are not a unitary state. We are a multinational state. In that context, it is natural to think of political institutions which reflects that underlying reality. However, another mistake is made when we look at those institutions. People think that we are talking about Parliaments and Governments, but we are not: we are talking about regional administrations, which do not have to have all the elaborate paraphernalia of Governments, such as Prime Ministers and Cabinets. Indeed, I am not certain whether it is necessary today for them all to have legislative powers.

In that context, it it well worth looking back to the minority report of the Kilbrandon commission in 1973, and to Crowther-Hunt. Interestingly, the Kilbrandon minority report seemed to pay more attention than the majority to the European dimension and the impact that the European Community would have on our institutions. It is well worth reconsidering the sort of administrative devolution that was then suggested.

Conservative Members have talked about size and communication. I intervened to ask the hon. Member for Taunton what he thought about Luxembourg. Taking what is perhaps a parochial view, I have pointed out to other people that Luxembourg is smaller in area and in population than County Antrim, but it manages to operate with its own administration. Therefore, in this context, size—whether geographic or any other—is not important. It is a question of natural human units.

I appreciate that there are serious difficulties and problems over questions of finance. I have heard the horrible phrase "block grants". If we have the block grants that Whitehall has thought up in terms of devolution for Scotland and Northern Ireland, we shall not make any advance. The sort of block grant that has behind it a detailed Treasury line-by-line examination of everything that the administration is to do will not work. I believe that the same problem underlies the standard spending assessments. They are trying to be too sophisticated. In addition, underlying those provisions is a degree of administrative and political control from the centre which deprives the regions or the local authorities of any real autonomy. The financing arrangements must allow the relevant body to have real autonomy.

When we are dealing with the formulae the House might like to consider the formula for the Süd Tirol or the Alto Adige, depending on one's sympathies, where a fixed formula relates not only to the population, but to the geographical area. The population is taken as a percentage of that of Italy as a whole and the geographic area is considered as a percentage of the size of Italy, and the two are taken together. That is it. Central Government have no say in the money, which is derived automatically from the formula. It is well worth looking at different formulae, provided that they are automatic and do not conceal central Government control.

On the issue of legislation, we must rethink what is appropriate at the European and national levels and, if at all, at the regional level. That applies to the question of subsidiarity.

We must also consider what is called the West Lothian problem. In our debate on 17 May, I commented that I find it strange that people are reluctant to look at the various proposals that have been made in respect of Ireland since 1886. The hon. Member for Taunton suggested that we should have an arrangement whereby Members from the area that would be covered by the regional authority—let us say Scotland for the sake of argument—should not be entitled to vote in this place on matters relating to, say, England. In other words, those Members would have voting rights on some issues, but not on others. That is utterly unworkable. Within the one Chamber, we cannot have a majority for some purposes, but not for others. If that is what would happen in the Chamber, what would happen in the Cabinet? What about people who are Ministers for one locality but not for another? Indeed, we should bear in mind that the majority of members of the Cabinet are English Members with responsibility for English areas not United Kingdom areas. That is another can of worms, and another issue.

Let us consider what happened with the various home rule Bills. They started with "everybody out" or, in other words, no Irish Members in Westminster. Then in the 1892 Bill the Liberal party changed its mind and had "everybody in". Eventually in the 1921 Bill it adopted a rather arbitrary reduction in the number of Members not merely to the theoretical figure which produced equality within the United Kingdom but to even fewer than that. For example, the six-county area which became Northern Ireland had 30 Members of Parliament immediately before 1920. That was reduced to 13 after 1920. Hon. Members will understand, therefore, why an increase from 12 to 17 is not something that we regard as a great favour. However, that is a different issue.

I mentioned Lord Crowther-Hunt. It is worth considering what he stated in his minority report to the Kilbrandon commission report. He said that in considering what arrangements there should be his guiding principle was:

"In our view an essential conditon for maintaining this unity is that there must be a substantial equality of political rights and obligations for the peoples of its different nations and regions."

That basic view led Kilbrandon to conclude that there should be a form of regional administration in England, and not only devolution for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. That should be the guiding principle in our approach to these issues. As Crowther-Hunt later said:

"Clearly, there would no longer be any reality to the concept of the political unity of the United Kingdom if individuals in one part of the United Kingdom had significantly greater or lesser political rights and obligations than those in another part."

In that context, I am afraid that I must criticise the motion. After referring to the need for regional government in England, it refers to

"the excessive centralisation of government in the United Kingdom since 1979 and the failure to decentralise and devolve power to the nations and regions of the United Kingdom."

Later it moves that the House

"expresses alarm at the regional divisions which continue to characterise the United Kingdom economy; and considers that the creation of a regional tier of government in the English regions as well as national devolution to Scotland and Wales is now vital to the Untied Kingdom's future economic and political well-being."

There is something missing there. A mistake has been made. The motion refers to the English regions, to Scotland and to Wales. That is not the United Kingdom, but Great Britain. The United Kingdom is the United

[Mr. David Trimble]

Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. I find it remarkable that while the motion calls perfectly reasonably for regional administrations in England and similiar measures of devolution for Wales and Scotland, it is silent about the rest of the United Kingdom. I remind the House of the perfectly correct statement made by Lord Crowther-Hunt that there would no longer be any reality to the concept of the United Kingdom if individuals in one part had significantly greater or lesser political rights than others. That is significant. The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) referred to the Government's difficulties over the Council of Europe's convention on local self-government. It is not simply that the Government are reluctant for political or ideological reasons to sign the convention. They cannot sign it. They would immediately be in breach of it because of the total absence of any form of local self-government in Northern Ireland.

In Northern Ireland we have suffered uniquely from Whitehall's desire for total political control over other local authorities. That desire has been maintained by the Northern Ireland Office regularly placing obstacles in the way of any restoration of local democracy in Northern Ireland. I have no hesitation in identifying it as the main obstacle to the restoration of democratic local administration there. It plays on our smaller size in the kingdom and consequent lack of influence and our desire not to disrupt the essential unity of the kingdom. But if that approach is followed elsewhere in the kingdom and the same attitude is applied, as the Government appear to do with regard to Scotland, the United Kingdom will be damaged.

I found particularly alarming the comments made by the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin), who seemed to want to make a unilateral declaration of independence for the south-east of England and to tell the rest of the country to go away. He clearly said that about Scotland. That attitude will do more damage to the United Kingdom than any form of regional administration. A little-England approach will end up impoverishing us all. It is necessary for us to consider a form of regional administration which would give some realistic opportunity for control and influence to the regions, which will become essential if we are to have some form of dialogue with European entities as they develop.

2.10 pm

Dr. Ashok Kumar (Langhbaurgh): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) for bringing this important issue to the forefront of our minds. I have been listening to the debate and find that other hon. Members have said everything that I want to say. However, I shall make a couple of points and I intend to be more constructive and rather less self-indulgent than some Conservative Members.

I shall try to be positive. Such an important issue cannot be dismissed lightly. We need to put the arguments for regionalism and for regional government in a wider context—national and international. Throughout Europe the demands for popular autonomy, regional self-determination and for a renewal of a sense of identity and self-esteem are rising daily. In many parts of eastern Europe that has a negative edge—indeed, some might say a barbaric edge in Yugoslavia. However, even that Balkan tragedy must be seen in its historic context.

In western Europe the same pressures are manifest, but in the main there is a more mature response. The vast majority of western European nations, the European Community partners and the European Free Trade Association countries have flourishing local and regional government structures. They know that the centre cannot and should not determine every small element of local spending and what is local need. In the one country that bucks the trend, the United Kingdom, that determination results in an undemocratic straitjacket confining local needs and local aspirations to the diktat of Marsham street and Whitehall.

Under the Government, since that miserable and bleak day in 1979 when the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) first assumed office, regional spending has been slashed. In the last years of the Callaghan Government, regional spending was in the order of £1·8 billion while today that spending, expressed in the prices of the period, has been reduced to an annual average of £242 million. Even that meagre amount has been largely taken out of the popular, public domain, with the focus of spending attention now geared towards unelected, unaccountable and undemocratic urban development corporations. The hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) said that I had not mentioned Teesside development corporation—now I have. In many cases, those organisations appear to believe that a new economic dawn can be built on the backs of tin sheds in primary colours and the industrial activities of B & Q and MFI.

The patterns of inequality in our society precisely mirror the regional divides. If one lives in the north, one is likely to die younger, to enjoy—if that is the right word—a greater incidence of disease, to have less chance of owning a car or owning one's home, less chance of a job and less chance of a well-paid and permanent job. One will lead a less satisfying and less promising life, perhaps shorter than that of a similar person who happens to live in the south-east of England.

If one lives in the north, big decisions affecting one's life and the lives of one's family—whether a new hospital is to be built or a new road constructed, or whether new investment and jobs are to be steered towards the area—will be taken by faceless civil servants from the home counties or by business men nominated by the Tory party machine.

The previous, popular powers of local authorities to take such decisions, to see whether they fitted distinct local needs and to ensure that those intended to benefit from the decisions do in fact benefit, have been eroded to the point where they are invisible. The fundamental truth is that the one group of people who have no say whatsoever in those decisions are the people who most need to benefit from the decision-making process.

It is obvious that the so-called free market has done little for those who live and work in the regions. The Conservative campaign guide for 1991—the guide for the general election which the Prime Minister was too frightened to call—said that it was the Government's policy to create sustainable growth for all Britain's regions by freeing markets and stimulating enterprise.

The Minister talked about great economic success in the north-east. Let him try telling that to the people of my constituency, who are now facing Christmas on the dole

because of the slump in orders for the retail and household goods which caused a hi-tech lighting company to close its factory at Skelton. Let him try telling it to my constituents employed in the steel industry who have seen the results of the profits crash of British Steel, job losses at Skinningrove and the shelving of a new platemill project for the Teesside works. Only two days ago 500 more redundancies were announced by British Steel, reducing the company's work force on Teesside by 20 per cent. in one year to 4,500.

People see this happening against a backdrop of regional inequality. My constituents are not blind. They have families and friends living in other parts of the United Kingdom and they can see with their own eyes, even allowing for the effects of the recession, what is happening. They see the evidence of two nations, with the physical and economic effects of the creation of more than 1·3 million jobs in the south since 1979, while we must live with the despair caused by the loss of more than 100,000 jobs in the northern region alone.

Labour will reverse that catalogue of man-made disasters. We will regenerate and democratise the regions and allow the United Kingdom to be seen yet again to be swimming with the incoming tide of decentralisation, democracy and accountability which is sweeping across Europe.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East referred to development agencies. When Labour comes to power, I intend to play a strong role in setting up the new agencies, which will act as the cutting edge of the new deal that is urgently needed. I want to see my constituents, many of whom know little other than the miserable dole queues or the underfunded, underpaid, so-called training schemes which the Government were proud to announce, including the youth training scheme and employment training, benefit along with others from the surge of democracy and regeneration.

For far too long we have all—Labour and Conservative alike—talked ceaselessly about "the regional problem." Instead, we must talk urgently—under the next Labour Government we shall certainly talk in those terms—about the coming regional renaissance in our areas. That is why we need regional government. I urge the House to support the motion.

2.19 pm

Mr. Michael Brown (Brigg and Cleethorpes): This has been an interesting debate and I was privileged to be able to hear a number of speeches. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) made particularly important contributions.

I hope that the House will forgive me if I concentrate on the region known in my area as Yorkshire and Humberside, which is not accepted as a loyalty region by those who live in the area. At present, people in my area have difficulty even in identifying with the present locally based county of Humberside. The county was created in the 1974 local government reorganisation and my constituency used to fall within the county of Lindsey. There was never a Lincolnshire county council, but we had Lindsey, Kesteven and Holland county councils, all of which were accepted as ideal, decentralised local government areas dealing with strategic matters. Those counties were much missed after the reorganisation of 1974, so the last thing that we want to do is create larger units than the present counties. We should question the very existence of counties and ensure that we return to a much more locally based system of local government.

I could not quite understand the point raised by the hon. Member for Normanton (Mr. O'Brien), who was contradicting the argument that he sought to make when he quoted the journal of the Association of British Chambers of Commerce. He seemed to be saying that the Labour party's case for regional government was based on the fact that cities such as Leeds needed to be intertwined, through the motorway system, with the Humber ports. He made a case for regional government because of the development of the Humber ports and said that he wanted that development to be shared for the benefit of the Yorkshire region. As I said to him in an intervention, the Labour party did more to prevent the development of the Humber ports, which the hon. Gentleman was praying in aid for the Labour party's policy on regional government, than any other political party in the House. He questioned why I had promoted the development of the Humber ports. The simple reason is that I am the Member of Parliament for the constituency which contains the Immingham docks.

The hon. Gentleman and several other Opposition Members also spoke about 1992, the need for Britain to be at the heart of Europe and for regional industry to have access to wider markets. Had we not expanded the Humber ports by means of private legislation between 1987 and 1990, industries, especially in the north of England, would have been denied the opportunity of transacting through a port with the most modern facilities in the world, and investment would have gone to Rotterdam or elsewhere in Europe instead of the United Kingdom. The hon. Gentleman contradicted his and the Labour party's policies by praying in aid the Association of British Chambers of Commerce document in support of regional government and suggesting how important it was for the Humber ports to be linked to wider opportunities for trade in Yorkshire and Humberside, yet that development came about only through the support of my right hon. and hon. Friends on a free vote in the House over a period of two or three years.

May I return to the main theme that guides debates on regional government in Humberside. Humberside is loathed and detested. The sooner the county of Humberside goes, the better. Fortunately, the local government boundary commission, which was charged by my right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) two and a half years ago to countenance the prospect of getting rid of that county, has made various decisions and its report is now on the table. I hope that it will be on the top of the agenda of the new local government commission and, when the statutory provisions are enacted, I hope that the commission will be guided by the boundary commission's report. I hope it will be possible for that report to be considered at an early stage.

There is no doubt that the last thing the people of Humberside want is to traipse all the way over to a regional centre. It is bad enough when I have to discuss the funding of my local health service with the Yorkshire regional health authority in January and have to traipse from Cleethorpes to Harrogate, which is miles away.

We want more power to be devolved downwards in all aspects of central Government and local government. We want the district health authorities to have more power so that they may consider the hospital trusts, and leave out

[Mr. Michael Brown]

the regional health authorities. The Department of Trade and Industry uses an inappropriate regional map of Yorkshire and Humberside. If I have to go to office meetings in Leeds, it means I have to travel miles from the far extremities of my constituency. It is miles from Cleethorpes to Harrogate, which makes it difficult when considering any regional organisation.

The system of the old counties of England was the best one and constituted an ideal way of retaining local loyalties. I believe that the local government commission and the structural reform that the Government are bringing forward in this Session of Parliament will ensure the best reform of local government.

2.27 pm

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): I have examined the Labour party's plans for regional government and endorse the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes (Mr. Brown) that the old system of local government—on whichever structure it was based—constitutes the right way to deal with future regional organisation, pressure for development and the interests of the local people.

The Labour party's series of proposals does not focus on the differences between local and regional government—there is total confusion on which roles will be played by each. First, it is suggested that the regional assembly and its functions will be financed centrally by a block vote of the House and, eventually, by a proportion of local government rates. Unfortunately, the general public will consider that to be another burden heaped on their local tax bill by the Labour party which views people as money milch-cows for Labour local government, free from central controls.

The simple relationships that will exist between central, regional and local government are not covered under the proposals. The Labour party's answer seems to be to create a series of quangos that, in a loose way, will relate to the regional assembly. The only result will be a massive increase in expenditure for the regional assemblies in England, whereby large numbers of elected representatives will be paid salaries and will no doubt require staff, offices and the whole panoply of mini-Westminsters in eight centres up and down the country.

The strength of the Conservative policy has been to devolve power downwards, often to the smallest units—as with schools. We want to give parents choice in schools and give local authorities greater control. The way forward lies in single-tier local authorities representing the interests of the regions. The Labour party's proposals completely ignore that.

I am also worried about the cost of the proposals, which have all the hallmarks of ideas that have been cobbled together. The Labour party addresses issues in Scotland and Wales by stating that it realises that it must give those countries devolution, and so must justify that in the rest of Britain. It is a hash and a mess. It will not do and I urge the House to reject Labour's proposals.

2.29 pm

Ms. Quin: I have very little time in which to sum up. The debate has been interesting and worth while and I thank hon. Members who have taken part for raising so many different aspects of the issue of regional government.

Almost all my hon. Friends and some Conservative Members spoke about the European dimension and how important it would be for the future of our regions. When the Government agree at Maastricht to the setting up of a regional advisory body, I urge them to make sure that English regions are represented on it, and that the English regions represented on that body also——

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

ACCESS (FORMER MEMBERS AND UNITED KINGDOM MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT)

Resolved,

That this House approves the Resolution of the Select Committee of the House of Commons (Services) relating to access to the House by former honourable and Right honourable Members of the House and by United Kingdom Members of the European Parliament, as set out in the Minutes of Proceedings of the Committee of Tuesday 16th July 1991 (HC 209-iv).—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

TRAVEL BY MEMBERS TO EUROPEAN COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS

Resolved,

That, in the opinion of this House, provision should be made as from 1st January 1992 for reimbursing Members in respect of the cost of travelling on parliamentary duties between the United Kingdom and any European Community institution in Brussels, Luxembourg or Strasbourg and any additional expenses necessarily incurred in such travelling, subject to the limit that the amount payable to a Member in any year, beginning with 1st April, shall not exceed the aggregate of—

(a) the cost of a return Business Class airfare for the journey on the assumption that the journey begins and ends at a London airport and that the destination is Brussels, Luxembourg or Strasbourg; and

(b) twice the corresponding Civil Service Class A standard subsistence rate for the time being in operation.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 11th December, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business) and Standing Order No. 15 (Prayers against statutory instruments, &c (negative procedure)), Mr. Speaker shall

(1) not more than three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Newton and Mr. Neil Kinnock relating to Social Security, Pensions and Terms and Conditions of Employment put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Newton; and

(2) put the Question or Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to Fisheries not more than three hours after their commencement;

and the above proceedings may continue after the expiry of the time for opposed business.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

EUROPEAN STANDING COMMITTEES

Ordered,

That the unnumbered explanatory memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 20th November, relating to the fisheries guide and other prices, shall not stand referred to European Standing Committee A.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

Fusilier Lee Thompson

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. John Hughes (Coventry, North-East): Just over nine months ago on 26 February, nine young soldiers of 3 battalion Royal Regiment of Fusiliers were killed in action in southern Iraq just 48 hours before the ceasefire. One of those killed was 19-year-old Lee Thompson, one of my constituents. Eleven other service men were injured in the incident. What makes the tragic slaughter of those young men different is that they were killed, or rather murdered, by so-called friendly fire.

I fully support the views of Lee Thompson's parents. This incident was a monumental military disaster. As the circumstances in which it happened have not yet been fully clarified, there can be no confidence that the lessons have been learnt or that the deaths were not in vain. The people who killed those men have not been brought to book; they are still in the American air force and they could therefore do the same again. In the circumstances, the Government have behaved in a deplorably cavalier and grossly insensitive way towards the families of the men who were killed. Events show that the Secretary of State is prepared to take the glory for victory, but not prepared to dirty his hands when others pay the price for his decisions and, in this case, for the gung-ho actions of his allies.

The incident occurred when C company of the Fusiliers was in southern Iraq. Some 37 Warrior and supporting vehicles were reorganising in the area after a sand storm. According to the official report, at 1500 hours local time, visibility was clear and skies were good. Suddenly, two Warrior armoured vehicles were destroyed. Soldiers on the ground assumed that their vehicles had hit mines, but they had actually been hit by Maverick missiles from two American A10 tankbusters. The A10s had previously been deployed by headquarters 1st British Armoured Division to attack the Iraqi positions some 20 kms—between 10 and 15 miles—east of C company. They were under the immediate control of the British assistant divisional air liaison officer.

The air controller insists that he gave the pilots the grid references of the intended Iraqi positions. The American pilots insist that they did not receive them, and they certainly did not acknowledge them. Instead, they relied on the parting words of an American pilot who gave them a physical description of the terrain in which the Iraqi targets were situated. They tried to find those targets, but instead found what they identified as a column of 50 Iraqi T54/55 tanks.

It is claimed that the lead aircraft made two passes at 15,000 ft and 8,000 ft to check the target. Although the pilots used high-powered binoculars, they failed to identify any friendly orange fluorescent markers, and the two aircraft each fired a missile from 9,000 ft.

The American pilots reported their action to the air controller, who realised that the US pilots had hit a British position and called in reconnaissance aircraft. Unlike the American pilots of the A10s, the reconnaissance crew identified the type of vehicles from 14,000 ft and saw their fluorescent markings at 6,000 ft. Astonishingly, the board of inquiry failed to establish whether the A10 pilots should have been able to see the identifying marks from their operating height of above 6,000 ft. That inquiry proved to be a charade, and its report a whitewash. Its anodyne conclusion was that while it was clear that the American A10s delivered the missiles, it could not be established precisely why they attacked the wrong target. The board recommended the clearest standard operating procedures and sophisticated identification systems to prevent such tragedies in future. More specifically, it recommended that concise grid instructions be given to and acknowledged by pilots.

Nearly a year after the tragedy, all too many questions remain unanswered. I trust that the Minister will answer them today, or will have them published in the official record. I vow not to drop this case until satisfactory answers are forthcoming. As to the board of inquiry, do the Government accept its report and the specific recommendations that I quoted? Have the Government established a research programme to investigate improved identification systems? If so, how much money has been allocated to that project?

Why did the American pilots rely on the parting words of the pilot of another plane? Why did the pilots either not receive or not acknowledge the air controller's co-ordinates according to the procedures laid down? Is there any truth in the report in *The Independent* on 23 November that either the controller did not use, or the American pilots did not know, the secret code word that was supposed to be employed when verifying messages so as to prevent the Iraqis from transmitting false data? Is the apparent failure to use that code word a clue to the chain of events leading to the deaths of nine young soldiers? Has the Minister thoroughly investigated those points?

What kind of binoculars did the American pilots use, and how long have they been in service? Did the Minister read in the 23 November article in *The Independent* evidence from British troops on the ground that the American aircraft were not at 9,000 ft but as low as 150 above the ground? Fusilier Howard Finnan is quoted saying that several of his fellow soldiers saw the American aircraft approach at a very low level. Fusilier Lee Thompson's mother contacted me this morning to express her great concern at the fact that Fusilier Finnan has been reprimanded for passing that information to the media. Is the Minister interested in the truth? Surely the Minister and the Government are determined to get to the truth, and should encourage Fusilier Finnan to provide information—especially as his observations were substantiated by the expert testimony of aircraft specialists in the same report in *The Independent*.

If the A10s had previously attacked an Iraqi vehicle from 1,000 ft, less than one mile away, they would have found it difficult to climb to the much higher altitude from which it is said that the attack on the British vehicles was made. What is the truth of those claims? Does the Minister deny them? Does he still stick to what is rapidly being seen as a fictional account of this incident?

Fifthly, were the British vehicles equipped with black boxes emitting signals recognisable to friendly aircraft? If not, why not? When I asked the Prime Minister that question he used the security angle as an excuse to dodge it. The Minister no longer has any refuge in that excuse. Sixthly, how is it credible that the pilots did not see the orange identification marks, from whatever height they were at? Seventhly, were either of the pilots given a drug test after their mission? Eighthly, have the two American pilots been disciplined?

[Mr. John Hughes]

I give notice to the Minister that a refusal to answer on security grounds will be unacceptable to the parents and myself, especially since the Gulf war is over. This House has a legitimate interest—indeed a duty—to get to the bottom of this incident, not only for the sake of the grieving families but so that such incidents are never repeated, or at the very least, so that the most strenuous efforts are made to minimise that possibility. If Governments are to learn from this incident, the truth of the matter must be acknowledged.

Contrary to what reports would lead us to believe, the truth is that allied aircraft were in full control of the skies in the combat area and were at little risk from enemy fire—the opposite of what the report of the Army board of inquiry tries to convey. In those circumstances, pilots were not required to make split-second decisions—they had ample time to check with the air controller for co-ordinates of their targets. The American A10 pilots had ample time to identify enemy positions and vehicles precisely. More importantly, they had ample time to identify and locate allied positions and allied vehicles. That should have been the disciplined scenario. However, on 26 February 1991 two irresponsible and gun-happy pilots were on the loose, ignoring all the rules and roaming the skies in the vicinity of C company. They were intent on a kill to notch up when they returned to base. Nine men paid the ultimate price for that act, one which the Government are still trying to cover up.

The Minister must explain or seek explanations for discrepancies in the reports of what happened on that day in February. The most important discrepancy concerns the reason why the pilots destroyed only two of what they saw as the enemy target. If, as the pilots claim, they attacked a column of 50 Iraqi tanks, should they not have continued to attack and destroy as many as possible? Is it not somewhat illogical, in military terms, that they fired only two missiles and then reported to the air controller?

Mr. Terry Satchell, the father of one of those killed, commented on the report of the Army inquiry in terms that I fully endorse. He said:

"The pilots—the American pilots, that is—had enough stuff under their wings to wipe out half the British army. The fact that they just fired a couple of missiles shows that they recognised their mistake—a mistake they could have avoided in the first place."

He went on to say:

"The inquiry is basically an appeasement for the Americans"

and he called for an independent inquiry.

Another relative, Mrs. Ann Leech, was quoted in *The Daily Telegraph* in July, after the release of the Army's report, as saying:

"You cannot tell me that an American pilot cannot tell 37 marked British troop carriers. If he—the pilot—thought that they were Iraqi, why stop at bombing just two?"

What does the Minister say to Mr. Satchell and Mrs. Leech and the other parents?

There seems, however, to be a conflict of evidence between the board's report and the letter from the American Assistant Secretary of Defence, Carl W. Ford, to the British ambassador in America. In that letter of 4 November 1991 Mr. Ford states that after the attack the American pilots departed and passed a report to the air controller. He makes it appear to be a routine reflex action, yet if there were perceived to be 50 Iraqi tanks, why did the A10s take out only two of them? If it was due to being short of weaponry, why did they not request support? Why let the sitting duck that they had shot up get away? If they were confident of their targets, they would surely have continued to attack the so-called Iraqi column of tanks. That would have been the action of a competent pilot. Can the Minister explain the discrepancy?

Is not the truth of the matter that the young men paid the ultimate price for a war which encouraged the indiscriminate and widespread blasting of Iraqi forces, which in turn encouraged a gung-ho attack-first-ask-questions-afterwards attitude in which aircraft took part in a high-tech turkey shoot?

The article in *The Independent* of the conversation of Lieutenant Colonel Hayes and his co-pilot is an example of a pilot's undisciplined approach to the serious business of war. With the knowledge of a huge discrepancy of 56 between pilot's and co-pilot's co-ordinate readings, missiles were fired killing American soldiers. It is true to say that a blasé attitude prevailed during combat, in the aftermath and at the highest level, judging from the insulting behaviour of the British and American Governments since the tragedy in February.

The parents of Lee Thompson said in their letter to the American president:

"We know accidents happen in wartime, but with all the high-tech equipment you proudly brag about, why is it left to an incompetent pilot to use it?"

The parents do not want to know the name of the pilot who gunned their son down, but they want an acknowledgment of their suffering. They have not had that from the American Government. President Bush has not deigned to send them a personal letter of condolence nor, shamefully, have they had similar acknowledgment from the British Government.

The incident occurred on 26 February. The war ended on 28 February. I am astounded that a formal board of inquiry was not convened until 15 May. Surely the Minister will agree that leaving such investigations so long merely ensures that the trail becomes decidedly cold, that clues to the behaviour of those involved are erased, and that memories become fogged. His inaction begs the question: why were investigations not begun much earlier? In answer, I contend that the Government delayed their statement on the inquiry into this serious incident until 24 July to prevent its being discussed in the House before the summer recess. For political convenience, they deliberately tried to draw the sting from this awkward incident so as to avoid embarrassment and having some of the false glory of the Gulf war being taken from them. That is an entirely cynical and unworthy strategy and it shows a blatant disregard for young soldiers' families.

The actions of Ministers and the Prime Minister, who ultimately is in charge of any war, are the true acknowledgment of the value that they place on the lives of young soldiers. The families of these young men whose lives were carelessly tossed away have been grievously insulted by the callous, heartless and insensitive way in which they have been dealt with by Ministers. Since this grave matter was reported to the House, Ministers have refused to meet and discuss the problem with a delegation of Members of Parliament whose constituents were killed. Further, the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister have failed to reply to my letters. They did not check inaccurate and insensitive letters that were sent on their behalf to grieving relatives. Their shocking insensitivity is

shown by the fact that they allowed illegible rubbish, in the guise of an American report of the incident, to be sent to the relatives of the young men. I contend that for reasons known only to them the Government have deliberately colluded with their American counterparts to cover up military negligence of the gravest magnitude.

The Ministry delivered the report of the inquiry with a letter to the relatives on 23 July. The Minister disdained to sign it personally, leaving that to his private secretary. To rub salt into the wound, the Ministry could not even get the date of the young men's deaths correct. The letter said that they died months earlier than was the case. A later apology from the private secretary was sent, but by that time the damage had been done.

When Parliament returns after the Christmas break, a year of wasted time will have elapsed since the Gulf war and the deaths of those young soldiers. It is imperative that this should be the first matter to be dealt with by the House in 1992. I am sure that the Queen's Speech will refer to the tragedy, but to many people those young men will be just a fleeting memory of the war which television brought nightly into our living rooms.

Christmas will be a trying period for the mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers and friends of the soldiers who died in the Gulf war. Their loss will be felt even more acutely during the festivities which will reawaken the anguish of those who have become reconciled and adjusted to the loss of a son or a husband killed by enemy action. For other mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers and friends, the grief which consumes them unabated has been compounded by the gross insensitivity of the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King), who on 21 January 1991 said that his overriding aim was to provide the most helpful support on a long-term basis for any people who were wounded in the war and for the families of those who were killed. He went on to say how happy he was to announce that fact.

Subsequent events have shown that that was meaningless rhetoric as the Minister did not uphold his promises. He has not even bothered to meet the families of those who were killed in the friendly fire accident. Does he not realise the offence that that, and his refusal even to sign the letter to the families, have caused? The Government must be severely reprimanded for that, but it is not enough. Governments come and go and it will not be long before the present Government are replaced. Regrettably, however, young soldiers like Lee Thompson are regularly sent into action. We must uncover the full circumstances of his death, but all that we have had so far is a culpable cover-up.

Without a full inquiry, we cannot fully understand and put into operation the necessary reforms of procedure and research into and improvements of equipment. That is why the Minister and the Government must answer all my questions. The Minister should also agree that the matter be referred to the Select Committee on Defence so that the Select Committee can institute a full, thorough and open inquiry with the right to call witnesses. That is why the Government should also support the efforts of the human rights lawyer Geoffrey Robertson QC to discover the truth. Will the Minister allow the Robertson inquiry to cross-examine Government witnesses? If not, what has he to hide? How would the right hon. Member for Bridgwater and his wife feel and act if they were told that their son had been killed in similar circumstances?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Gentleman during his Adjournment debate, but I remind him that it is customary to allow the Minister a reasonable time to reply, and there is now very little time left.

Mr. Hughes: Would not their first response be to ask where, when and why, and would they not feel an overwhelming need to know why their son's life had been so senselessly sacrificed? Someone who holds the position of Minister should be fully aware that in the reconciliation of grief the need to know is absolutely paramount. He should also be aware that the relatives of the young men killed cannot come to terms with the ultimate finality of the loss without full knowledge of the circumstances of the tragedy. The absence of such certainty and plain, unvarnished truth, and the Government's insensitivity and lack of support, only prolong the heartache and grief. Wilfully to collude with a cover-up and to withhold information from my constituents Mr. and Mrs. Thompson constitutes an act of mental cruelty.

I shall heed your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and conclude shortly. I expect the Government and the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, out of common decency and human compassion, to respond speedily and honestly, fully and frankly to the need for the truth. I have two important messages. The first is to the Prime Minister, who has produced a proliferation of charters of rights: may we have a charter of rights for service men and their families? The second is to the Secretary of State for Defence: he should reveal the truth or do the honourable thing and resign.

2.55 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Hughes) for bringing this case to the attention of the House. However, I am sad that I do not have rather longer to answer the long list of queries that he raised with me.

I wish, first, to extend my sincere condolences to Mr. and Mrs. Thompson and the families of the other soldiers killed in the incident, and indeed to the families of all the other British personnel who lost their lives in the Gulf. All of those deaths are tragic, but the fact that Lee Thompson and eight of his colleagues were killed by allies is, I know, particularly keenly felt.

Early in his remarks the hon. Gentleman said that those men had been "murdered". I hope that he will withdraw that mark, because murder is an intentional killing. There is no question of those men being intentionally killed; it was a tragic accident. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will realise that to use the word "murder" is wrong in this case.

On 24 July, in response to a written question from my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim), I gave a comprehensive account of the findings of the board of inquiry. I should just like to recount briefly the circumstances of the incident.

The tragedy occurred at the height of the land offensive to liberate Kuwait, on the afternoon of 26 February. Having successfully fought their way through a number of enemy positions in southern Iraq, the 3 battalion of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers—RRF—was reorganising before continuing the push towards Kuwait. Although the

[Mr. Archie Hamilton]

battalion itself was not actually fighting the enemy at the time, the battle was still very much engaged, and the Iraqis remained a threat to British forces.

The 1st British Armoured Division was being supported by United States Air Force aircraft. Earlier in the day, the division's headquarters had tasked two successive flights to attack Iraqi armour. Subsequently, a further flight of two United States Air Force A10s reported for tasking to the British assistant divisional air liaison officer. In my subsequent remarks I shall refer to him as "DALO". His intention was that the aircraft should attack the same target as the two previous flights, in a location over 20 km to the east of 3 RRF's position at 15.00 hours.

The A10 pilots identified what they thought was the target area from a physical description given to them by a departing United States Air Force F16 of the previous flight, and shortly afterwards saw what they thought was a column of Iraqi tanks and support vehicles heading north. The pilots had been briefed that there were no friendly forces within 10 km of their target, and those vehicles were closer than that to the point they had identified as their target. Having made two observation passes and seen no friendly markings, both of the A10s then fired one infra-red Maverick missile, each destroying one of the vehicles. The aircraft then left the area, having reported the engagement to the assistant DALO.

As the pilots' report of the convoy of vehicles differed so dramatically from earlier descriptions of the target, the assistant DALO asked for confirmation of the location. When given the grid reference, he immediately realised that this was not the intended target area; and that it corresponded with the location of 3 RRF. He then called up a reconnaissance flight over the area, which identified the vehicles as Warriors and observed that they were carrying fluorescent air recognition panels.

Shortly after the incident, a military investigation began. This investigation gathered much information, but it became clear that in order to establish exactly what had happened, a formal board of inquiry would be needed to consider this information and to gather any further evidence necessary. This board of inquiry was convened on 15 May. The House will recall that during last week's debate on Marine Simeon Ferrante, I outlined the status and purpose of boards of inquiry. Given that in the case of the Warrior/A10 incident, too, my Department has been criticised for excessive secrecy in refusing to release a full copy of the board of inquiry report, it might be helpful if I covered the ground once again.

Although this was a joint-service board of inquiry, it was convened by Air Chief Marshal Sir Patrick Hine, and was conducted according to Royal Air Force procedures. The RAF derives its authority for holding boards of inquiry from the Air Force Act 1955, statutory rules made thereunder and Queen's regulations for the RAF. Generally, the primary purpose of boards of inquiry is to investigate and report on the facts of the matter referred to them by the convening authority and to make recommendations aimed at preventing a recurrence of an accident.

It is of overriding importance, particularly in the case of injury or death, to establish the facts as quickly as possible. It is essential, therefore, that witnesses appearing before boards of inquiry should give their evidence in a full and frank manner.

The motion having been made after half-past Two o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 9 December 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENERGY

Coal Mining (Productivity)

1. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what has been the increase in labour productivity in the coal mining industry since 1983-84.

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. John Wakeham): The British Coal Corporation has achieved impressive improvements in productivity, which is now 105 per cent. above 1983-84 levels.

Mr. Knox: Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is an impressive increase over that period of years? Can he say whether productivity in the British coal industry is beginning to catch up with productivity in the coal industries of our major competitors?

Mr. Wakeham: Certainly the productivity of the coal industry has improved greatly over the years, but further improvement is still required. Although our productivity compares well with coal industries in Europe, it has some way to go before it is at the level of some of the coal industries outside Europe.

Mr. Alan W. Williams: Does the Secretary of State accept that Britain has the most cost efficient coal industry in Europe, producing the cheapest coal, and that if it were in any one of the other 11 European countries there would be no question of its further contraction at this time? What is his view of the European Commission's proposals for reference pricing, which would allow Governments to support certain mines which produce coal for less than £50 per tonne?

Mr. Wakeham: No communication has been sent to the British Government about European reference prices, so I have not had a chance to study those, but I pay full tribute to the improvement in productivity. What is important is that the British coal industry should achieve contracts with the generators in the next round of contracts due to start in April 1993. The size and volume of the contracts secured is the best safeguard for the future of the coal industry.

National Grid Company

2. **Mr. Norris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will now take the National Grid Company back into state ownership.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): No. The National Grid Company has played a central role in the development of the new competitive electricity market.

Mr. Norris: I thank my hon. Friend for that entirely commendable answer. Was his calculation based on any assessment of what he thinks the cost of that renationalisation might be? Perhaps more important, given that it is Labour party policy, what impact would that have on the price of electricity for consumers?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yes, I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. To take the grid company back into public ownership would cost about £2 billion. I do not know how the money would be found, except from higher taxes or higher electricity prices, or both. Such a move would reimpose the dead hand of state control and political interference. That is Labour party policy, so taxpayers and electricity customers had better beware.

Mr. Hague: Is my hon. Friend aware that although it would be wasteful, unnecessary and expensive to renationalise the National Grid Company, the company has incurred great unpopularity due to its proposals to build pylons through the finest parts of our rural landscape in Cleveland? May I welcome his decision to hold a public inquiry about these proposals and urge him to ensure that the inquiry is held in such a way, in such a place and at such a time that the concerns of many thousands of people about the proposals can be fully communicated?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I know of the proposal to which my hon. Friend refers and I know that he has vigorously represented the concerns of his constituents. I wish to ensure that environmental considerations are properly taken into account. I can tell my hon. Friend that there will be a public inquiry into the proposal and that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will announce that formally in due course.

Mr. Dobson: Before the Minister starts to make criticisms of the cost to the taxpayer of buying back the grid company, may I remind him what happened when his right hon. Friend sold it? He so underpriced the shares that the taxpayer lost £1,200 million on the first afternoon of dealing. Since then, the directors have done little other than line their own pockets, award themselves enormous pay increases and indulge in dodgy share options, all of which has been done at the expense of the domestic customer, whose bill has gone up by 40 per cent. since privatisation was announced.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The hon. Gentleman is entirely wrong. The taxpayer and the electricity customer have benefited in every way from privatisation and restructuring of the electricity supply market. I remind the hon. Gentleman that, for the first time, domestic electricity customers are protected by a price cap which ensures that, for the next three years, electricity prices will not rise by more than retail price inflation.

North Sea (Capital Investment)

4. **Mr. Donald Thompson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the level of capital investment in the North sea in 1990, and in the first half of 1991.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Colin Moynihan): Capital investment in the North sea in 1990 was £3·5 billion. In the first half of 1991 it was £2·1 billion, which is some 30 per cent. higher than in the first half of 1990.

Mr. Thompson: Is my hon. Friend aware that continuity of orders is most important for manufacturers in my constituency who produce valves, pumps and pipes for the North sea oil industry? I welcome my hon. Friend's answer.

Mr. Moynihan: In this industry as, no doubt, in the rest of the manufacturing sector in my hon. Friend's constituency, my hon. Friend has continued to work assiduously for his constituents. I believe that we shall have greater continuity of orders throughout the 1990s than we did in the 1980s, due to the maturing nature of offshore oil and gas work, including refurbishment, sub-sea systems and satellite developments.

Mr. Wilson: In relation to the North sea, I am sure that the Minister will recall that during the Kincardine and Deeside by-election, various hints and half-promises were given about the transfer of the petroleum exploration division jobs to Aberdeen. We understand that consultants have now been appointed, so can the Minister give us an assurance about the timetable for those inquiries? Will he also guarantee that there will be an announcement this side of the general election? The Government may believe that once the Kincardine and Deeside election was out on the road—somewhat unsuccessfully for the Government—those promises might be out of sight and out of mind, but they are still in the mind of the Opposition.

Mr. Moynihan: We are seeking tenders from a range of consultants to review the location of the petroleum engineering directorate. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will announce who is to carry out that review as soon as the consultants have been chosen.

Dr. Michael Clark: Will my hon. Friend confirm that 1990 was an all-time record year for activity in the North sea, with the drilling of 224 exploration and appraisal wells resulting in 16 significant finds? Will my hon. Friend also confirm that 1991 has been a vibrant and exciting year in the North sea? On the eve of discussions at Maastricht, will my hon. Friend confirm that such activity in the North sea enables this country to provide 82 per cent. of Europe's indigenous oil?

Mr. Moynihan: I can confirm those three points. If company intentions on wells to be drilled, as recorded in a survey by my Department, are realised, the total of such wells in 1992 could yet again be extremely high indeed, as high as 220.

Mr. Hood: I welcome the capital investment, but will the Minister join me in condemning those oil companies which use the Economic League to blacklist workers and potential workers? Surely the best way to look after the industry is to stop the nonsense of blacklisting people simply because they belong to a union or for whatever other reason?

Mr. Moynihan: I think that is it is the hon. Gentleman who is talking nonsense on this occasion. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said on many occasions in the House, the Department is more than happy to receive representations from the hon. Gentleman or anyone else about specific cases of blacklisting.

Straw

5. **Mr. Moss:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what research is being undertaken into the use of straw as a renewable source of energy.

Mr. Moynihan: The Department of Energy has funded research and development into the use of straw as a renewable source of energy within its biofuels programme.

The results of this work were disseminated most recently at a workshop in Peterborough on 7 November 1991 which we jointly sponsored with the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service.

Mr. Moss: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Given that about 7 million tonnes of surplus straw is produced each year, much of it from the cereal-growing area of East Anglia in my constituency, does my hon. Friend agree that it is an important source of energy? The ban on straw burning will come into effect in 1993, so does my hon. Friend agree that we in East Anglia have a ready market for such initiatives?

Mr. Moynihan: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. In particular, the ban on burning straw in the field from 1993 could stimulate the use of straw as a fuel. That practice has already been very successful—as, for example, in straw combustion for space heating, which was demonstrated at Woburn abbey. There is good potential for straw as a fuel source, so long as we continue the important research and development programme that we are currently commissioning.

Mr. Haynes: Mr. Speaker, Sir, may I congratulate the Minister on his engagement? It is about time. The Minister ought to come off it, though. He is under instructions from the Secretary of State. Anything that the Government can burn to destroy the mining industry, they have done and will do. If it is not gas, it is oil. If it is not oil, it is straw. If it is not straw, it is imported coal from foreign lands. Why do the Government not come off it? We in the coal fields know what is going on. The Secretary of State ought to say, through the Minister, that the Government will back off. Let us keep the mining industry.

Mr. Moynihan: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his kind opening remarks. I was certainly under no instructions from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in that respect. As to the hon. Gentleman's other points, he will be the first to accept that straw is very low in sulphur and will reduce acid rain when it is substituted for—or, as the hon. Gentleman would no doubt hope, co-fired with—fossil fuels.

Mr. Dickens: Conservative Members also congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on his engagement. We are very pleased to hear about it.

If it is true that 7 million tonnes of straw are wasted each year, why is straw so expensive to horse riding, racing, and show jumping stables? If straw is used as a fuel, will that not make it much more expensive to the horse fraternity?

Mr. Moynihan: My hon. Friend will know the importance which needs to be attached to transport costs

when considering the economics of straw. For that reason, straw as a fuel is likely to be most efficient and economical when used in heating close to the point of production. That is due not just to its comparatively high transport costs but to its low density.

Nuclear Generation

6. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the chairman of Nuclear Electric to discuss the future of the nuclear generating industry.

Mr. Wakeham: I regularly meet the chairman of Nuclear Electric to discuss a variety of matters.

Dr. Howells: Whatever one might think about the virtues or otherwise of nuclear energy, clearly it is a viable source of base load electricity for the future. However, it requires long-term thinking, in terms of the industry's future funding. Does the Secretary of State agree that it is too large an area of expertise and of excellence in many ways to be allowed to rely simply on the vagaries of the open market?

Mr. Wakeham: The Government have made it clear that they will review the future of this country's nuclear power industry in 1994. By that time, we want to see a future which demonstrates that nuclear power can be produced safely and economically. Today, Nuclear Electric published its half-year results, which show continuing and encouraging progress towards Nuclear Electric's aims. Its output is up by 13 per cent. compared with the same period last year, its market share is up from 17 to 19 per cent., and its operating profits are up by 50 per cent.—entirely reflecting higher output and tighter cost control.

Mr. Hannam: Does my right hon. Friend agree that Nuclear Electric's half-year results confirm a long-term future for nuclear power? It is not important that we keep together the teams that will ensure that the nuclear power construction industry will continue in the future?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is why I am delighted that the Sizewell B project is being built on time and within cost. That is a testament to Nuclear Electric's management in respect of that project, which is a major achievement by British industry.

Mr. Wigley: The Secretary of State will be aware of the uncertainty surrounding the future of the Trawsfynydd nuclear power station, which employs up to 200 people in my constituency. Can he give an assurance that if the Magnox reactors are indeed approaching the end of their days and Trawsfynydd has no continuing nuclear future, the Government will accept responsibility for finding jobs for those who depend on the industry? Such responsibility has been taken in other areas where a major rundown of significant employers has taken place.

Mr. Wakeham: I think that we must deal with such matters stage by stage. First, we must satisfy the nuclear installations inspectorate that the reactor is safe; it will not reopen until that has been done. The same applies to any other Magnox stations whose safety is being reviewed by the NII. We shall see what happens after that.

Sir Trevor Skeet: Is my right hon. Friend aware that if the nuclear power programme were abandoned completely, 15 million tonnes of carbon dioxide would be pumped into the atmosphere every year? That is one thing that we should avoid. If my right hon. Friend holds a review in 1994, he may find that not much of the industry is left by then, because many of the teams will be broken up.

Mr. Wakeham: I agree with the first part of what my hon. Friend has said: nuclear power certainly makes a valuable contribution to the environment by curbing carbon dioxide emissions.

My hon. Friend mentioned 1994. That is the year in which the Sizewell B project will come on stream, and will start to produce electricity. I feel that that is a good time at which to review the implications for the future, and I very much hope that the expertise that now exists will not be lost to the industry.

Mr. Morgan: Can the Secretary of State confirm that, notwithstanding the encouraging programme that he has just reported, Nuclear Electric's directors could not continue to pay the £1 million per day that it costs to continue the Sizewell B construction project if they were not covered by a letter of comfort from the Treasury, without which the company would be technically insolvent?

Does the right hon. Gentleman propose that in 1994, when the review is completed, that safeguard protecting the company's directors against the threat of unlawful trading while technically insolvent should be lifted? Will he also tell us when he expects the nuclear levy, which is still rising, to start to fall in the light of this morning's results from Nuclear Electric?

Mr. Wakeham: As the hon. Gentleman knows, Nuclear Electric was formed out of the old Central Electricity Generating Board and has remained a Government-owned project throughout. It is therefore entirely proper for the directors to be given proper assurances by Government about the funding of a project undertaken on behalf of Government.

The nuclear levy is set to decline over the 1990s, and at present runs only until 1998. The calculation is quite complicated, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows. The actual amount of cash is not rising; it is the relation of that cash to the output of electricity and, therefore, the area that must be covered, which make the difference to the percentage. *[Interruption.]* The percentage went up last year, but the amount of the levy is still set to fall over the 1990s.

Sizewell B

7. **Mr. Irvine:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the progress of construction of the Sizewell B nuclear power station.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am pleased to say that the Sizewell B project is progressing on time and to cost.

Mr. Irvine: Does my hon. Friend agree that all those involved in the work on the power station, many of whom are constituents of mine, deserve great credit for the fact that it is proceeding so well? Does not that provide a welcome contrast with the bad old days of the 1950s, 1960s

and 1970s, when all too often the construction of power stations—nuclear and conventional alike—fell years behind?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Yes. The project remains eight months ahead of the committed 72-month programme. That reflects very well on the management and work force concerned. It contrasts markedly with similar past projects which often suffered from appalling industrial relations and were sometimes years late.

North Sea Oil

8. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his Department's estimate of North sea oil reserves and how long it is anticipated they will last; and what were the corresponding estimates five years ago.

Mr. Moynihan: My Department's central estimate of reserves remaining in existing discoveries at 31 December 1985 was 1,230 million tonnes. The corresponding estimate at 31 December 1990, after production of 549 million tonnes in the intervening period, was 1,195 million tonnes. These estimates confirm that the United Kingdom will remain an important oil producer.

Mr. French: Do not the figures reveal that those independent oil analysts who, in the early and middle 1980s, forecast a substantial depletion of United Kingdom resources in the early 1990s got it wrong? Is not the position that the United Kingdom will remain a very substantial oil producer until well into the next century?

Mr. Moynihan: It is certainly the case that, due to the substantial improvements in the technical ability to recover oil, in particular by means of enhanced oil recovery techniques, many of the past estimates have proved inaccurate. Many of the reserves that were not then technically capable of being produced economically will come on stream and, in my view, will ensure that we are a major oil producer until well into the next century.

Mr. Doran: As well as North sea oil, we have also been fortunate enough to discover gas in the North sea. Can the Minister provide similar figures for the amount of gas discovered in the North sea and an estimate of the life of our gas supplies? That issue is the subject of debate, given the recent Office of Fair Trading report into British Gas. I should also be interested to hear the Minister's views on the Government's policy regarding gas imports. I noticed that last week permission was given for gas exports. Will the Minister make a statement on that issue, too?

Mr. Moynihan: In 1990, gas produced from the United Kingdom continental shelf increased to 50 billion cu m, compared with 45 billion cu m in 1989. That included gas used by operators for drilling and production operations. As for gas imports and exports, United Kingdom continental shelf gas reserves should also be capable of supplying the expanding United Kingdom gas market well into the next century. The Government's objective is to work towards freer trade in gas throughout Europe. For that to happen, we need to be able to export United Kingdom continental shelf gas. The European gas market, which is dominated by large and often state-controlled monopolies which shun competition, needs to be liberalised.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Given that we need to ensure that we should have as a priority the conservation of resources and energy efficiency, whatever the amount of reserves of oil and gas, what progress has been made by the Department and the Treasury in discussions with the European Community on the value added tax harmonisation talks with a view to the introduction of a lower level of VAT for environmentally friendly technologies which conserve resources?

Mr. Moynihan: I will happily refer the hon. Gentleman's latter point to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Energy conservation and environmental pressures are rightly being placed on oil and gas producers in the North sea. A very high priority is placed on both issues. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that his concerns are well reflected in all the discussions between operators and Ministers.

Mr. Dickens: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the greatest danger to the North sea would be an incoming Labour Government, who would seek to shackle the oil and gas companies by imposing new controls and high taxes?

Mr. Moynihan: The answer is yes.

Combined Heat and Power

9. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement about the Government's support for combined heat and power schemes.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Government fully recognise the environmental and energy efficiency benefits of combined heat and power. The Energy Efficiency Office in my Department continues to promote the wider use of the technology under its best practice programme. Interest in CHP is at a high level and the prospects for CHP in the 1990s are excellent.

Mr. Vaz: In view of Leicester Energy Limited's continued interest in the establishment of a combined heat and power scheme in Leicester, will the Minister give his wholehearted support and instruct his officials to give their wholehearted co-operation to Leicester Energy Limited in the tremendous efforts that it is making to promote that scheme?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I know of the hon. Gentleman's interest in the subject. He will know that my Department gave a grant for a feasibility study into large-scale CHP in Leicester, but the scheme did not proceed. The privatisation and restructuring of the electricity industry have offered new opportunities for independent electricity-generating schemes, particularly those that combine heat generation with electricity generation. That will assist those in Leicester, if they decide to revive the scheme, and those elsewhere.

Mr. Rost: Under the Electricity Act 1989, the regulator is directed to monitor the progress of combined heat and power. Will my hon. Friend discuss with the Office of Electricity Regulation the complaints of the Combined Heat and Power Association that existing regulations contain barriers to the progress of combined heat and power, which should be removed?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I know that the Combined Heat and Power Association recently submitted a report to OFFER pointing out some institutional and administrative barriers that it should like to be tackled. That is being considered, with our support, by the Director-General of Electricity Supply.

Mr. Barron: The Minister cannot fail to acknowledge what has been common knowledge in the combined heat and power industry—that the major block is electricity prices. Despite the so-called new market that the Government have created, they have never recognised the price differences between electricity from combined heat and power plants and that from conventional generation. When will they act instead of saying at every Question Time how much they are in favour of combined heat and power?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The combined heat and power industry was held up for many years because it was in the hands of a state monopoly. We have ended that and have given unprecedented new opportunities for independent generators, particularly those that employ combined heat and power technology.

Oil-related Fabrication Sector

11. **Mr. Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will assess the implications of the single European market post-1992 upon the United Kingdom oil-related fabrication sector; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: United Kingdom companies that have a good track record and are competitive will continue to win orders. It is up to United Kingdom industry to demonstrate and promote its strengths—its productivity, its advanced capabilities, its technological edge, its reliability and its safety record, all of which are vital ingredients of a bid package.

Mr. Kennedy: I am grateful for that reply. I am sure that, from the Minister's knowledge of and visits to the area, he will agree that companies such as Highlands Fabricators at Nigg, which has an excellent work force, a good track record, is competitive and highly skilled and has diversified on site, are well placed to take advantage of the single market. Will he recognise the persistent anxiety and doubts of United Kingdom-based fabrication yards about indirect subsidies finding their way to yards based in some of our main European competitors? Will he continue to press our interests on that front?

Mr. Moynihan: On the former point, the hon. Gentleman will be pleased to note that all of the most recent fabrication contracts have been awarded to United Kingdom yards. For many of the reasons that he gave, the contract for a Shell Sole Pit compression platform has been awarded to Highfab. The Offshore Supplies Office will continue to play an important role in promoting fair commercial opportunity in all oil and gas markets and in supporting EC initiatives for the creation of open and commercially fair markets.

Mr. Moss: May I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on securing a 40 per cent. increase in the budget for the Energy Efficiency Office for next year? It will total about £59 million, which compares favourably with the measly £3 million that Labour spent in its last year in office. May I extend the grateful thanks of Mr. and Mrs. Emery of Eye in my constituency, whom I visited this morning and who have just had their home insulated under the Government's home energy efficiency scheme?

Mr. Moynihan: I am delighted to accept those congratulations, not least on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, who have spearheaded the campaign.

Oil and Gas (Irish Sea)

12. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the latest situation in respect of oil and gas exploration in and around the Irish sea.

Mr. Moynihan: Since the beginning of 1990, a total of 13 exploration and four appraisal wells have been drilled in that part of the United Kingdom sector of the Irish sea generally known as the Manx basin. In addition, four exploration wells have been drilled in surrounding onshore areas of Great Britain. Four significant gas discoveries and one significant oil discovery, all offshore, have been announced resulting from this activity.

Mr. Wareing: Does the Minister agree about the urgent need to exploit the resources of the Irish sea, in the hope that there will soon be a Government who will not dissipate the revenues from such exploration, as happened so tragically in regard to the North sea? Will the hon. Gentleman give an assurance, which is urgently needed on Merseyside, that every effort will be made to ensure that contracts for Irish sea exploration are given to firms in the north-west of England in general and to Merseyside in particular?

Mr. Moynihan: I have no doubt that companies in that area which have proven expertise will be in a strong position to win contracts on merit.

Opencast Mining

15. **Mr. Sumberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many jobs are both directly and indirectly supported by the opencast coal sector.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: There is no precise figure available about employment in the opencast coal industry, but the number is likely to be of the order of 17,000.

Mr. Sumberg: My hon. Friend will know of the considerable worry in the Radcliffe part of my constituency about the prospect of an opencast coal mine being developed there. That matter will be determined by the local council a week on Thursday. Although jobs are always welcome, particularly at this time, does my hon. Friend agree that the environmental impact on the locality is also important, because a safe environment will protect the area for future generations?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend has vigorously represented the interests of views of those who may be affected by this project. I agree that there must be a balance between the need to exploit economic coal reserves and the need to pay close attention to any possible environmental impact. That is done through the planning

system and the fact that appeals are heard not by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State but by the Department of the Environment.

Mr. McAllion: Will the Minister confirm that there will be fewer jobs in opencast mining as a direct result of the Government's policies? Will he confirm that, for example, opencast mines and jobs in Ayrshire are threatened by the Government's proposals to privatise Northern Ireland Electricity? Will the hon. Gentleman explain to miners and other people in Ayrshire how the Government can try to persuade them to vote for Tories in marginal seats when Government policies, because of their privatisation obsessions, lead directly to job losses in Ayrshire?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No. Jobs in the opencast sector are at risk from the vendetta against opencast mining conducted by the Labour party. We know that a successful deep-mine sector and a successful opencast sector are complementary. We need the output from both for blending purposes.

Mr. Michael Morris: Is not opencast coal a vital national resource in the same way as sand and gravel in my constituency are? Does my hon. Friend agree that, except in areas of outstanding natural beauty or sites of scientific interest, our mineral resources must be exploited?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I agree with my hon. Friend that an important balance must be struck. Provided that environmental concerns are met and are specifically addressed in the planning process, we believe that output from the opencast sector must be blended with output from the deep-mine sector. Indeed, the coal industry as a whole would be put at risk through premature shutdown of the opencast sector.

Mr. Dobson: If the Department of Energy believes that 17,000 people are employed directly or indirectly in the opencast coal sector, why did the Secretary of State for Employment recently say that 40,000 people were employed there? Who is right?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The figure that I gave was of those who are directly or indirectly affected by the opencast sector. The figure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment gave included those who might be affected in other ways by premature closure.

Wave Energy

16. **Mr. Evennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what has been the level of investment since 1979 into wave energy research; and what initiatives he has undertaken to promote its use.

Mr. Moynihan: My Department has invested £17 million since 1979-80 on wave energy research, including £900,000 for an experimental shoreline wave energy project on the Scottish island of Islay, which is the most technologically advanced of its type in the world. The review of wave energy currently under way is due to report early next year.

Mr. Evennett: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply, which is most impressive. Can he give the House more details about the important review of wave energy and will he also tell us which other projects it will cover?

Mr. Moynihan: Yes. The current review includes a detailed, technical and commercial assessment of the leading wave energy devices ranging from large offshore to shoreline systems, including Professor Salter's duck, the National Engineering Laboratory's breakwater device, the Bristol cylinder, Coventry polytechnic's circular clam and other devices. The review has covered four main areas of work—wave resource modelling, capital costing, availability assessment and economic modelling.

Combined Heat and Power

18. **Mr. Rost:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received from the Combined Heat and Power Association about the barriers to the wider use of combined heat and power; and what action he proposes.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend and I have received a number of representations from the Combined Heat and Power Association. I am aware that the association has provided a review paper to OFFER on the perceived barriers to the development of CHP, and the issues raised are primarily matters for OFFER.

Mr. Rost: Is my hon. Friend aware that the main barrier to CHP is that producers have to sell their electricity to the pool and then buy it back at a much higher—an uplift price? Is not that regulatory nonsense, and what is my hon. Friend going to do about it?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will shortly pronounce on alternative measures and I think that my hon. Friend will be pleased with the outcome.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Legal Profession (Recruitment)

30. **Mr. Jessel:** To ask the Attorney-General what discussions he has had with the chairmen of the Bar Council and the Law Society concerning the impact on the effective operation of the legal system of the quality of recruitment to the legal professions.

The Attorney-General (Sir Patrick Mayhew): Neither the Bar Council nor the Law Society has raised with me the question of the quality of recruitment to the legal profession.

Mr. Jessel: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, but I could not hear as an hon. Friend was standing up.

The Attorney-General: Neither the Law Society nor the Bar Council has raised with me the question of the quality of recruitment to the legal profession. I think that I put it the other way round last time.

Mr. Jessel: Whatever the quality of recruitment of barristers and solicitors, is my right hon. and learned Friend aware of the deep weakness in the British legal system in that justice is readily available to the poor who can get legal aid and to the rich who can easily afford it anyway but that to a large proportion of people in between it often seems barely accessible and yet they have to pay taxes to provide justice for others? Is not that in itself an injustice, and should Government and Parliament tolerate it?

The Attorney-General: I am well aware of the widespread anxiety about the thresholds of eligibility for legal aid. My right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor expects to issue a consultation paper next year on the financial conditions for legal aid in criminal proceedings. He has already done so in respect of civil non-matrimonial legal aid and is considering the responses to that. His purpose is to try to target legal aid on individual need and he continues to seek ways—as we all must—to reduce the cost of litigation, both criminal and civil.

Mr. Fraser: I am sure that the Attorney-General will agree that it is important that women, blacks and other ethnic minorities, and working-class people should be able to get into the legal professions. Is he aware that at the moment there is great difficulty in obtaining discretionary grants for professional training and for the final qualifications for both professions? Will he discuss with his Cabinet colleagues whether the discretionary grants for vocational training for the professions might be made mandatory or whether the training and enterprise councils might provide money to help those with little means to train for entry into the professions?

The Attorney-General: I very much agree with the desirability of the objective expressed by the hon. Gentleman at the beginning of his question. As for the remainder, I shall draw the suggestion to the attention of the Lord Chancellor.

War Crimes

31. **Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Attorney-General when he expects to bring prosecutions under the War Crimes Act 1991.

The Attorney-General: The Metropolitan police are conducting a major investigation into alleged war crimes. It is too soon to say when a decision whether to prosecute will be taken.

Mr. Bottomley: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that the House is united in abhorring war crimes —and no doubt there were many—but that the House will want to consider early-day motion 275 which draws attention to some articles in the *Evening Standard* and elsewhere which remind us that mistakes have been made? We hope that we do not make any here.

The Attorney-General: I am aware of the article to which my hon. Friend refers, which involves a case that was tried in Israel, and of the fact that, apparently, KGB records recently made available in Moscow suggest that there was mistaken identification. That is one of the matters that feature in any such consideration, and would always feature with a court.

Mr. Janner: Will the Attorney-General confirm that in many of the war crimes cases now under investigation in this country the issue of identity does not arise? How many cases are being investigated? Bearing in mind the urgency of the matter now, after so many years, when does he believe that action will be taken?

The Attorney-General: Naturally, each of the cases referred to in the report by Sir Thomas Hetherington and Mr. Chalmers has been and is being investigated. I cannot give a reliable date as to when the Metropolitan police report in the case of the first matters will be available, but I have no reason to suppose that it is not being prosecuted with all celerity by the dedicated team that the Commissioner has made available.

Sir John Stokes: My right hon. and learned Friend knows how highly I regard his judgment, but is he still satisfied that it is wise to go ahead with the charges after all the mistakes have been made, and after such a long time has passed? Will not the whole matter cause nothing but trouble and tears to him, his Department and the Government?

The Attorney-General: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the kind remarks at the beginning of his question. I have to be loyal to the decision of Parliament, which passed the War Crimes Act 1991. All those involved in the prosecuting process will approach their task in a fair and proper way, as the House would expect.

Crown Prosecution Service

32. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a further statement about job vacancies in the Crown prosecution service.

The Solicitor-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): Over the 12 months to 31 October this year, 209 lawyers have joined the Crown prosecution service and vacancies have fallen from 17·4 to 10·8 per cent. Vacancies for administrative staff are currently 5·3 per cent.

Mr. Vaz: Does the Solicitor-General share my concern that years after the CPS was established, vacancies still exist among its professional staff? There has not been a single year when the CPS has been fully staffed. Does not the Solicitor-General accept the views of the Select Committee on Home Affairs, which conducted an inquiry into the CPS, that it is now time for a full inquiry into why the CPS is not up to its full complement?

Also, when does the right hon. and learned Gentleman hope to fill the post of Director of Public Prosecutions?

The Solicitor-General: I think that the hon. Gentleman is less well informed about the Crown prosecution service than he was a year or so ago. He certainly underestimates the effective recruiting campaigns that the CPS has carried out during the past year and he seems to have ignored the fact that, in order to carry out its work as well as possible, its total manpower requirement has been increased. Consequently, the figures do not appear to have risen as much as they actually have. The CPS has been recruiting successfully.

Mr. David Shaw: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that any temporary difficulties of manpower in the Crown prosecution service will not in any way affect prosecutions that may be necessary as a result of the discovery of potential fraud in the Maxwell case? Will he confirm that the possible political connections of any individuals will not be taken into account in relation to any prosecutions that may be necessary?

The Solicitor-General: My hon. Friend will appreciate that the investigation of anything to do with the Maxwell empire is being undertaken by the Serious Fraud Office. I can certainly confirm that that investigation will be carried out and any decisions taken without fear or favour, affection or ill will.

Mr. Winnick: Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman aware that many people in this country find it almost inconceivable to understand how such a crook as Maxwell could have got away with what he did for so long without the Crown prosecution service being in any way involved? Is not it necessary to recognise that in future the Crown prosecution service should be far more willing to listen to allegations and to investigate them?

The Solicitor-General: It is important in these matters to remember where the responsibilities lie. The Crown prosecution service is not an investigating body. Investigation in these areas is carried out by the police. The Serious Fraud Office has powers of investigation, and it is exercising them.

House of Fraser

33. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement setting out the action which he has taken since the report of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry about the circumstances relating to its consideration of the House of Fraser issue.

The Solicitor-General: The Metropolitan police have been making inquiries. Their preliminary report on this matter has been received and is under consideration by the Crown prosecution service.

Sir Teddy Taylor: As the Select Committee has made serious allegations about interference in its important work, is not it worrying that it has taken quite so long to make any progress in dealing with its complaint? Does my right hon. and learned Friend appreciate that many people are genuinely mystified by what appears to be the astonishing delays—in some cases of years—in dealing with issues of any sort relating to the activities of Mr. Fayed?

The Solicitor-General: We are certainly not talking about delays of years. The preliminary report was received within the time notified to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) in an answer to his recent question. That preliminary report on a matter by no means without complexities and evidential difficulties is being carefully considered.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

East Timor

40. **Mr. John Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has any plans to visit Indonesia to discuss assistance to East Timor.

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): May I begin by paying tribute to the long and distinguished career of the late Baroness Hart of South Lanark? No one in the developing world or the ODA will forget her great contribution.

The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is: no, Sir.

Mr. Evans: As chairman of the Labour party, I thank the right hon. Lady for her tribute to my good friend Dame Judith Hart. She was a former chairman of the Labour party and she performed noble duty both to her party and to millions of people from the dependent territories.

I suggest that the best aid that could be given to East Timor would be an arms embargo on Indonesia until an independent United Nations inquiry has been held into the slaughter of many defenceless men, women and children by the Indonesian army.

Mrs. Chalker: The hon. Gentleman will probably already know that we do not permit the sale of arms or other equipment that could be used internally against the people; but I fully agree that it is necessary to see the report of the commission of inquiry. I gather that a draft will be presented to President Suharto at the end of this week. That inquiry is not being carried out by the military or the police, and when we see what it reports, we will decide, together with our EC partners, what to do next.

Sir Peter Blaker: Is my right hon. Friend aware that Conservative Members who remember Lady Hart will wish to be associated with her tribute to her?

Is my right hon. Friend further aware that she is supported by our party in being circumspect about jumping to conclusions before the official inquiry report to which she referred is received? Is not this a particularly suitable case for the development of an EC attitude?

Mrs. Chalker: I thank my right hon. Friend for his remarks.

Together with our EC partners, on 13 November we condemned the violence against the people in East Timor and urged the Indonesian Government to ensure that the Indonesian armed forces and police stopped using violence and that those responsible for these acts were brought to trial. On 3 December, the European Community repeated its condemnation and called on the Indonesian authorities to respond to the serious concerns expressed by the international community. We supported the demands for a thorough and credible investigation by independent and impartial experts.

I believe that we are right to wait until the independent report has been received, but I assure my right hon. Friend and the House that all EC partners who have worked well together on this are carefully considering future relations in the light of what appears to have happened, as shown on the video which so many of us have seen and which the families of the people involved have had to witness in their suffering.

Mrs. Clwyd: I thank the right hon. Lady and hon. Members for their condolences on the loss of Dame Judith Hart. We are all very saddened that she has died.

I am very puzzled by the Minister's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans). She continues to maintain that we do not allow the export of arms and equipment that are likely to be used against civil populations. However, in a letter to Canon Michael Doe, who wrote to her, the right hon. Lady said:

"it is not practical to monitor their use once they have reached their destinations."

How does she square her answer to my hon. Friend with her letter to Canon Michael Doe?

It is incredible that both the Minister and the Prime Minister whitewash the inquiry by describing it as independent. In no way can it be described as independent when the chairman of that inquiry is a former general who is responsible for some of the worst atrocities against the

East Timorese. There are continuing violations of human rights against the East Timorese while that farce of an inquiry is being carried out. The Government should freeze supplies of military equipment and aid to the Indonesians forthwith.

Mrs. Chalker: I am not prepared to take action until the facts have been established. There is absolutely no whitewash as far as this Government are concerned, and nor will there be. Right from the beginning of that terrible saga, I have been absolutely determined that the United Nations and any other body that it may be necessary to involve in order to get to the bottom of this and to resolve matters for the people of East Timor—they have gone on since 1975—should have our support. We have told the United Nations Secretary-General of our support for his efforts to resolve the problems in East Timor. On this latest apparent atrocity—I see it as that; I have seen the film as much as anybody has—I have to be absolutely certain of the facts before I take action. I cannot act without facts.

Mr. Alexander: My right hon. Friend's measured response will be widely welcomed in the House and elsewhere. Although all of us are deeply concerned to know precisely what happened in East Timor, will she bear it in mind that, since Indonesia took over East Timor a few years ago, there has been considerable development of the infrastructure in that country, and that, although no one condones that massacre, we must know what has been going on before we adopt the language that we heard from the Labour party?

Mrs. Chalker: As I said a moment ago, I will wait until I have the facts, but I have already undertaken to review co-operation with Indonesia in the light of the response by the Indonesian Government. My right hon. Friend the Earl of Caithness called in the Indonesian ambassador and expressed our grave concern. We have taken action—indeed, led action—at every possible turn, but we must establish without doubt exactly what is going on.

OECD

42. **Mr. Shore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with Overseas Development Ministers of OECD countries on aid matters over the last month.

Mrs. Chalker: I met all EC Overseas Development Ministers present at the Development Council meeting in Brussels on 28 November, and most other Overseas Development Ministers at the OECD joint ministerial and development meeting and the OECD development assistance committee high-level meeting in Paris from 2 to 4 December.

Mr. Shore: I thank the Minister for that reply. It has been made plain that Government policy on aid will be increasingly conditioned by the performance of recipient governments in terms of human rights and observance of democratic practices, and I wholly welcome that. Have the principles of United Kingdom policy been discussed with colleagues in the OECD and, if so, with what response and result?

Mrs. Chalker: I am pleased to be able to tell the right hon. Gentleman that we have had discussions on that matter both in the European Community Development Ministers' meeting the Thursday before last and at the OECD. As a result of those two meetings, we now have resolutions that support the line that we have consistently taken—that aid will be dependent on the trends shown by all countries—and I mean "all countries"—with regard to their respect for the rule of law, human rights, the development of good government practices and of an independent judiciary, and the following of sound economic policies. The right hon. Gentleman can be assured that the whole aid community is firmly behind those principles.

Global Environmental Facility

44. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what role he sees for the global environmental facility in helping developing countries with their environmental problems.

Mrs. Chalker: The role of the global environment facility is to help developing countries act to reduce threats to the global environment. It will finance costs that are justified only by their global benefits. It will play a key role in helping to finance responsibilities accepted by developing countries under the conventions on climate change and biological diversity, which we hope will be agreed over the coming months.

Mr. Townsend: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that that excellent facility is not supported from the aid budget? Does she agree that it should be reinforced and strengthened so that the developing countries can play their full part in dealing with the world's acute environmental problems?

Mrs. Chalker: I can, indeed, assure my hon. Friend that the £40·3 million for the GEF is additional to and separate from the development aid budget. In addition, there is up to a further £9·4 million for the Montreal protocol fund. We very much hope that that money will help many countries to phase out CFCs much earlier than they might otherwise have done.

Rail Crash (Severn Tunnel)

3.31 pm

Sir John Cope (Northavon) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he will make a statement on the rail crash in the Severn Tunnel on Saturday last.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): At about 10.35 on Saturday morning 7 December, the 07.00 hrs sprinter diesel train from Portsmouth to Cardiff collided with the rear of the 08.30 hrs InterCity 125 train from London, Paddington to Cardiff inside the Severn tunnel, about one and a quarter miles from the Newport end.

I understand from British Rail that the impact was less severe than it might have been, since both trains were on the move at the time, but some 90 passengers and the driver of the Portsmouth train were injured. Eight people, including the driver, were still in hospital this morning.

The House will wish to join me in expressing our sympathy with those who were injured and our hopes for their speedy recovery. I also pay tribute to the professionalism of the emergency services, who naturally faced difficulties in getting to the injured and in getting them out of the tunnel for treatment. The response by all involved was magnificent. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

British Rail has accepted responsibility for the accident and will be starting its own internal inquiry tomorrow. I understand that the signalling and axle counter system, which is used to detect the location of trains in the tunnel, was not working normally at the time. An emergency procedure was in operation which should have ensured that only one train was in the tunnel. There are a number of questions to investigate, which may take some time. British Rail will make its results available to the Health and Safety Executive.

A principal inspecting officer from the Health and Safety Executive's railway inspectorate visited the scene of the accident. After consultation with the Health and Safety Commission, I shall be appointing an inspector to carry out an inquiry into the accident under the Regulation of Railways Act 1871. The inquiry will be wholly independent. The report will be published, and I have asked the inspector to report to me as quickly as possible.

Meanwhile, British Rail will, of course, take immediate corrective action should the need for it emerge during any of these investigations. At this stage, the cause of the accident is not yet clear, and we cannot reach any conclusions until all the evidence is available.

Sir John Cope: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for that statement and, on behalf of my constituents, join him in sending sympathy to those who were injured in the accident. In addition, I should like to thank my right hon. and learned Friend for his well deserved tributes to the emergency services.

It is peculiarly frightening to have an accident in a tunnel, but that should not obscure the fact the Severn tunnel in particular, and the railways in general, have a very good accident record and that travelling by rail is safer than travelling by road. Will my right hon. and learned Friend say a bit more about communications? These days, we should expect the drivers of all trains to have two-way communication at all times with the signal box and those who are in control of the track. Does my right hon. and learned Friend think that such communication would have contributed to avoiding the accident?

Mr. Rifkind: I thank my hon. Friend. He is right to emphasise the general safety level of the railways, which compares favourably with all other modes of transport. Tragically, some 5,000 people die on our roads every year, whereas only about 84 died on the railways during 1990.

As for communication, there is no way of knowing whether a cab radio would have made any difference in this accident, but I agree with my hon. Friend that it is desirable that cab radios should be fitted into locomotives and multiple unit fleets. Already, some 60 per cent. of British Rail locomotive and multiple unit fleets have some such radio installed. All regional railways will have such radios installed by June next year.

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): Does the Secretary of State appreciate that the Welsh entrance to the tunnel is in Caldicot in the Newport, East constituency? Local people there have been worried for some time about safety factors which affect the tunnel. For them, last Saturday was an accident that had been waiting to happen. I wrote to Sir Bob Reid, the chairman of British Rail, over 12 months ago expressing my constituents' concern. I also tabled early-day motion 186 in the last Session of Parliament, which was supported by no fewer than 39 hon. Members, calling for lighting throughout the tunnel and for closed circuit television. Certainly those facilities would have helped in the evacuation of the injured last Saturday. The Severn tunnel is a wonderful structure, which has served the travelling public well for over 100 years, but it is now badly in need of modernisation.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman is right to emphasise that the Severn tunnel has served the travelling public extremely well for many years. Indeed, as far as I am aware, there have not been any previous accidents of this nature within the tunnel. I was interested in the points that the hon. Gentleman raised. Clearly the inquiry which is to take place will take into account any comments made by the hon. Gentleman which may be relevant to the cause of the accident or to reducing the prospects of any future incidents.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): My right hon. and learned Friend will be aware that on the train were constituents from not only the Portsmouth area but Southampton. We are gravely worried that a series of accidents seem to have taken place in which trains simply run into each other. Surely it must be tantamount to neglect of the safety of our railways if we do not spend more and more money on a system which can give early warning. Aircraft have transponder systems which locate the aircraft exactly so that everyone for several miles around knows where the aircraft is. Surely research and development can provide similar high technology for railway cabs. It is all very well to have two-way communication, but we need some high technology which will prevent trains from slamming into the back of each other.

Mr. Rifkind: My hon. Friend is right to say that British Rail needs to use available modern technology to reduce further the incidence of accidents involving loss of life and injury on the railways. He will be pleased to know that the latest report of the railway inspectorate on railway safety

showed a modest reduction in the number of collisions between passenger trains in 1990 compared with the previous year. I know that that will be welcome to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): May I join in the Secretary of State's praise for the emergency services, which acted magnificently, and also in his best wishes to those who were injured? This accident, and the collapse of a railway bridge within the recent past in Wales, together with declining standards and quality of service, raise serious questions about the competence of British Rail's management of the rail network in Wales. Will the Secretary of State please ask the chairman of British Rail to report to him as a matter of urgency on the state of British Rail in Wales an on its financing? Will he also ask the chairman to prepare—at long last—a strategic plan for co-ordinated rail services in Wales, as those services are in a poor state?

Mr. Rifkind: We naturally expect British Rail to attach the greatest importance to safety considerations. That is also the view of the chairman of British Rail, and is matched by the resources that the Government make available. The resources available for safety have increased from £140 million to about £200 million for the current year, and are likely to continue at at least that level. It would be unwise for the hon. and learned Gentleman or for anyone else to draw conclusions about what might have been the cause of this accident. We do not have the information today which would entitle us to draw any conclusions of that kind.

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): May I associate myself with my right hon. and learned Friend's comments about the injuries of people on the train? May I also welcome the inquiry that he has announced? As the cause of the accident is not clear, will he deplore the remarks of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) and others who are already speculating on the causes of the accident and criticising the Government for not investing enough in the railways? That is always the knee-jerk reaction of Opposition Members, who say that we are not spending enough money, without saying precisely how they would improve situations such as this.

Mr. Rifkind: Yes, my hon. Friend is correct. I am afraid that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) has a regrettable tendency not to bother with the facts, but to jump to conclusions in the immediate aftermath of any accident, before any of the facts are known to him or to anyone else.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Without going into matters which might be the subject of the inquiry, can the Secretary of State confirm, first, that there have been recurrent problems with the signalling at either end of the line, as a result of the damp; and, secondly, the system in case of an emergency and a red light was for the relevant engine drivers physically to get out of the cab and use a telephone near the tunnel? Although that will be remedied by next June, is it not somewhat antiquated that such a system has persisted for so long?

Mr. Rifkind: I said in my orginal response that there was a failure in the signalling system at the time, and that is why the emergency procedure was in operation. I agreed with the other hon. Member who mentioned radios in cabs—they are being introduced into all new cabs and into existing cabs. All regional railways will have such equipment by June next year.

Mr. Ian Grist (Cardiff, Central): Can my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that it took the emergency services an hour to reach the injured, and that another hour went past before the 125 was able to move off? Many people were therefore trapped for a long time. Does he not think that that could be improved on in any future, but hopefully never to be repeated accident?

Mr. Rifkind: I think that it must have been a frightening experience for people trapped within the train for that time. I understand that one of the reasons why it took longer than one would have wished was that the emergency services went to the inappropriate end of the tunnel, further away from the train, and had to be redirected to the other end, which gave easier access to the two trains.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Does the Secretary of State recall that, earlier this year, when he was talking about the increase in BR's external financing, he said that there would be £70 million more for safety matters? Does he accept that a fail-safe system—an automatic train protection system—would cost nearer £390 million and is a matter of urgency? If we are to overcome this sort of problem in future we must put even greater resources into British Rail to safeguard trains, crews and passengers.

Mr. Rifkind: British Rail is at the moment testing automatic train protection, and the Chiltern line has a pilot scheme which, if successful, will enable ATP to be implemented elsewhere on the network.

Mr. Robert Hayward (Kingswood): Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that he will ask the chairman of British Rail urgently to look at the position of the tunnels further along the line to ensure that precautions similar to those that are being instituted in the Severn tunnel will also be made in those tunnels if signalling changes have taken place recently associated with the general modernisation work?

Mr. Rifkind: Yes, it will be appropriate for both British Rail's internal inquiry and the inquiry that I have announced under the railway inspectorate to look at all the implications that may be relevant to the work being undertaken.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Will the Secretary of State, without waiting for the report, send for the chairman of British Rail and, exceptionally, offer him enough money to allow him to put into operation an immediate emergency programme for the renewal of signalling systems? It is clear that signalling is one of the vital factors that, unfortunately, has contributed in the immediate past to several major accidents.

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Lady should not jump to conclusions. My understanding is that the signalling in the Severn tunnel area is relatively new, and was installed in the relatively recent past. The suggestion inherent in her question—that the signalling is antiquated—does not appear to be justified.

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Mr. Cope) that the crash in the

[Mr. Robert Adley]

tunnel was frightening, but that the problem was not caused by junctions, so we should not associate what happened at Purley, for example, with what happened in the Severn tunnel? Is my right hon. and learned Friend familiar with the automatic warning system of the Great Western railway, which has kept this tunnel and hundreds of miles of railway line safe for years?

We now seem to have a serious problem with some of the new technology. My right hon. and learned Friend has announced an internal inquiry. In view of the importance of signalling and telecommunications to the railways, would it not be sensible quietly to contemplate the proposition of an independent inquiry into all the technological changes that are taking place on British Rail signalling?

While the subject——

Mr. Speaker: Briefly please.

Mr. Adley: As the subject of funds for British Rail has been mentioned, will my right hon. and learned Friend have a look at two points quickly——

Mr. Speaker: One point.

Mr. Adley: One point. On locomotive-hauled trains, a flashing red light is used by British Rail, while on multiple units a static light is used. Is not that one matter that could be rearranged? Surely a flashing red light would be far more visible in a tunnel than a static light?

Mr. Rifkind: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has considerable knowledge of these matters. I will direct his point to the chairman of British Rail, so that the matters are taken into account. My hon. Friend suggested that there would be only an internal inquiry. British Rail is conducting an internal inquiry, but the inquiry that I have announced today, which is to be held by the Health and Safety Executive, will be a public inquiry under the Regulation of Railways Act 1871.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): May I on behalf of the House offer our deepest sympathy to those who were injured and hope that they have a speedy recovery? Indeed, may I express once again our great admiration for the skill and courage of those involved in our emergency services?

Is the Secretary of State aware that it is almost three years to the day that we heard of the Clapham rail tragedy, which was caused by faulty signalling and negligence? Is he further aware that last week we heard of a thousand signalling faults on British Rail followed by this further terrible accident in the Severn tunnel, involving signal faults and negligence yet again? [HON. MEMBERS: "How do you know?"] British Rail has already accepted responsibility for the matter, as the Secretary of State has pointed out.

That undoubtedly goes a long way to explaining the inspectors' report. I hope that the Secretary of State will look again at the figures, instead of looking at them superficially as he has done, to see that, in the past five years, the incidence of passenger train collisions has increased by 40 per cent. over the average for the past 10 years. That is the point that is causing the travelling public great concern.

Can the Secretary of State tell us, three years after Clapham, what the total cost is of implementing the Hidden recommendations to make our system safer? Has the Department completed the review of the investment for safety, as required by Hidden? Finally, does he accept that the general public want to see him and his Department using all their energies to ensure the implementation of a safe, reliable railway, instead of producing a White Paper on the privatisation of British Rail?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman is really behaving disgracefully—*[Interruption.]*—when he accuses British Rail of negligence before an inquiry has even begun, and when he has not the slightest idea of what caused that accident. The hon. Gentleman is in danger of becoming like a vulture scavenging around every incident, irrespective of the facts and of the accusations that he makes against other people.

The hon. Gentleman referred in his question, and in a conversation on radio during the weekend, to what he describes as "an increasing number" of passenger train collisions. As the hon. Gentleman must know perfectly well from the railway safety report, published only last week, the total number of significant collisions in 1989 was 85, and in 1990 it was 59. If that is what the hon. Gentleman describes as an increasing rate of passenger train collisions, it shows that he does not deserve the attention or respect of the House.

Bus Plant Closure (Workington)

3.50 pm

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House under Standing Order No. 20 for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"The need for a debate on the closure of the Volvo bus plant, formerly known as Leyland National, in my constituency".

This matter is urgent, as west Cumbria is now on the eve of a renewed spate of large-scale redundancies. Last week, job losses were announced at Allbright and Wilson, and last weekend Volvo announced the closure of its bus plant in Workington with a loss of 370 jobs. That closure will, from July next year, leave empty a modern factory of 650,000 sq ft in my constituency. The area will face a herculean task if it is to find a new occupier for that factory. The House will also be aware of the impending rundown of the THORP—thermal oxide reprocessing plant—construction project at Sellafield with the loss of several thousand jobs.

The matter is important, as Volvo clearly blamed the Government's economic policies for its decision. In the press release announcing the closure, Volvo states:

"The actions are the direct result of deregulation of bus services and the recession, which have combined to severely depress demand."

The matter is specific, because the Leyland/Volvo plant in Workington is Britain's principal bus producing plant. Surely it cannot be right for a foreign company, faced with recession and a lack of profitability at home, in Sweden, to cut its overseas operations and, in doing so, close down the United Kingdom's strategic bus manufacturing plant. Such a decision is surely a matter for Government.

The plant was built under a Labour Government, with a large amount of taxpayers' money, as part of efforts to consolidate bus manufacturing within the United Kingdom. Its loss can lead only to an invasion of imports when the recession ends and the market picks up. In the absence of adequate bus production capacity in the United Kingdom, we can face only danger in terms of the future bus market. I appeal to you, Mr. Speaker, to allow us to have a debate on this matter today.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) seeks leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 20, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"The closure of the Leyland Volvo bus manufacturing plant in Workington, with the loss of 370 jobs, announced this weekend."

I have listened with concern to what the hon. Gentleman said about this matter. As he knows, I must decide whether to give this matter precedent over the business set down for today or for tomorrow. I regret that his application does not meet the requirements of the Standing Order. I therefore cannot submit the hon. Gentleman's application to the House. I hope that there may be other opportunities for the hon. Gentleman to raise this matter this week.

Points of Order

3.55 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (Chelmsford): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As you are probably aware, when astronomers discover a new star, there are special procedures for registering it. I wonder whether you follow any special procedure when you spot a new political party in the House. For example, will you instigate an investigation and action to change the Short money as a result of the hon. Members for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields) and for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) ceasing to be members of the Labour party? Will you expect the size of that new political party to increase, as other non-community-charge-paying Labour Members join it?

Mr. Speaker: I regularly look for stars in the Chamber, and I believe that the stars are on the Floor of the House. However, I am not certain that such a point of order falls within my area of responsibility.

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you received a request from the Secretary of State for Social Security to be allowed to make a statement on the withdrawal of moneys from Mirror Group Newspapers' pension fund? The revelations from MGN show that there is a gaping hole in the law covering pension funds. There is no legal provision for an independent chairman, 50 per cent. independently elected employee representation on the board, or full and up-to-date disclosure of information covering a fund's financial state or the allocation of its surpluses.

As there is no provision either for fully protecting the interests of fund members, the Government's proposed regulation on self-investment is irrelevant to what has been revealed in respect of the MGN pension fund. Millions of employees and pensioners are deeply worried about the future of their pension funds as a result of the MGN revelations, so will you, Mr. Speaker, use your good offices to seek an early statement to the House by the Secretary of State, so that the public's doubts and apprehensions can be allayed?

Several Hon. Members: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Perhaps I can save time. That matter was raised at business questions and in points of order to me last Thursday. I said then that it seemed to me that the Consolidated Fund Bill would provide an opportunity to debate it—possibly at some length.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps I may support the request of the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher). Such a debate would give right hon. and hon. Members—particularly those whose constituents, like mine in the north-west, are suffering from the loss of their MGN pensions—an opportunity to ask the Opposition to account for the way in which some of their members who were trustees of the MGN fund behaved in a wholly negligent way.

Mr. Speaker: That point could also be raised in the Consolidated Fund Bill debate.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Leaving aside cheap party political propaganda, I put it to you, in all seriousness, that literally millions of people in this country will rely when they retire on occupational pensions. They know that, if anything went wrong, they would lead a life of poverty or near-poverty. Concern about that is likely to spread beyond those immediately affected by the revelations about Robert Maxwell's actions at Mirror Group Newspapers. Would it not be right for the Secretary of State to come to the House to say what steps are being taken to try to ensure that the sort of dishonesty and crookery that went on at MGN is not being repeated elsewhere? The people of this country are entitled to know that.

Mr. Speaker: I cannot say anything more. If that topic is submitted as a subject for debate on the Consolidated Fund Bill, I will certainly give it careful consideration. Such a debate would give the hon. Members who have raised those points of order an opportunity to participate, and for a Minister to respond.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: What more can I say?

Mr. King: You kindly reminded the House, Mr. Speaker, that the Consolidated Fund Bill may provide an opportunity to debate the MGN pension fund, but I wonder how far such a debate could go—particularly in respect of references to Mirror Group Newspapers, the *Daily Mirror*, payments to the Labour party, advertising in Labour party journals, and so on. Would we not be touching on areas that are sub judice, or which are the subject of possible legal action, which may or may not be taken? Would an application for a full debate on Robert Maxwell, Mirror Group Newspapers and the Labour party be permissible?

Mr. Speaker: We shall have to consider the sub judice rule in relation to what is said, but at present I can see nothing sub judice in this matter.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In a spirit of Christmas unity, may I agree with the shadow Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher)? A full debate on the issue would indeed be very helpful to us all. It is to the hon. Gentleman's credit that he wishes to raise a matter that may be embarrassing to his hon. Friends.

Would it not be a good idea, given the suggestion that all these shady capitalist things happen on only one side of the House, to discuss pension funds and how they are to be controlled? Regardless of what company is involved in such matters and of whether it has a socialist supporter, a Conservative supporter or no political supporter at all, it is our duty as a House to enable everyone in the country to feel that his or her pension is well protected.

Mr. Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman is called to speak in the debate on the Consolidated Fund Bill or the Adjournment motion, he could well raise those points then.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: I appeal to your Christmas spirit, Mr. Speaker. Will you allow such a debate?

Mr. Speaker: Those are not matters for me.

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I share the view expressed by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark): it does not matter whether those involved in fraud, the rip-off of investors of the misuse of pension funds belong to any political party, or to no political party. There have been plenty of City frauds and scandals involving Conservative supporters. This is just the latest in long line of such scandals, which besmirch the country's financial institutions as a whole.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) is right to point out that revelations such as these terrify people whose lifelong pension contributions are at the mercy of those responsible for the action taken at Mirror Group Newspapers. It will seem strange to them that the House has not been given the opportunity to hear a statement on the matter, or to debate it. I strongly support my hon. Friend's request for a statement.

Mr. Speaker: Any statement is for the Government—what has been said will have been heard by the Home Secretary and other Ministers. As I have said, there will be opportunities for hon. Members to debate this matter during the debate on the Consolidated Fund Bill, if the subject is submitted.

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is it a different point of order?

Mr. Shaw: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Absolutely different?

Mr. Shaw: Yes, Sir.

Can you say, Mr. Speaker, whether it would be in order, during any debate on the Maxwell group pension fund fiddles, to raise the subject of the fiddles carried out by the Labour Government in 1976——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That point of order seems to be related to the matter that we have just been discussing.

Mr. Michael Irvine (Ipswich) *rose*——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: No, I do not think that we need to hear any more points of order. Let me tell the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) that I heard what he said about this matter on Thursday, and I agree with him.

BILLS PRESENTED

Commonwealth of Europe

Mr. Tony Benn presented a Bill to provide for the establishment of a Commonwealth of Europe; and for purposes connected therewith: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 17 January and to be printed. [Bill 37.]

Cheques

Mr. Conal Gregory, supported by Mr. Anthony Coombs, Mr. Simon Coombs, Mr. Douglas French, Mr. Archy Kirkwood, Sir Richard Luce, Mrs Marion Roe, Sir Gerard Vaughan, Mr. Alan Williams and Mr. Robert Wareing, presented a Bill to amend the law relating to

cheques: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 17 January and to be printed. [Bill 38.]

Statutory Instruments, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With permission, I will put together the two motions on the Order Paper.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

RATING AND VALUATION

That the draft Non-Domestic Rating (Appropriate Fraction and Rateable Values) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE

That the draft European Parliamentary Constituencies (Scotland) (Miscellaneous Changes) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Aggravated Vehicle-Taking Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. During my 20 years of practice in the law, there has been a great deal of vehicle taking, in precisely the kind of circumstances that led to the promulgation of the Bill by the Government. The courts have had powers over the years to deal with those offences. I wonder whether you could define the circumstances in which it is appropriate for the Government to introduce a law reform Bill and seek to push it through all its procedures in a day without it going to a Standing Committee to be considered carefully as to its detail, when it happens that there is no particular circumstance of urgency and when the reform concerned could lead to considerable difficulties for the courts if the measure is not fully considered?

Mr. Speaker: It is within the knowledge of the House that Bills have gone through all their stages in one day. The House itself will take a decision on the matter later this evening when the Question will be put whether the Bill should or should not be considered in Committee of the whole House.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Following the point made by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), presumably the Government's contention is that, either because of prevalence or because of some emergency, it is necessary today, without the normal consultation, to go through every stage of the Bill. If there is such an emergency, why is it that there is no analogous Bill for Scotland? Is it the Government's contention that such an emergency, if there be an emergency, is relevant only in England and Wales? What are the intentions, therefore, in respect of Scotland?

Mr. Speaker: Of course, this Bill will go through all its stages in the normal way. The unusual feature is that that may happen in one day. I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to the fact that the Question will be put from the Chair at the appropriate moment, That the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House. The House will then decide to agree—or to disagree.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. You said earlier that other Bills have gone through all their stages in one day. That is true of some uncontroversial matters, but recently there have been several Bills of this kind, such as the one after the Hungerford massacre—that was rushed through the House and not dealt with properly—the council tax Bill —that was rushed through the House and is a mess—and the Dangerous Dogs Bill that was also rushed through all its stages. Yes, you are right, there are precedents, but most of them have ended in tears.

Mr. Speaker: I think that perhaps we had better hear the Home Secretary explain it.

4.7 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Kenneth Baker): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill has two simple aims. The first is to make sure that everyone who gets involved in the taking of someone else's vehicle is made criminally liable for the consequences. The second is to give the courts power to sentence the serious cases in the way that they deserve.

Car crime, I think it is generally agreed, is a curse on our society. Let me give just a few facts and figures. In the 12 months to June 1991, over 550,000 cars were stolen. There were over 800,000 thefts from vehicles. About 30 per cent. of all recorded crime is car crime, and car crime is rising rapidly. It accounted for more than a third of the overall increase in recorded crime this year.

It is a curse that affects us all. Many hundreds of thousands of members of the public have had their cars stolen, or their cars broken into and their possessions taken. We have seen recently how car crime can destroy the peace of mind of whole communities in Oxford and in Newcastle.

We are taking action on a number of fronts to tackle this problem. Over the last year, I have held a series of meetings with the major motor manufacturers to see what action they can take in the battle against car crime. Many manufacturers have made great improvements in the security of their vehicles. I welcome that, but there is much more that can be done. When I last met them in September, I asked them to consider urgently three specific point: first, the introduction of visible vehicle identification numbers; secondly, the fitting of deadlocking across all their vehicle ranges; and, most important, the development of an effective vehicle immobilising device that would make it impossible to move a car even if it had been broken into.

I am meeting the manufacturers again this Wednesday, and I shall ask what progress they have made. I think that all hon. Members have been sent a circular about the Bill by the Consumers Association. It says that it has been urging motor manufacturers to make cars more secure since 1961. I applaud what it and *Which?* have done.

The Government have an important role in improving vehicle security. We want to see the British standard on vehicle security adopted as a compulsory European Community directive. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State and I have raised this with our European colleagues. The standard covers locking systems, glass marking, security of in-car entertainment and deadlocking. We are working hard in the EC to get all member states to accept those requirements.

The insurance industry is also very concerned about rising car crime. When I met the Association of British Insurers about six months ago, it was reluctant to take a collective view, but when I met it about two months ago, its views had changed considerably, because the claims paid by insurers rose by 46 per cent. to £225 million in the first half of the year—a substantial sum. That is equal to the value of the claims in the whole of 1989.

Since that meeting, I am glad that the industry has announced its plan to double the number of insurance ratings, for the first time taking account of factory-fitted security measures in assessing insurance grouping. I have asked the ABI to consider whether there is scope for offering discounts to car owners who fit effective security devices after initial sale.

There is much that the Government, the car industry, the insurance industry and others are doing to prevent car crime, but tackling the roots of car crime means, in part, tackling the roots of criminality. We must consider what leads young men—it is predominantly young men—to see crime as a better outlet for their abilities and energies than lawful activity. What causes young people to fall into crime? This year, I have been having a series of informal discussions with Church leaders, the voluntary sector, leading members of the police, probation and prison services, magistrates and others to consider what we can do to get at the roots of criminality. I intend to set out our proposals in the new year.

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): Has my right hon. Friend seen the view of the chief constable of west Yorkshire, Mr. Peter Nobes, that the upsurge in the taking of motor vehicles has probably occurred since the change in the Criminal Justice Act 1988, which reduced the unauthorised taking of a motor vehicle to a summary offence triable only at a magistrates court? He believes that the deterrent effect, which no longer seems to exist for young people, should be reinstated. Is my right hon. Friend willing to consider that further?

Mr. Baker: My hon. Friend should bear in mind the fact that, before 1988, only 3 per cent. of sentences were longer than six months. That effectively answers my hon. Friend. That is why I believe that the Bill is necessary.

The Bill is one of a wide range of urgent measures that we are taking to stop the plague of car crime getting out of hand.

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): I am glad that the Home Secretary recognises that we must tackle the whole question of crime to get a grip of the dreadful problem of stealing vehicles, which has affected my area of Newcastle. Is the right hon. Gentleman frustrated by the edicts of the Secretary of State for the Environment, whose rate-capping proposals have reduced Newcastle city council's ability to tackle the core of the problem? Many youth clubs in Elswick, Benwell and Lemington have had to close because of that lack of funding.

Mr. Baker: Deprived urban areas have had one of the largest increases in expenditure since we took office. From memory, I believe that the figure was about £100 million when we took office but about £900 million or £1 billion this year. I remind the hon. Gentleman that this year I secured not only a good standard spending assessment for the police but an urban crime fund for the Northumbrian police of £3·66 million. That shows our commitment to dealing with those very problems.

The Bill is not the whole answer to car crime, nor does it pretend to be, but it is an important, new and urgently needed part of the legislative answer. It is difficult enough to identify anyone who was in a vehicle. It is much more difficult to establish precisely when damage occurred, who was responsible and what they intended at the time.

What is new about the Bill is that, where a vehicle is taken and damage or injury are caused, all those involved in the taking, including the passengers, will be equally

liable to the more severe punishment for the aggravating events. All the criminals involved in taking the vehicle will be held responsible for what followed the original taking.

Of course, not all cases of vehicle taking are so serious: our whole approach to sentencing—brought to fruition in last Session's Criminal Justice Act—is to have a range of custodial and exacting community penalties graduated to fit the seriousness of the offence. The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) has raised that matter with me on other occasions.

For example, my Department funds various motor projects which have played an increasing role, and there are some excellent examples which focus on demanding programmes to get motor offenders to change to adopt responsible attitudes and behaviour. I believe that, organised properly, those can be effective. My Department is providing £200,000 this financial year to motor projects dealing with young offenders, thereby keeping them out of custody. That includes more than £150,000 to projects supervising offenders through the young adult offenders grant scheme. That fund is set to increase by a further £1 million next year, and I certainly expect motor projects to figure significantly within that increased expenditure.

What we are talking about today is the need to ensure that bad cases do not elude tough penalties, because the present law puts burdens on the police and prosecution which they can have difficulty in discharging.

Mr. Alex Carlile: I suspect that the right hon. Gentleman said something a little earlier that was factually inaccurate. He has implied that all those who are involved in taking a vehicle are not already committing an offence, but they are. Everyone who is involved in taking a vehicle is implicitly committing an offence. The right hon. Gentleman has implied that those who travel in such a vehicle are not already committing an offence, but they are. There is the offence of being carried.

If the right hon. Gentleman took the measure which has been suggested of restoring indictability to the offence of taking and driving away, would not the courts be left with a wide range of penalties? Would not the courts therefore be able to take into account the facts of offences without going through the restrictive provisions in this ill-considered new Bill? Every item in clause 1(2) imposes a restriction on the courts. Does not the right hon. Gentleman realise that he is setting an obstacle course for the courts which will make it more difficult for them to pass tough sentences in serious cases?

Mr. Anderson *rose*——

Mr. Baker: Let me reply to one point at a time.

I knew perfectly well what I was saying with regard to the Theft Act 1968. The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) is right—when a person is charged with taking and driving away, there is a collective responsibility on all those in the car. We are extending that provision to the aggravated events that follow the taking away. The hon. and learned Gentleman can rightly say, "Leave the present offence and just increase the penalties," but it would be difficult, in respect of the offence of taking and driving away, to prove culpability for the aggravated offence and the damage that followed. That is the point of the Bill, and I shall justify it in a moment.

Mr. Anderson : I wish to follow the point made by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile). If the Government were serious about this matter, would they not remove some of the obstacles that now stand in the way of successful prosecutions under section 12 of the Theft Act? Under that section, the prosecution has to prove mens rea in respect of "knowing", whereas, under section 22, the handling provision, it has to prove a case in respect of "knowing or believing". By importing into section 12 "knowing or believing" for the purposes of means rea, could not the Government give an extra tool to the prosecution to deal with this prevalent offence?

Mr. Baker: With great respect, to begin with, that involves a fundamental re-examination of this and other offences under the Theft Act.

Mr. Anderson: Why not?

Mr. Baker: We believe that the right way to deal with that offence is to build on the offence under the Theft Act 1968—the taking and driving away—and add to it the aggravated offence covered in clause 1. Clearly, the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery and the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) take an entirely different view which I do not believe would be an effective way in which to deal with the problem. My view is shared by all the chief constables to whom I have spoken.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): Will the Bill deal with the problem of people reoffending while on bail? Chief Superintendent Riding of Bolton said that one youth has been arrested 30 times so far this year for taking vehicles.

Mr. Baker: That is a separate matter. I shall publish —shortly after Christmas, I suspect—the results of our survey of research on reoffending while on bail, and I shall introduce proposals. However, the Bill does not deal with that point.

I resume my explanation of the Bill, and this goes to the very heart of the issues raised by the two hon. Gentlemen. Let us consider the problems that there may be in proving the more serious offence of criminal damage. Let us suppose that the vehicle is found abandoned in a wood, seriously damaged or completely burnt out. Perhaps one of those involved in the taking—perhaps the original taker —is caught. His fingerprints are all over the car. He admits that he took the vehicle, but says that it was already damaged when he got in or that it was not damaged when he left the scene and that it must have been damaged by someone who took it later.

Perhaps the vehicle was seen colliding with another as it swerved around a corner. The witness says that he cannot be sure—at that speed, everything was blurred or it was dark—that the person being questioned by the police was behind the wheel or even in the vehicle. The accused says that it was not him, or perhaps he says nothing at all. In that case, there is a great deal of uncertainty.

What is certain—what is well beyond all reasonable doubt—is that none of the damage would have occurred had the vehicle not been taken in the first place. It is that certainty which drives the Bill.

The facts are that at least 40 per cent. of cars which are criminally taken are damaged when the owner gets them back. Home Office statistics show, however, that criminal damage is charged in only 6 per cent. of cases. So, whatever the serious damage, in the remaining cases it goes

[Mr. Baker]

unpunished by the criminal law. I believe that that is completely unacceptable. People who get involved in such activities need to know that they will be liable for the consequences—the aggravated offence, and not merely the taking away.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): My question arises out of genuine curiosity. Will the circumstances outlined by the Secretary of State also pertain in Scotland? I should be interested to know why Scotland is not included in the legislation. Whether or not this is the right solution, it seems odd that it does not apply to one part of the United Kingdom. Many people in Scotland—including, for example, the Scottish Campaign Against Irresponsible Driving—are deeply upset about the present level of sentencing in exactly the circumstances which have been outlined.

Mr. Baker: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, the Bill applies only to England and Wales. I have discussed the issue with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, and he believes that there is no need to extend the Bill to Scotland, as there is different legislation for this, as for many other Scottish matters.

It is not for me—as a member of the Executive—to comment on the level of sentencing. As Home Secretary, I do not comment on the length of sentences. I have personal views, but I keep them to myself in such matters.

I remind the House of the basic statistics. At least 40 per cent. of the cars which are criminally taken are damaged when the owner gets them back, but criminal damage is charged in only 6 per cent. of cases. That is the problem which the Bill seeks to solve.

I deal now with dangerous driving and the injuries that it causes. Under the law at present, conviction for reckless driving or for causing death by reckless driving needs proof of who was driving at the material time and what was his state of mind. It will be easier to convict under the Road Traffic Act 1991, but it will still be necessary to identify the driver. That is perhaps not so difficult when the vehicle is registered in his name, but it is a different story when he is one of a number of possible drivers, all certainly involved but none of them owning up to it.

The criminal law demands certainty—and rightly so—before a person is found guilty of having committed a specific criminal act. However, is it relevant to know precisely which of a group of people who are already guilty of knowingly taking or travelling in that vehicle—the point on which we agreed a moment ago—had his foot on the pedal at that moment? The mischief would not have happened had the vehicle not been taken in the first place. Who is to say which of the takers or passengers is sufficiently personally culpable to get extra punishment? The Bill answers that question: they all are.

Over the past few months we have witnessed a succession of very nasty cases of aggravated vehicle taking. In some cases, the law has been able to punish the basic taking itself. It has also, on occasion, been able to provide more serious charges against some of the offenders involved—in some cases it has been possible to charge for manslaughter. Thanks to the efforts of the police, the Crown prosecution service and the courts, it has, on occasion, managed to bring serious charges in some really bad cases, but it has not, and cannot, treat the total mischief with the certainty and severity which it deserves. The Bill will enable it to do so.

Clause 1, which is the heart of the Bill, defines the new offence and sets out what needs to be proved, and what does not need to be proved, before someone can be convicted under it. It is important to recognise at the outset that the Bill does not create a stand-alone criminal offence. Its penalties apply only to those who took the vehicle or got criminally involved with it before it was recovered. The standard of proof for the basic taking of the vehicle remains unchanged.

Under clause 1, it must also be proved beyond doubt that at least one of the four specified aggravating events occurred after the vehicle was first taken and before it was recovered. I emphasise to the House that those "aggravating events" are the four events listed at the bottom of page 1 of the Bill:

"(a) that the vehicle was driven dangerously on a road or other public place;

"(b) that, owing to the driving of the vehicle, an accident occurred by which injury was caused to any person;

"(c) that, owing to the driving of the vehicle, an accident occurred by which damage was caused to any property, other than the vehicle;

"(d) that damage was caused to the vehicle itself."

The Bill will not convict anybody of the crime of criminal damage, or the crime of reckless or dangerous driving, or any crime against the person. It is simply recognising an aggravated form of an existing Theft Act 1968 offence, where a vehicle is taken without the owner's consent, and damage, danger or injury follow which would not have happened if the vehicle had not been taken in the first place.

The House will also understand that clause 1 does not reverse the normal onus of proving who committed an offence. It does not do so because, under the Bill, who may or may not have committed a separate criminal offence is not relevant. The Bill does not want any legal argument about the precise state of mind of those involved. It does not want to know whose foot was on the pedal, whose hand on the wheel or handbrake, or who might have said what to whom. The Bill is looking at the total aggravating consequences of the whole joyriding event, and it states that everyone guilty of taking, or travelling in the car should be liable for more serious punishment.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): The offence differs from the existing regime, in that there is to be a new maximum penalty of five years. Where the offender is under 18—a juvenile—he is presumably still caught by the ceiling of the maximum of two years for all juveniles. In the north of England, which can readily claim to be the taking-and-driving-away capital of Europe, about 90 per cent. of offences are committed by juveniles. How will the Bill improve the way that they are treated?

Mr. Baker: At present, 15 and 16-year-olds may receive a sentence of only one year's custody unless they are guilty of an offence likely to carry a penalty of more than 14 years—usually rape, domestic burglary, murder, arson and such offences. That will not change. To answer my hon. Friend's question directly, at present, the maximum penalty for the existing offence is six months, but very few offenders actually receive six months: instead, they receive about two or three months. Due to the custody rule of one year, the period for 15 and 16-year-olds can rise to one year.

I know what lies behind the anxieties of the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery—that the onus of proving who committed an offence should not be reversed. I daresay that that will be debated not only on Second Reading but in Committee later today. The only excuses to which the Bill will listen will be the two set out in subsection (3) of new clause 12A: that the relevant aggravating offence—the damage to the car or other property or injury to people—occurred before the person committed his basic taking offence, or that he was nowhere near the vehicle at the time.

Those defences depart from the liability principle at the heart of the Bill only to this limited extent. When the accused can show that the damage occurred before he got involved or after he had abandoned the car—perhaps two days later—the Bill lifts his liability. The accused has to be able to show that to the court. In common with other statutory defences of this kind, it is for the defence to show on the balance of probabilities that they apply.

A person convicted under clause 1 could face an unlimited fine and up to five years' imprisonment for the worst cases. Clause 3 also provides for obligatory disqualification in magistrates courts and the Crown court, and for obligatory endorsement and penalty points when, for some exceptional reason, the first penalty is not applied.

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): What evidence does the Home Office have that these young people will be deterred by large increases in fines? Many of them are unable to pay fines of this sort in any case, so how do they constitute a deterrent?

Mr. Baker: Many young people will be deterred from joyriding by this Bill. First, not only the person doing the driving away will be liable to the penalties under the Bill: all the other people in the car will be. That is an extension of the existing offence of taking and driving away. Such people will also be liable to be charged with the aggravating offence. That will have some effect on people piling into a car to go off joyriding.

There is also a possibility of an unlimited fine. My hon. Friend will know that under other legislation passed by the House, parents can be held liable for such fines. That too is a deterrent. We are building into the offence a series of deterrents, including disqualification. We are trying to prevent these young hooligans and criminals from grabbing cars and creating mayhem thereafter.

I remind the House that clause 2 provides that the new offence is to be tried summarily if the only aggravating event was damage and the total value of that damage was below the threshold set in the Magistrates Courts Act 1980 —£2,000—for criminal damage. The offence can be tried either in a magistrates court or a Crown court.

This Bill has been described as tough on joyriders. It is, and I make no apologies for that. It is tough because this so-called joyriding is tough—tough on victims, tough on property, tough on whole communities whose daily life and business have been ruined by hooligans on wheels. The Bill will enable the law to recognise the full consequences of what is involved. It will send the clearest possible message to the people who get involved that society will not tolerate such behaviour.

4.33 pm

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): No one can or should doubt the seriousness of the problem to which the Bill relates. Car crime is now endemic in Great Britain, and the disease has reached epidemic proportions. The Home Secretary talked of attempting to prevent the plague of car crime from getting out of hand, but it is out of hand already. Last year, there were almost 500,000 recorded offences of theft or unauthorised taking of motor vehicles—an increase of 25 per cent. on the previous year's figure. Many of those offences were due to young men —it is a peculiarly male crime—taking cars, not to sell them for profit, but to drive them illegally in a fashion mortally dangerous to themselves and to others.

The question that we must decide today is whether the Bill will achieve a material reduction in the number of such offences. I have no doubt that, from time to time, the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) and the hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) will pop up in the House or on television to tell us that it will indeed have exactly the prescribed effect. In the spirit of Christmas, I must say that I have no doubt at all that, if the Government announced their intention to slaughter the holy innocents on 28 December, the hon. and learned Gentleman and his hon. Friend would pop up again to congratulate the Home Secretary on his perception, sagacity, compassion and commitment to the public good. Other more objective observers have concluded that the Bill will have little or no effect.

The majority of known car crime offenders are teenage boys: 34 per cent. of offenders are aged between 15 and 16 and 39 per cent. between 17 and 20. The need to prevent young men from behaving in a way that is often lethal to themselves and to others, and at the very best causes inconvenience and distress, is not in doubt: the question is whether the Bill will have that effect. Its purpose is the creation of deterrents so severe that young men will think twice before embarking on theft and reckless driving. Unfortunately, the group whom the Bill targets are uniquely unlikely to be deterred even by the threat of a most extreme punishment.

Deterrents act only on rational men and women who consider and calculate the consequences of their actions. The car thief who takes a car to drive with reckless disregard for his own life and the lives of others does not make a careful calculation of what will happen when he is caught. In any event, those who take cars can already be imprisoned for up to six months for the simple act of taking and driving away. If reckless driving—it is now called dangerous driving—is involved, sentences of up to two years' imprisonment are possible. A young man who causes death by dangerous driving can be sentenced to five years' imprisonment and could be convicted of manslaughter and imprisoned for life. It is difficult to follow the argument that the penalties in the Bill will provide a deterrent which is not available at present. That point was made in an intervention by the hon. and learned member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile).

I wish to ask the Minister of State a specific question which I asked his right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office, the right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold) during her wind-up speech in the prison security debate. Why do the Government think that, by passing an Act which does little more than duplicate sentences already on the statute book, they will

[Mr. Roy Hattersley]

achieve a reduction in crime? The only possible reason is the hope that the publicity involved in passing a new Act of Parliament will in itself have some effect. I have my doubts. I do not believe that potential criminals of this type read *Hansard* or, for that matter, newspaper reports of Parliament with the assiduity that we would all wish. In any case, I am opposed to the idea of legislation as a form of public relations. That can only lead to bad law.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) for giving me the opportunity to answer his question, which I shall do in two ways. First, the right hon. Gentleman asked why we need this change in the law. He echoed the point made by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlisle). It is because of the evidential difficulties of bringing a successful prosecution, under all the different statutory provisions to which the right hon. Gentleman referred, when so-called joyriding takes place. Secondly, we can argue until the proverbial cows come home about whether deterrents work in this or that circumstance, but deterrence is very important, as also is punishment and keeping offenders off the streets.

Mr. Hattersley: Perhaps the Minister of State did not altogether follow my point. Rightly or wrongly—I believe it to be right—my point is that punishment, by which the Minister sets great store, is already available. The Bill is mere duplication. As to the arguments about evidence, the Minister must know that we are concerned only with the very small proportion of young men who commit this particular offence. On some occasions evidence may be more easily obtained and more readily lead to a conviction, but we are very dubious about the procedures that the Bill sets down for obtaining evidence and obtaining conviction.

I should like to echo another point made by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery. I agree that there are the greatest dangers in completing all the stages of the Bill in a single day—as is the Government's intention and as, no doubt, will be the outcome of today's deliberations—but it seems particularly foolish to rush through the Bill in this way when penalties and punishments are already available to deal with the offence that we are debating. We may, of course, argue about how adequately those penalties and punishments deal with it——

Mr. Iain Mills (Meriden): If the right hon. Gentleman disagrees with the Government's approach, does he, on behalf of his party, have any specific proposals for dealing with the problem, especially in relation to 15 and 16-year-olds?

Mr. Hattersley: Of course I do. I listed them briefly in our debate on the Gracious Speech and have advocated them on many other occasions. If the hon. Gentleman can bear to remain with us until the end of my speech, he will hear exactly what they are.

Mr. Devlin: I was interested in the right hon. Gentleman's reply, because his proposals have not come to fruition in the amendments. Nothing on the amendment paper would beef up the law in terms of the aggravated offence.

Mr. Hattersley: When the hon. Gentleman has been a Member of the House for a little longer—representing another seat after the general election—he will come to understand that one can amend a Bill only according to what is in it. One cannot deal with its inadequacies in terms of its total omissions. If he, too, will bear with me until the end of my speech, he will hear me list some of those total omissions.

The truth about the Bill is that it is a return to the formula that has characterised the Home Secretary's behaviour throughout the year. A real problem is identified, such as dangerous dogs, prison mutiny and, now, reckless driving. The right hon. Gentleman said several times that this problem had come to light "over the last few months". Indeed, the right hon. Gentleman's epitaph will be "over the last few months" or "over the last few weeks" or "over the last few days", because he lives according to a very short time scale.

The right hon. Gentleman discovered the problem through reading the headlines, and decided to take action on it. There was then much vacillation about what, if any, response was possible and about what that response should be. In the case of dangerous dogs, the Home Secretary said that nothing could be done; then he promised wholesale slaughter; and then he left us with an inefficient and ineffective compromise.

Today is the culmination of a process which began with the promise to the Tory party conference of "robust action". As we now know, that was said before the legislation was prepared. The process continued with the omission of the Bill from the Queen's Speech, because at that time there was no certainty that the legislation could be prepared. The process now ends with a proposal which is probably ineffective and which does nothing whatever to deal with the generality of car thefts.

We are again left with the conclusion that the Home Secretary's principal intention is to make headlines rather than to find solutions. It is reminiscent of the great spring offensive against crime, which was based on a massive advertising campaign and encountered the signal problem that neither the thieves nor the burglars seemed to read the advertisements.

Mr. Anderson: Can my right hon. Friend speculate on the Home Secretary's motive for truncating all stages into one day? Is the Home Secretary saying that allowing the Bill to go to a Special Standing Committee, which might have the benefit of advice from outside legal opinion which might improve the Bill, would have no potential benefit for the quality of the legislation? What is the emergency which demands that the Bill's passage must be completed before Christmas?

Mr. Hattersley: The only possible conclusion is that rushing the Bill through the House in one day adds to the air of urgency. I have sworn to do two things never in any circumstances. The first is to try to read the Home Secretary's mind and the second is to call for his resignation.

Mr. Baker: I must continue to disappoint the right hon. Gentleman on both counts. If he wants to read my mind, he should read what I say.

It is clear from what the right hon. Gentleman has just said that he is opposed to the general thrust of the Bill. If he is so opposed, why do we have an agreement, through the usual channels, to take the Bill through in one day? The

right hon. Gentleman must have been party to that. He must have been asked about it and approved it. If he is really opposed to the thrust of the Bill—which I assure him, if he is about to criticise whether the law will be tougher, marks a considerable toughening of the law and is much tougher than the right hon. Gentleman could produce—he should vote against the Bill tonight so that the whole country can see how he wants to water the law down and how lame his proposals are.

Mr. Hattersley: When provoked, the right hon. Gentleman always changes from a second-class Home Secretary to a third-class party chairman—*[Interruption.]* We shall certainly not oppose the Bill but we shall, of course, vote for the amendments that are necessary to improve it. If the Home Secretary, like some of his Back Benchers, will contain himself with patience for a little longer, I shall describe some of our improvements to the whole area of policy which the right hon. Gentleman touched on but did not deal with in sufficient detail.

Mr. Shersby: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: Yes, but this must be the last time because I must make progress.

Mr. Shersby: The right hon. Gentleman referred to the need for urgency and asked why the Bill was being rushed through the House. That is a perfectly fair question, but does he agree that the tragic deaths of several people, as recently as the day on which the Queen's Speech was being read in the other place, must place on all hon. Members a degree of urgency to deal with this terrible problem?

Mr. Hattersley: Of course I agree with that in principle, but it begs the question whether the Bill will prevent the tragic occurrences to which the hon. Gentleman referred. We rushed through the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, but a young boy was killed by dogs a fortnight ago. The idea that passing the Bill will automatically prevent such things is a mistake——

Mr. Baker: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way on that particular case?

Mr. Hattersley: In a minute——

Mr. Baker: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hattersley: I will give way at the end of the next paragraph.

The Home Secretary has——

Mr. John M. Taylor (Solihull): How do we know when the right hon. Gentleman is at the end of his paragraph?

Mr. Hattersley: I shall give way to the Whip if he would like to intervene.

I was in the process of commending the Home Secretary for the Government's one positive initiative. I refer to the attempt to persuade British motor manufacturers to produce more secure cars. However, after three years of attempted persuasion, beginning with a meeting in Downing street in 1988, the initiative has not yet succeeded. I was delighted to see a television commercial last night which commended a car that was unlikely to be stolen. In the age of European car production, there are difficulties in persuading manufacturers to incorporate security features the necessity for which is limited to Britain. The French, Germans and Italians do not suffer from the disease to the same extent. That, I suppose, is why it is necessary to obtain common European standards——

Mr. Baker *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: In one moment. I will let the Home Secretary know when I have finished.

I congratulate the Home Secretary on initiating and pursuing the idea of a common European safety standard——

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): What sort of paragraph is that?

Mr. Hattersley: As this is the first day of the Maastricht summit, I cannot resist asking the Home Secretary why he believes that car locks are a suitable subject for Community competence when unfair dismissal procedures and minimum working conditions are not. By any standard, car locks and safety devices are intruding into what the Foreign Secretary calls the "nooks and crannies" of our normal life. I am in favour of that, but I thought that the Government were not.

Mr. Baker *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: If the Home Secretary would like me to give way, I am happy to do so.

Mr. Baker: A paragraph from the right hon. Gentleman borders upon eternity, but before he started that long, long paragraph, he made a careless, damaging and harmful comment about a tragic accident which took place a few weeks ago when a young boy was killed in his own garden, alas, by three dogs. It is typical of how the right hon. Gentleman argues in his ill-informed way, grabbing at a few facts, imperfectly understood, that he should try to say that the Dangerous Dogs Act was imperfect because it allowed that tragic accident to occur. It had no effect on that tragic accident because, as the right hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well, to do away with the possibility of such accidents, one would have to forbid the ownership of all dogs in almost all circumstances. The right hon. Gentleman should try not to make such cheap points, but I am afraid that that is typical of the way in which he seeks, time and again, to argue his case.

Mr. Hattersley: The Home Secretary simply makes the point that I made, at rather less length. The fact that we pass legislation to prevent tragedies of one sort or another does not mean that those tragedies will be avoided, although I trust and hope that that will be so. The contention of the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby), with which I entirely agree, is that the House has a special duty to move swiftly when it is sure that to do so will avoid a national ill, but I am not prepared to accept the assumption underlying his contention that by passing the Bill we shall solve the problem.

I welcome the one positive initiative that the Home Secretary has taken, to which he referred during his speech —the attempt to make British cars more secure—but that positive action should have been reinforced by a swathe of other positive proposals. Chief among them should have been a co-ordinated attempt to deflect young men at the first opportunity from a practice which turns into an obsession. The problem with such young men is the numbers in which they commit their crime.

[Mr. Hattersley]

The Criminal Justice Act 1988 was intended to overcome the difficulty of Crown courts being inundated with young men who had taken cars and been apprehended before they had done any damage to themselves or anyone else. That Act amended section 12 of the Theft Act 1968, which virtually created the offence of taking and driving away. The offence carried a maximum penalty on summary conviction of six months' imprisonment and a £2,000 fine.

Although the offence was intended to be a low-grade offence with a low-grade punishment, police authorities throughout the country complained of difficulties of getting prosecutions into court. The Crown prosecution service often insists that the cost of prosecution, which is estimated at £190 per hour, is not justified, and proposes a caution instead of prosecution. That is especially the case when the crime is committed by juveniles.

I have no doubt that action should be taken to prevent young men—some of whom, as the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) said, have been cautioned up to a dozen times—from developing an ingrained course of conduct. We know how that can be achieved. The Home Office working group which reported as long ago as 1988 showed that of 4,500 youngsters who, having been held responsible for motoring offences, attended special motor projects, only 100 committed car-related offences in the weeks and months that immediately followed.

There are examples from throughout Britain of the success of such schemes. One notable example is in south London, where, according to the probation officers who run the scheme, the reoffending rate is 9 per cent., compared with 80 per cent. in adjacent areas. There is no doubt that widespread development of such schemes would cut the number of car thefts.

However, the schemes that I have described suffer from one disadvantage. They seem to the unthinking to provide pleasure rather than punishment. I take a wholly pragmatic view. If schemes result in a reduction in car crime, I am in favour of them. That seems to be the sensible approach, and one which the sufferers from this epidemic would welcome.

I admit that many young men who are required to attend such schemes might have to go through the courts to obtain a probation order, but that would be a price well worth paying for an extension of sentencing in the community where it is a proven success. That is why the Opposition regret that, alongside the proposals that the Home Secretary has made today, he has not already instituted a massive programme of the nature which his own research demonstrates to be the most effective way of tackling car theft.

Such a programme would have tackled the causes of the crime and prevented thousands of young men from developing an obsession which can lead to destruction of property, injury and even death. It would not have sounded spectacular, as the Bill does, and it would not have appealed to the people who believe that the only response to crime is more severe punishment, but it would have been effective. As the only virtue of such schemes is practicality, however, they do not appeal to the Home Secretary.

I ask the Home Secretary specifically what is happening to the proposed scheme in Oxford, where the Blackbird Leys incident last summer caused so much damage and distress. I understand that the police and the probation service are anxious to develop motor projects and are waiting for Home Office approval and the promise of a Home Office grant.

There is one immensely important objection to the Bill as it is currently drafted. I shall deal with it briefly, not to minimise the strength of our objection, but because it is the subject of the first group of amendments with which we hope to deal in the Committee stage. In effect, the Bill creates two levels of car crime. The basic act of stealing a car is defined in section 12(1) of the Theft Act 1968. Clause 1(2) stipulates the ways in which offences can be aggravated, or made more serious, and attract additional penalties.

I understand—and, within the limited value of the Bill, accept—the advantages of warning a young man who steals a car that if, by his reckless behaviour, a pedestrian is killed or injured or damage is done to property, he will be subject to more severe penalties. Within the limitations of the Bill, I understand the purpose and advantage of that proposal, although it is worth repeating that the young man is probably already liable to penalties of similar severity even before the Bill is passed.

Surely it cannot be right that the man who commits the basic offence—and is liable to prosecution under the 1968 Act—may become liable under the Bill, even though his actions, or those which he is accused of taking, are not actions which he takes knowingly or wilfully or which are likely to exaggerate the offence in the way the Bill stipulates. That is in defiance of the principle of English law which requires the prosecution to demonstrate the wilful commission of an unlawful act. *[Interruption.]* As I see some scepticism on the Treasury Bench, I shall give an example of what I mean, which I hope will demonstrate the unacceptable point.

A young man steals a car and is indictable under the original Act. Let us assume that the young man loses his nerve, or retains his senses, and pulls up in a lay-by with the intention of leaving the car and walking home. If he succeeds in that endeavour and leaves the car and walks home, he can still rightfully be prosecuted under the Theft Act 1968. Clearly, no one would object to that. But if he climbs out of the car to walk home and another driver, legally in charge of his vehicle, swerves off the road and hits the stolen stationary car, the man who stole the car is guilty of the aggravated offence and liable to the additional penalties.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire South-West): Quite right.

Mr. Hattersley: I hear the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) say that that is right. How can it be right to say that someone is guilty of an offence if he gets out of the car and walks away, but guilty of a worse offence if he gets out of the car and walks away and someone hits the car?

Mr. Alex Carlile: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the problem goes a stage further? Courts will not sentence people for those things which they have not done. Whenever a case comes before a court, there will be a prosecution version and a defence version of the facts. The label given to the offence is often misleading, because if the defence disputes the prosecution's version of the facts—even if there is a guilty plea—there will be what is called a

Newton hearing to determine exactly what the defendant did. Therefore, if the facts are as the right hon. Gentleman suggested, the young man will receive the sentence that he would have had for the lesser offence in any event. So the distinction is wholly artificial.

Mr. Hattersley: That is my view.

Sir Anthony Grant *rose*——

Mr. Hattersley: I think that we are about to hear why the courts will sentence a man for something that he has not done, did not wish to do and, indeed, attempted not to do.

Sir Anthony Grant: There is a much simpler explanation of the point that the right hon. Gentleman made. The fact is that, if the offence of stealing and taking away the car had not been committed, the other car would not have run into the first one.

Mr. Hattersley: While that is patently true, the man in my hypothesis has created exactly the same circumstances and committed exactly the same offence whether or not something wholly fortuitous happens to him. I agree with the hon. Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile). The distinction may be clear to Conservative Members, but it will not be obvious to the courts. In consequence, the courts will not share the Home Secretary's judgment.

The Home Secretary's judgment is that the Bill makes individuals responsible for the consequences of their actions. We are all in favour of that, but it can be seen from examples which anyone can make up that the Bill makes people responsible for actions which are not their own but the actions of others. I do not believe that that will be acceptable to the courts, not least because the issue is much complicated by the defence set out in clause 4, which reverses the burden of proof in a way which extends the innovation which first came into English law in the legislation prohibiting the carrying of knives in public places.

According to clause 1(3)(b), a conviction is not possible if a driver proves that

"he was neither in nor on nor in the immediate vicinity of the vehicle"

when the aggravated offence took place. That vitiates the defence of the Bill by the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West, who said that because the person stole the car he was responsible even if he was

"neither in nor on nor in the immediate vicinity of the vehicle"

when the aggraved offence took place. The hon. Gentleman's argument is totally invalidated by the Bill. More importantly in terms of that argument, however, the defence of clause 1(3)(b) requires the defendant to prove his innocence, and thus contradicts a basic principle of English law.

I draw the Home Secretary's attention to another area of legitimate doubt—automatic disqualification from driving as set out in clause 3.

Mr. John Patten: On that basic point of principle, the right hon. Gentleman surely recalls that, under the Prevention of Corruption Act 1916, a person convicted of corruption has to prove that moneys in his possession were gained from activities which were other than corrupt activities, or that under the Sexual Offences Act 1956 a convicted pimp has to prove that his moneys were not gained from immoral activity? Also, under the 1971 drug legislation, a person with a cannabis plant in their garden has to prove that they did not know what it was. There is no great principle adduced in British law, and the right hon. Gentleman cannot refer to one because it does not exist, as I have just demonstrated.

Mr. Hattersley: I confess my ignorance of the three laws that the Minister has brought to my attention, but I recall vividly the first Act of this Parliament, which concerned carrying offensive weapons in public places. I read the speech of the then Home Secretary—now the Foreign Secretary—this morning, in which he dealt at great length with what he described as a new principle of English law, in which a man found to be carrying such weapons was required to demonstrate that he was not doing so for an unlawful purpose. He described that as a reversal of our normal rules of evidence. His speech four and a half years ago was explicit in saying that that was unique to that sort of offence. If it was unique, this is the first extension of it that I know of.

Mr. Anderson: Surely the new principle of law to which my right hon. Friend takes exception is that a penalty can be aggravated as a result of circumstances over which the person has no control. That was the case in the example that my right hon. Friend gave about a lay-by. That penalty would be even more aggravated in the case of a passenger, whose mens rea may extend to riding in a vehicle which he knows to be stolen, but it does not follow that he has any control over the manner of driving.

Mr. Hattersley: That was my first objection. My second concerns the reversal of the burden of proof, and my third concerns the automatic disqualification from driving, as set out in clause 3. However, that may not be an objection if the Minister of State can give a cogent explanation. There is some doubt about whether a 14 or 15-year-old offender will be influenced by the discovery that he will be denied a licence two or three years later. More important is the effect that automatic disqualification would have on proper rehabilitation, which in some ways would be made impossible by such a requirement.

When the Minister of State winds up the debate, will he tell us if he can imagine circumstances in which a sentence —perhaps a custodial sentence—has been served and it would be sensible to direct the offender into some activity which requires a driving licence? I can imagine that that might be part of the corrective training, or even part of the punishment. Will he think about that and tell us whether he still believes that mandatory disqualification is the right course to follow?

I admit that all those considerations are practical, and the Government are far less concerned with practical consequences than with public impact. In our way, we shall persist in examining each Bill brought before us in terms of its real and relevant issues, and that is how we intend to continue to behave when we get into Government.

Mr. Baker: Before the right hon. Gentleman sits down, I have listened to his speech carefully——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. Has the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) completed his speech?

Mr. Hattersley: Yes.

5.4 pm

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): There can be few more mindless crimes than that which used to be known as "joyriding", but is now correctly described as death riding, because that is what, sadly, it so often becomes, as far too many families in the land now know.

Under the present law, the penalty for taking and driving away a car is a derisory six months, yet those thugs —usually young thugs—wreck people's lives, destroy property and terrify innocent pedestrians of all ages.

I was delighted when I heard the Home Secretary say in October that he proposed to introduce a new offence to tackle the problem. At that time, he proposed to provide for automatic disqualification, a maximum penalty of two years in imprisonment and an unlimited fine—good, but not quite good enough.

I was glad that, when the Bill was drafted, the proposed penalty was increased from two to five years. However, even that is not a sufficient penalty for those who mindlessly destroy other people's lives—and not only the lives of the people they kill. To lose a much-loved child or partner—often the parent of a young family—can cruelly affect many more lives than the person who was killed. We must bring home to these scatterbrained young hooligans the seriousness of what, to them, is a light-hearted prank or blatant exhibitionism.

The thought of spending a few dull years in gaol although the Opposition appear to discount it—should help to dampen even the most foolhardy. Under the Road Traffic Offenders Act 1988, there is a power to disqualify youngsters who are under the legal driving age. It is used far too rarely. All too often those youths are legally able to drive when they become 17. It is to be hoped devoutly that, whatever the Opposition may say—they do not seem to like this provision at all—that power will now be more widely used.

Moreover, since the offences covered by the Bill are usually committed by the young, more youngsters will be caught in the net and will be liable to a term of disqualification, which can be unlimited and applies—as do the other penalties—to passengers as well as to the driver. That is important and fair, since egging-on by passengers is all too often the cause of the disaster, as a recent case has shown only too clearly. It will no longer be necessary to prove who was driving, which is sometimes difficult, since all those involved will now be liable. Thus another loophole is usefully closed by the Bill.

Apart from the penalties under the Bill, penalties of life imprisonment for murder or manslaughter are still available under other legislation. However, the Bill tackles not merely injury to persons, but the damage to other people's property which criminals can cause.

As with much criminal law, it is essential for people who have knowledge of the offenders to speak out. It is no kindness to a son or daughter—however much loved—to shield them from the consequences of their criminal behaviour. It must be agonisingly hard to shop someone whom one loves, but we must create a climate of opinion in which that can and will be done.

Anyone taking a vehicle without the owner's consent, or driving or being a passenger in such a vehicle, will be liable under the Bill for tougher sentences if any of the aggravating circumstances—injury, death or damage—takes place between the taking and the recovery of the vehicle. I am bound to say that the shadow Home Secretary's example was ludicrous in the extreme.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Absolutely, and the right hon. Gentleman would not give way to me.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The right hon. Gentleman would not give way to the Home Secretary.

It will be no excuse to plead that the consequences were not intended or foreseen or directly caused by that person. All too often, especially on motorways, a relatively small initial error can cause an horrendous chain of consequences. In the right hon. Gentleman's example, that was exactly what happened: the man got out of the car and another driver swerved to avoid him. If the young man did not cause that to occur, I should like to know who did, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) asked. Under the Bill, the person taking and driving away the vehicle will be liable for the chaos and mayhem that can follow the initial act of folly.

All in all, I welcome the Bill and wish it a speedy passage. The only matter that puzzles me is why those on the Liberal and Labour Benches do not see the urgent need for the legislation. Those in Oxford, Liverpool, Newcastle and many other cities undoubtedly do.

5.10 pm

Mr. David Young (Bolton, South-East): It is not for me to analyse in the House today the reasons for the escalation in car theft. Part of it may be due to boredom caused by unemployment and some of it may well be due to our acquisitive society. Where material gain is everything, the law suffers as a result.

It is clear that, in many of these cases, there is complete contempt for the law as it stands, not unlike that shown by certain store owners who, when faced with a vacillating and weak Government, use their commercial power to bring the entire law into disrepute. I see little difference between the contempt in which a car thief holds the law and that of those who continue to open their stores because the Government are not prepared to uphold the law. I will not comment on who those store owners support financially, but many are the financial friends of the Tory party.

Car theft is not simply an offence against property: it is potentially a lethal offence. Between 1 September and 30 October 1991, about 12 youngsters died. Some died as a result of their own actions, but others were innocent people who were mown down by cars being driven at least recklessly or by cars certainly out of control.

This is a serious problem in Bolton. In the first 10 months of 1991, 4,589 vehicles were taken and there were 4,903 thefts from vehicles and 2,533 charges of criminal damage involving vehicles. In total, about 11,000 innocent Boltonians suffered in one way or another from the crime. When these crimes continue to occur, it is the innocent who pay. It is the nurse who comes late off her shift to find her car stolen. It is the young man trying to hold down a job who finds his means of transport taken from him. Worst of all, it is those who are killed by the stolen cars. If we believe in a law-abiding society, this must be a matter of concern to us all.

What saddens me most is that we do not have as much will as we should have to get rid of the crime. With a small

amount of the dedication that the Tory party showed in the way it attacked miners and trade unions, we would live in a law-abiding society. What we have is not a society of law and order, but a society of law and disorder.

I do not condemn the police for that. The clear-up rate in Bolton increased from 27 per cent. last to 41 per cent. this year. That is a creditable performance, but there remains a tremendous backlog from which criminals benefit.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn (Perth and Kinross): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Young: I will not give way now, because other Members wish to speak.

There is little point in passing legislation if the police do not have the means to apprehend the criminals.They cannot deal with people they do not catch. The problem in Bolton is that it is often the same people who repeat crimes. The crimes are not simply committed by people on bail. They are also committed by the same people time and again. This morning, the chief superintendent in charge told me of an individual who had stolen 30 vehicles. Clearly, if we wish to rid our streets of this danger, it is not enough to pass legislation. We must also provide the resources to enable the police to carry out the legislation.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Young: I am not giving way.

Equally important is the requisite facility of communication between police forces in different areas because, obviously, car crimes are not exclusive to one town or county. They spread across the length and breadth of the country.

What is apparently lacking is a meaningful deterrent. I am not talking simply about custodial sentences, although I do not rule them out. The Government must take in hand by every means in their power any scheme that will stop this crime. As I have emphasised time and again, we are not talking simply about the loss of property, bad as that may be; we are talking about the loss of life.

The people involved are often between the ages of 13 and 19. Often they have no worry about losing a licence, because a person who applies for a licence in the first place has some respect for the law. For the person with no respect for the law, why should the removal of a licence be any deterrent when that person has never had a licence anyway? Many of those involved are without funds.

The Bill has been cobbled together as a hopeful public relations exercise, but it will result in only a small reduction in the crime.

When such crimes are committed, it is the innocent in our society who pay. It is no good passing new legislation unless it reduces the incidence of the crime. We are seeking not simply to introduce punitive measures for use against the criminal, but to stop the crime of car theft and sweep it from our streets.

A few months ago, our television screens showed entire communities that were terrified. Men and women were afraid to walk on the streets of their own town or city because someone was racing around in a high-powered car that he could not control.

The preservation of the law is a matter for all parties. It is no good simply to claim in words, without actions, that one supports law and order, because, as the saying goes, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. So far, the taste of the proposed legislation has been nasty.

5.20 pm

Mr. Michael Shersby (Uxbridge): I declare that I am, as the House knows, parliamentary adviser to the Police Federation of England and Wales.

The federation and I support the Bill. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary should be in no doubt that he has the full support of the federated ranks in trying to deal with this difficult problem.

The increased penalties are necessary. The penalty for the aggravated taking away of a vehicle, causing the death of innocent members of the public, must be introduced because the recent events in Oxford, Elswick and other towns and cities have shown that we cannot sit idly by and watch them repeated.

Until the passage of the Criminal Justice Act 1988, persons convicted of taking away vehicles without consent could be given a custodial sentence of up to three years. My right hon. Friend told us today that, of those sentenced, only about 3 per cent. each year received custodial sentences of more than six months. It is one thing to say that only 3 per cent. of those convicted receive custodial sentences, but it is interesting to consider the number of offences involved.

Those figures, which were given in answer to a parliamentary question that I tabled on 15 November, reveal that, in 1988, more than 20,000 persons were convicted, of whom 3,658 received immediate custodial sentences. Of those, 491 received a sentence of more than six months; 103 received a sentence of between a year and 18 months; 36 received a sentence of between 18 months and two years, and six received a sentence of between two years and three years.

Those figures show that substantial custodial sentences were imposed which cannot be considered light or as encouraging young people to take a risk in the belief that nothing serious will happen to them. The figure of 3 per cent. is a little misleading. The custodial sentences and the number of individuals who receive them are significant.

Mr. Anderson: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is not just the actual number of those who are sentenced to immediate imprisonment or to terms of imprisonment of six months or more that is significant? What is crucial is the signal given about the importance the Government attach to this offence. In 1988, the Government sent a clear signal that that offence was no longer so high in their scale of priorities. Does the hon. Gentleman agree, however, that that scale of priorities provides a deterrent in itself?

Mr. Shersby: I entirely agree. However, in 1988, the Government, and indeed the House, decided to reduce the penalty for the offence to a maximum of six months. The House agreed to the proposition that we should rely more on cautions and community service punishment. That decision was part of the policy, which had received support from all sections of the House, of reducing the number of people, particularly juveniles, sent to prison. It was also part of the policy of reducing the cost of criminal proceedings. I agree with what the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said about that.

[Mr. Shersby]

To some extent, the decision in 1988 has resulted—it is difficult to judge to how great an extent—in a massive increase in auto crime—the taking away of cars without the consent of their owners and, in some cases, racing them on the public highway. I cannot believe that there is no connection between the abolition of the custodial sentence of up to three years and the subsequent increase in auto crime.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Shersby: I shall give way to my hon. and learned Friend a little later.

The number of vehicles that have been used to ram-raid shops and other premises to steal goods of every kind from hard-working shopkeepers has also increased. That crime has not been referred to today, but it is a worrying and major part of the auto-crime scene.

Why do such things happen in our country? Some people will say that such crime is caused by unemployment and the recession, but that is not necessarily so. On the Blackbird Leys estate, it was clear to the police that the damage to cars and shops was done merely for pleasure, not for gain. Many of the youths involved in that crime were in full-time work or full-time education. It is true that some were unemployed, but there did not appear to the police to be any common denominator among them except that they lived on the estate or had relatives living there.

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): I live on the Blackbird Leys estate, and I can tell the hon. Gentleman that by no means all those who were caught up in the events were residents of the estate. It is an unfortunate feature of such confrontations that, once they start, every psychopath for miles around who wants to have a go at the police is pulled in. The people of Blackbird Leys and other parts of Oxford who are plagued with this problem are decent, law-abiding citizens. They are more anxious than anyone in the House to see this business brought to an end.

Mr. Shersby: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman intervened, because I know that he has a unique knowledge of precisely what happened.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that a number of youths who were in full-time education or in full-time work were responsible for what happened. Many of those in full-time education did not attend school, and some visited Oxford and committed shoplifting offences or car crimes around the city.

During September, the people of our nation sat watching a unique spectacle on their television sets. They watched as young people drove stolen cars at high speed on several estates, to the great danger of residents. "Hotting" was the term used by many of those youngsters to describe their activity. Stealing cars and driving them to destruction had become a dangerous craze, almost to the point of addiction.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Shersby: I will do so in a moment.

The House will recall that a computer scientist, Mr. Melvyn Davies, was clubbed and slashed in Oxford while going to the help of his girl friend, who had herself been stabbed in the body and in the face. He gave a succinct judgment about what happened when he said:

"We have got to stamp out this sort of thing or it will spread like wildfire and become a new craze for the yobs. We cannot let them ruin our lives."

That is one powerful reason why the House is considering the Bill. I believe that we owe it to Mr. Davies and to many others to pass it quickly.

We owe it not only to the people of Oxford but to those of Birmingham, Cardiff, Elswick, and even of rural Shropshire who have suffered. We owe it to the people of my own borough of Hillingdon, where only a week or so ago a teenager who had just stolen a car killed himself when he drove it into a tree at nearly 100 mph. There is no joy in those dangerous rides to death.

It is only as a result of sensitive and skilful policing in towns and cities that the problem will be kept under control. That kind of policing requires good police intelligence and first-class training. Fortunately for us all, those skills are possessed to a considerable degree by police officers of every rank.

The police have also demonstrated considerable success in building good relationships with the community, but they need the backing of the law and a powerful deterrent to prevent the craze of "hotting" from becoming a permanent feature of life in British towns and on estates.

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: My hon. Friend spoke of "our nation", which includes a place called Scotland. Those new crimes are not occurring in Scotland—but if they were, there would be no difficulty in charging a person with reckless driving under the Road Traffic Act 1988, or, under common law, with assault to the danger of life, which should, if necessary, carry a penalty of life imprisonment.

Am I being told that the law of England is so deficient that, if one assaults a person by driving a car at them to the danger of that person's life or property—whether or not one damages either—that is not a crime known to the common law of England, and would it not attract the most condign penalties?

Mr. Shersby: My hon. and learned Friend makes an extremely valuable point. I am glad that he has drawn the attention of the House to the situation in Scotland and to the law of Scotland, which in so many ways is superior to that of England.

Although the Police Federation welcomes the Bill, it would prefer the basic offence of taking away without consent possibly to incur the same penalty as was available until 1988, of up to three years' custodial sentence. The Bill does not propose that: it proposes only that those who cause injury or damage shall be liable to imprisonment for up to two years—or, if it is proved that an accident caused death, of up to five years.

Over the past few days, police officers have asked me why a community has to wait until someone is injured or killed before an offender is sent to prison for a lengthy period. For most juveniles who steal cars and engage in "hotting", the maximum penalty will remain a six-month custodial sentence—although, as my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said this afternoon, the fine will increase next year to £5,000.

I doubt whether many young people will be deterred by a fine of £1,000 or £5,000, because they do not have that kind of money available. However, it will be interesting to see whether, under the Criminal Justice Act 1991, their parents will have some liability, and perhaps exercise more supervision over their youngsters than they have in the past.

Mr. John Patten: Is my hon. Friend aware that, under the Criminal Justice Act 1991, the parents of convicted children will leave themselves liable to meeting an unlimited fine, as levied by a Crown court, if their children cannot themselves pay? That will act as a considerable encouragment to greater parental responsibility.

Mr. Shersby: I am aware of that provision, to which I was referring before I gave way to my right hon. Friend —and I hope that it will be widely understood by parents throughout the country. For the first time, to anything like that extent, parents are liable for the criminal activities of juveniles.

The Bill also imposes an automatic one-year driving ban, but I cannot help wondering how many young people will be deterred by that—particularly as many of them drive without a licence anyway. The police know that "hotting", ram-raiding, and related offences are committed by a comparatively small number of people, many of whom are persistent young criminals. Surely the threat of a custodial sentence would be a stronger deterrent—as it was before 1988—in addition to the longer sentences for which the Bill provides.

The Government give as reason for not reverting to the 1988 arrangements the small number of convictions previously secured. I believe that the real problem was that, before 1988, magistrates were under pressure from the Home Office not to award custodial sentences. If the will had been there and secure accommodation and prison accommodation had been available, I suggest that magistrates would have applied the law in the way that was intended when that legislation was passed.

I am told that, even today, most juveniles are cautioned or sentenced to community service, or receive a discharge because magistrates remain reluctant to award custodial sentences. However, in so many cases, the police and the courts are dealing with persistent reoffenders rather than with first-time offenders, for whom a caution or community service would be an appropriate penalty.

I turn to the taking away of children. Does my right hon. Friend consider that the Bill's provisions will deter the kind of thief who stole Mr. Peter Brown's BMW from a garage forecourt while Mr. Brown's infant daughter was in the back seat? According to Martin Newland's article in *The Daily Telegraph* today, Mr. Brown turned his back on his car for less than one minute. Mercifully, his car was abandoned three miles away, and two-year-old Natasha Brown was able to tell a passing couple that "a naughty man" had taken the car.

The prospect of community punishment or even six months' imprisonment did not deter the thief in that case. According to *The Daily Telegraph*, that was the latest in a series of incidents in which children were inadvertently taken by car thieves.

In another recent case, two-year-old James Austin, who had been left strapped into his baby seat by his mother, was driven away while she took some refuse to a rubbish dump some 50 yards from her parked car. Luckily, he was reunited with his mother unharmed.

Were both offences aggravated taking away? Perhaps my right hon. Friend the Minister will tell the House when he winds up. Neither child was injured, and nor were the cars damaged. I suppose that the thieves concerned could be charged with kidnapping or some other offence under common law. Perhaps my right hon. Friend could clarify that point, because that danger is a cause of great concern to many parents.

It is proper for the Government to act promptly, early in this Session, to deal with the problem. I understand the reservations expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House about the speed with which the Bill is being enacted. However, the offence is so serious, and parents and car owners are so concerned, that the House should not delay but ought to place the Bill on the statute book as soon as possible.

5.38 pm

Mr. Andrew Smith (Oxford, East): This matter is of the greatest concern to my constituents, many of whom are at their wits' end as to what can be done to halt the murderous menace of the theft and racing of cars in residential city streets.

I support the Bill, because anything that can add to the action that can be taken against car thieves is welcome. Much more needs to be done. The Bill is much too little and comes much too late. It is, by itself, little more than window dressing on the part of the Government. Anyone who believes that the Bill will really be effective in catching, punishing and deterring the criminals in question is living in cloud cuckoo land.

The extensive national media coverage in August and September of confrontations with the police left many of the wider public with a distorted picture of the problem. Some of the media were interested only in portraying a violent image of Blackbird Leys. I know the estate well, because I live there. I place it on record that Blackbird Leys, Barton and the other parts of Oxford that are plagued by this menace are good places, with a terrific community spirit. Decent people who are sick and tired of the criminal activities of the few deserve a much better portrayal by the national media and more support from Government.

On Saturday night, volunteers from Blackbird Leys community centre provided—as they do every year—a free dinner and social evening, drinks and gifts for 250 local pensioners. They held a similar event back in the summer, when Blackbird Leys was in the headlines. On neither occasion were the media at all interested in covering the good news; they were interested only in hyping up the bad news.

When I add that youngsters have reportedly been paid by film crews to put on displays in stolen cars and that a recent Channel 4 programme tried—ludicrously and dangerously—to suggest that the real problem was police brutality, hon. Members will have some idea of the anger felt by my constituents about the gross irresponsibility shown by some of the media. They have let down the public and also let down colleagues who, in the local media and in some national programmes such as "Newsnight", have succeeded in giving a more accurate and balanced picture of events.

Now that the events of the summer are out of the headlines, some hon. Members, and members of the public who are not immediately affected, may imagine that the problem of theft and racing of cars has gone away. Sadly, that is not so. Reported car crimes in Oxford are running at 600 per month; car crime has doubled in the past four years, constituting one third of all crime reported in the city, and this year's figures are one third up on last year's.

[Mr. Andrew Smith]

Residents and police are in the front line of a war against hooliganism and car crime, including the displaying of stolen vehicles, which is now running at some 10 to 12 reported incidents per week. They were at it last night, as they are nearly every night.

Just a week ago on Saturday, the secretary of our Headington Labour club, remonstrating with a thug outside her home, was knocked to the ground and beaten. She, and all the other residents with the courage to stand up and defend decent values on behalf of their families and communities, deserve more support than they are receiving from the Government.

The police have taken action to combat the wave of car crime. In the past three months, there have been some 150 arrests in Oxford for car theft. I have the highest praise for the professionalism and dedication of the Oxford police and for the bravery that they have shown when confronted by ugly and sickening attacks.

Let there be no mistake: the Oxford public strongly support the police and they have our confidence. It is evident, however, that the police are overstretched and are having to fight the rising tide of car crime with insufficient officers and with one hand tied behind their backs. The Bill will barely scratch the surface of either problem. If the law is to be effective, the criminals must know that the chance of their being caught is high, as is the chance of their being convicted; and that they are certain to receive a sentence that matches the severity of their crime. Sadly, none of those factors applies today.

Even when their offences are of the ultimate gravity, some people are getting off far too lightly. An example is the appalling tragedy of lorry driver Leslie Parsons, who was killed last February when he was just doing his job. Let me quote from last Saturday's *Oxford Mail:*

"A teenager whose night of joyriding ended in the death of a lorry driver, was sent to a young offenders' institution for two years.

Alan Dawtrey was driving a Metro at about 80 mph on the wrong side of the road before it smashed into a lorry coming in the opposite direction, Oxford Crown Court heard.

Lorry driver Mr. Leslie Parsons, 51, lost control of the 28-ton lorry after colliding with the H-reg. car.

The lorry careered across the A423 Oxford to Henley road, hitting a second Metro before ploughing into the Harcourt Arms pub.

Mr. Parsons, of Fenny Compton, Warwickshire, a driver with Fine Lady Bakeries in Banbury, died from multiple injuries in the crash early on February 18.

The court was told that Dawtrey had been racing against the other Metro shortly before the crash in the village of Nuneham Courtenay, where there is a 40mph restriction.

Dawtrey, 18, of Boundary Brook Road, Oxford, who admitted causing death by reckless driving and five offences of taking vehicles without consent, was also banned from driving for four years.

The driver of the second Metro, Jamie Hughes . . . of King's Lane, Harwell, was also convicted of causing death by reckless driving. His sentence was adjourned for social inquiry reports.

Judge Leo Clark told Dawtrey it was a bad case, with a number of aggravating features which included running away from the scene 'in complete disregard for the lorry and its driver'."

Surely it is clear to anyone who might imagine that we are discussing an activity that could legitimately be called "joyriding"—from the incident that I have cited and from the horrors of the case in Liverpool, where a car ploughed into some children—just what a murderous evil that activity is.

I am fully aware of the importance of the independence of the courts and of the constraints that they face when sentencing juveniles. I imagine that, in the case that I cited, the offender was given the maximum sentence that could be conferred for causing death by reckless driving; but, given normal remission and remission for good behaviour, there is every possibility that that young man will be freed after nine months in custody. I cannot believe that many members of the public believe that that is justice, or that it conveys the right message to those who, tonight, will steal a car and race it in the path of some other innocent victim.

We should remember that causing death by reckless driving carries the same five-year maximum penalty as is included in the Bill. The public will want to know how many people who are convicted will serve five years and how many will serve nine months.

As the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) pointed out, the courts and the public receive very confused and contradictory messages from the Home Office and from Ministers, whose words suggest that the police and the magistrates must be backed up, but whose actions have on occasion deprived them of the support that they need. An example is the injunction on magistrates to do everything possible to keep people under 21 out of custody.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said, some supervised car projects may be an effective alternative to custody; but do the Government give the probation service the resources that it needs to run such projects? Why, in Oxford, has it been left so far to the police, the voluntary sector and private sponsorship to try to cobble together a scheme? As my right hon. Friend asked earlier, when will the Home Office commit resources to that scheme?

Mr. John Patten: As the hon. Gentleman and I both have constituencies in the city of Oxford, I was interested to learn of the comparatively recent endeavours to introduce motor projects there. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Home Office received the first application from Oxfordshire only last week, on 5 December? It is under active consideration, however.

That application relates to the Oxfordshire motor project—which is aimed at those on probation, following conviction, unlike the diversionary projects to which the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) referred.

Mr. Smith: I hope that that means that support will be forthcoming.

My point is that, in general, the courts are under an injunction not to give custodial sentences to offenders under 21. If the alternatives are to work, we must take care that they are not seen as a reward for those who become involved in such activities. What about the kids who do not steal cars? Where are the projects that might stop them from doing so in the first place? Where the alternatives are to be provided, however, I believe that the Government are obliged, through the Home Office and the probation service, to fund them adequately.

Another example that illustrates the need for change is the diminished opportunity to pass deterrent sentences, not just in terms of the threat to society of a particular offender, but the threat to society that is posed by the crime at large in which these people are involved. That

important point is well argued in an article in "Justice of the Peace" by Mr. T. G. Moore, who is deputy clerk to the justices in Nottingham. He points out:

"A court faced with a young offender who has been involved in the taking of vehicles, even though it may be his third or possibly fourth appearance, cannot simply pass a deterrent sentence on the basis of the prevalence of such offending in the locality . . . Section 1(4A)(b) of the 1982 Act deals with protecting the public from serious harm from the offender. The importance of the amendment by the 1988 Criminal Justice Act was that it added the words 'from serious harm from him' to the end of the sentence 'only a custodial sentence would be adequate to protect the public'. The case of R. v. Jacobs and Kinsella . . . makes it clear that the consideration which courts must now take into account is not whether a custodial sentence was necessary to protect the public from offenders generally of the same type, but whether it was necessary to protect the public from a particular offender. This indicates that if the court's desire is to protect the public from persons who take vehicles without the owner's consent, that is by a sense of general deterrence, then this particular criterion of the Criminal Justice Act will not be applicable . . . The question posed for the courts must be whether taking a vehicle without consent can ever, as an individual offence, be so serious that a non-custodial sentence cannot be considered. It is on this point, that the ordinary member of the public and, it is suspected, the average police officer finds it difficult to equate his own perception of the offence of taking without consent with the strictures placed upon the courts by legislation."

We are responsible for legislation. We have to take account of that article and ask what difference the Bill will make in this respect. The answer is that it will make no difference at all.

Even with such opportunities as the Bill presents to get cases into the Crown court, where the offence involves only damage to vehicles or property—the vast bulk of cases—it is the value of the damage to property, as set out in clause 2, that is the criterion, not the extent of the nuisance and danger, although that is the real problem with which we need to get to grips. To get such cases to the Crown court will therefore involve further cost to victims and trouble to the police in obtaining estimates from garages, builders and so on. An element of bureaucratic waste is built into the Bill.

I support the measure, but for those reasons I have no confidence that the Bill will make more than a very small difference. It is much too little much too late. Why has it taken the Government so long to take even this inadequate action? Local residents, the Thames Valley police and I were urging, long before the events of the summer, that something should be done. The Government cannot say, as an excuse, that they did not know what was going on and how it could escalate. I shall give some examples.

I raised what was happening—the racing and the attacks on police—at a meeting with the chief constable on 2 November 1990 at which the Foreign Secretary, the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd), and the present Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), were present. The Home Secretary was fully briefed about the position when he visited Cowley in May this year. Again I stressed the seriousness of the matter and the need for more police officers at a meeting of Thames valley Members of Parliament which the Home Secretary was supposed to take, but which Lord Ferrers took instead, on 23 July this year.

The Home Office took more than six weeks even to respond to the points made, by which time the situation in my constituency had already exploded out of control. Home Office Ministers fiddled while tyres and a few petrol bombs burned. If the Government had listened to the police and taken prompt action on any of those warnings —action for which they could have secured all-party support—I have no doubt that some of this summer's tragedies would have been avoided.

Much more vigorous action than is provided for in the Bill is needed. We need more police officers, urgent changes to sentencing policy and an end to the nonesense whereby attempting to steal a car and attempting to drive while disqualified are no longer arrestable offences. Where the Government propose alternatives to custody, they must provide the resources to make them work.

As for the motor manufacturers, we need more progress and Home Office action to build on the excellent collaboration that the Rover Group has with Thames Valley police. We also need Government investment to back up the youth services, teachers and parents so that the next generation of youngsters does not include a minority whose self-discipline, self-esteem and respect for their own future are so lacking that they get kicks from racing stolen cars or lobbing bottles at the police.

The first duty of the Government is to work with the people to ensure security and freedom from fear for the people. This Home Secretary and this Government have failed that test. The Bill should be supported, but unless a much more determined attack on the problem, and its roots, is launched, we shall, I fear, have to address at some point in the future an even more hideous nightmare than that which confronts us now.

5.55 pm

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): We on this side of the House agree with much of what the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) said. It is a rare example of ecumenism—on a day other than a Friday—across party lines. However, before I so much as opened my mouth, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) had attacked me. He had the impertinence to berate me for knee-jerk reactions on behalf of the Government when he opposes absolutely everything that the Government do, however sensible it obviously is. That is as genuine an example of a knee-jerk reaction as it is possible to get in this place. The right hon. Gentleman does it every time and under any circumstances.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook—and, I suspect, many other Opposition Members—are against all deterrent sentences. In addition, the right hon. Gentleman does not seem to be aware that, although potential joyriders may not read *Hansard*, the word about tough sentences having been imposed has a habit of getting around. Anyway, if the right hon. Gentleman had remained in the Chamber, he would have realised that much of what he said was total nonsense, for reasons to which I shall turn in a moment.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on taking action against death riders—I agree with those who have already said that that is a much better way to describe these offenders who are not joyriders—and others who think that it is good fun to take somebody's car and drive it dangerously, thereby damaging property and sometimes killing people, thus causing appalling misery to those whose lives may be wrecked in the process. The public will be thankful to my right hon. Friend for his

[Mr. Ivan Lawrence]

timely action, following the recent bout of appalling abuse in Oxford and the north of England and the immense misery that this atrocious behaviour has caused.

It is also important that we should all realise that surveys show that a quarter of all stolen cars are used for death riding, just as a quarter of all car thefts happen to unlocked vehicles—which is our fault. There is no reason why we should not lock our vehicles when we leave them and thus prevent that crime.

My right hon. Friend's action at large—to spur manufacturers to action to improve security—is also very welcome, as is his acknowledgement of the Government's role. If we can give tax concessions for unleaded petrol to improve the environment, surely we should not be aghast at the prospect of tax concessions to secure that alarms are fitted in our cars and that some protection is provided to stop a lot of this senseless crime.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend on identifying the fact that, apart from the commission of the taking and driving away offence, there is an additional factor that arises when injury and damage are caused, but that there is no adequate deterrent penalty for that aspect of the offence. However, deterrence will exist only when young people can be locked up in secure accommodation: if they cannot be locked up, all this will be a waste of time.

Having said all that, I am afraid that I cannot be as enthusiastic about the Bill as I should like. We support and accept the good sense of increasing sentences for offences that are worse than taking and driving away and of extending the deterrent of disqualification where personal injury and damage occurs, but it is quite another thing for someone to be guilty of additional offences that he does not commit, to which he is not a party and which he might not have foreseen as the likely consequences of his taking and driving away.

How would that occur? It would arise where a defendant could not prove, on the balance of probabilities, that his story was correct, that someone else was responsible for causing personal injury or damage to the vehicle taken or to other vehicles and articles, and that he was not a party to the offence. It would arise where, for example, the original taker and driver away was arrested, but after he had left the car and was going to have no more to do with it. He may not be able to call upon the driver who took over the car to support his defence and to help him discharge the balance of probabilities in his favour, because that driver would not want to expose himself to the criminal charges of aggravated car theft.

In the environment in which these cases occur, witnesses are young and can easily be intimidated. The accused also might not be able to call witnesses who saw the damage-causing driver, because that driver may have terrified the witnesses to prevent them from giving evidence. That seems to be the stuff of which miscarriages of justice are made.

I appreciate that the number of cases in which the taker and driver away is not the driver who goes on to cause personal injury or damage will be comparatively few, but I ask my right hon. Friend whether it is necessary to make such a draconian change in the traditional principles of British law, or to do it by reversing the normal burden of proof. Clause 1(3) says:

"A person is not guilty of an offence under this section if he proves".

Will my right hon. Friend reconsider whether this part of the Bill is necessary?

I support the intention of the Bill and its important deterrent aspects, and I shall support it for the same reason as the hon. Member for Oxford, East, but I must confess that I do so with some reluctance at this stage.

6.3 pm

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): If the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) had been here for the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley)—[HON. MEMBERS: "He was here."] If he had been listening, then, he would have heard my right hon. Friend's point about the lay-by.

Having said that, the hon. and learned Member for Burton makes a good point: it would offend against the views of ordinary persons and would be a crying sense of injustice if people who were not party to the aggravated crime and who had sought to distance themselves from it were found guilty because the balance of probabilities had fallen on them to prove their innocence. Anyone who has practised at the Bar knows well that, in the sort of case that arises on an estate, where a number of people are involved, intimidation is such that it may prove impossible for a young man to find witnesses to say that he had left the scene of the crime and that another person was guilty of aggravated theft.

Any amendment to the law that provides an aggravated penalty for someone who could not have foreseen that for which he is sentenced must be wrong. The Government must find an answer to that key point, which was made by the hon. and learned Member for Burton, who has long experience at the Bar, and by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook.

The Bill is an attempt to respond to widespread public concern. No one doubts that concern or that the offence is prevalent. Almost daily, my local newspaper, the *South Wales Evening Post*, publishes examples of what used to be called taking and driving away—joyriding. There is a graveyard for cars at Kilvey hill, where young men drive cars that they have taken without authority and then burn them. There is an immense feeling of anger among ordinary members of the public at the extent to which they are inconvenienced, and they are crying out for something to be done.

Magistrates are under a constraint not to send young people to prison. There is the problem of general deterrence, which my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) set out in his excellent speech on behalf of his constituents. Surely the Lord Chancellor should have issued guidance to justices on the tariff for sentencing in such cases.

The House may be interested to learn that hon. Members who represent south Wales constituencies hold fairly regular meetings with the south Wales constabulary. The main item on the agenda of our last meeting was joyriding. We saw several videos that the police had taken from helicopters showing the nature of the driving of some young drivers and the constraints on police in pursuing them, particularly in built-up areas. Guidelines have been issued to them on the point at which they must desist from the chase because of danger to the public. They expressed various other concerns, few of which are addressed in the Bill.

Although we must respond to the offence, we must avoid the "Something must be done" syndrome and ensure that we do not lash out wildly in some public relations exercise. Why must the Bill be completed today? Why do the Government reject the argument that even a Home Office Bill is capable of improvement? A Special Standing Committee could hear the views of practitioners, police officers and others on how the Bill could be improved.

Is the Home Office alleging or claiming that an emergency has arisen since the Conservative party conference, that the Bill must be completed in one day and that it is inconceivable that it could be improved in Committee? That is an arrogant view to take of the Bill. If there is such an emergency, why is there not a similar Bill for Scotland? Do the Government contend that the emergency is confined to England and Wales and somehow stops at the border?

The legal situation in Scotland differs from that in England and Wales. Section 178 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 applies in Scotland, rather than section 12(1) of the Theft Act 1968. Will the Government give an assurance that there will be a similar attempt to alter the law in Scotland if there is an emergency there?

Penalties in Scotland also differ from those in England and Wales. In Scotland, the penalty for a summary offence is three months' imprisonment or a fine, but not both. On indictment, the maximum sentence under section 178 of the 1988 Act is 12 months. Why is there a difference? If the emergency is so important, why are not the penalties for these aggravated offences equally applicable in Scotland?

As a Conservative Member asked in an intervention, if there is an adequate remedy under existing law, why is there a void in the current law in England and Wales? Surely the Government must either say that the position in Scotland is essentially different from that in England and Wales or provide a timetable within which they will aim to introduce equivalent legislation in Scotland.

There are other differences in penalties between England and Wales and Scotland with which we should deal. We must ask ourselves: who are the perpetrators of these offences, and what are their motives? As several hon. Members have asked, are these individuals, who typically are young men in their teens, likely to be deterred by the changes brought about by the Bill?

The south Wales constabulary interviewed young men who had committed these offences and the factors involved were set out. The plus factors included the kicks that those people got from driving in that way. One of the minus factors was clearly the risk of being caught and the associated penalty. How do we ensure that there is a much greater chance of catching those young men and adequately dealing with them? Is that matter addressed by the Bill?

The key question was put forcefully and eloquently by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook: is the lack of an adequate penalty the root of the problem, or can we tackle the matter in other ways—for example, by extending motor schemes in the way he described? My hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East said that such schemes should be available not only for those who have already committed offences but for young people who might be tempted to do so, perhaps for kicks. Extending schemes, as suggested by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook, would be a cost-effective way of dealing with the problem.

I am afraid that we are assuming too much from this proposed change and that it is a little too simplistic—a sort of professional defamation from those who believe that applying law and order is the only way of solving what are, in part, deep-seated social problems.

The issue is much more multi-layered than that. There are other key considerations, one of which is the near-certainty of detection. In this respect, police manpower levels are important. There was great astonishment and anger in south Wales when we heard by letter of 28 November 1991 the news that the Home Secretary was unwilling to agree any additional manpower for the South Wales police authority in 1992-93. The letter boasted:

"the South Wales Police has received approval for 99 extra police posts since the Government took office, with actual strength increasing by 198—or 7 per cent.—over that period."

That 7 per cent. must be put in the context of the more than 100 per cent. increase in this type of crime.

I certainly would not boast about that 7 per cent. Like everyone in the area covered by the South Wales police authority, I must ask why built-up urban areas such as Cardiff and Swansea will pass this Christmas—with all the great temptations offered to young people at that time—and go through 1992-93 with no increase in police manpower.

A wide range of powers are already available under statute law to combat this crime. Maximum sentences could be increased. As several hon. Members have said, the changes brought about by the 1988 Act—making this crime only a summary offence—should be reconsidered. If the Government are concerned about public expenditure and court time, will they make offences under section 12(1) of the 1968 Act indictable, rather than purely summary, offences for people who are making a second or subsequent court appearances?

The Bill does not deal with other key matters. If the Government wanted to reduce the number of obstacles that prevent prosecution of offenders, thereby making convictions more certain, they would alter the mens rea principle under section 12(1) of the 1988 Act and import the term "knowing or believing" from section 22 of that Act. That would put a lighter burden on the prosecution, and improve the chances of convicting an offender. Had the Government not thought that they could get the Bill passed without the House having a serious attempt to debate or qualify it, those matters could have been discussed with experts.

Our police forces have another major complaint about the Bill. They say that it does not deal with the problem of people who persistently reoffend while on bail. My local police force has given me remarkable examples of young people in the south Wales constabulary area who have persistently reoffended. In South Glamorgan, over a period of a year, a 15-year-old male took 15 cars and was involved in six house burglaries, one handling offence and six thefts. The most that that young man received was a supervision order for one year.

I shall not bore the House with the details of another case, but I shall summarise it. In West Glamorgan, a juvenile male was found guilty between the ages of 13 and 15 of offences involving 45 takings of cars, but it was only towards the end that he received a custodial sentence. One can well understand the anger and frustration of the police force. In another case in Mid Glamorgan, a young man between the age of 11 and 16—I pass over six or seven

[Mr. Donald Anderson]

pages of antecedents—was involved in 32 burglaries, 34 thefts, 15 offences of criminal damage and 41 offences involving motor vehicles, but the most severe penalty that he received was a supervision order for 12 months. He gaily continued to offend and reoffend, to the point where the police wondered whether it was worth bothering to pick him up. Those are the problems that face our police force.

In 1990, 20 per cent. of detected crime in Mid Glamorgan was committed by juveniles. In South Glamorgan, that figure was 17 per cent. of the total, and in my area of West Glamorgan, the figure was more than 22 per cent. However, the police ask how the Government are helping them to deal with those who persistently offend. What happens when the police do detain such individuals? Should not more secure units be available for those juveniles while they are on remand? Some investment is at last being made in south Wales in that respect.

Other issues with which I shall not detain the House but which have been mentioned by other hon. Members include the design of motor vehicles, the admirable *Which?* survey, the question of insurance and rewarding those who take adequate precautions to secure their vehicles by having the means to immobilise them in case of theft, safety improvements and cases such as those in Swansea, where, for example, the local authority has now put attendants in several of the key car parks. The authority charges people to park there but the editor of my local papar—*The South Wales Evening Post*—said on 3 December:

"Many people will be pleased, and reassured, that Swansea City Council appears to be moving towards a policy of providing attendants for selected car parks."

The paper went on the say that such a move would at least give the people who came into the city centre greater reassurance, even if they had to pay for the privilege. The Government must deal with the issue of making crime more difficult for the young people who are tempted to perpetrate it, and local authorities can also help.

Clearly, the Bill is a step forward, by and large. It is an attempt to deal with a prevalent problem, but I fear a distortion—the Government are considering only one aspect of the issue. They are not attempting to modify the existing law in ways which would help the prosecution. I have mentioned some ways in which section 12(1) of the Theft Act 1968 might be amended. I have also mentioned the question of indictment after the first court appearance, and other hon. Members have suggested other means to tackle the problem. However, it would be wrong for the Government to hype the Bill too much, and to raise expectations which they certainly cannot meet.

6.24 pm

Mr. Michael Irvine (Ipswich): The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) delivered what I thought was a curiously muddled speech.

Mr. John Patten: Characteristically muddled.

Mr. Irvine: I shall confine myself to "muddled".

In the fist half of his speech, the right hon. Gentleman complained that the Bill was irrelevant, that it did nothing, that it was wholly superfluous and was simply aimed at the headlines. In the second half, he suddenly changed tack. Far from arguing that the Bill did nothing, he argued that it was too draconian. He criticised the changing of the evidential requirements and complained that the burden of proof has been reversed in certain important respects. He also attacked the provisions for automatic disqualification.

Such a muddled approach is symptomatic of a tendency, among all too many people who should know better, to treat the taking and driving away of vehicles as a less serious offence than it is. It is such loose, flaccid and irresponsible thinking which has led to the widespread use of the offensive term "joyriding". Such thinking was behind the absurd argument that the police should be restrained from giving hot pursuit to stolen cars, and it also lay behind much of the nit-picking objection to the Bill that we heard from the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook.

For many people—if not most—their car is, after their home, their most valuable piece of property. When their car is taken, they suffer, at the very least, considerable inconvenience and very often substantial financial loss. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary stated that as many as 40 per cent. of all vehicles taken and driven away unlawfully are damaged when returned to their owner. If a car is unlawfully taken and then returned in a damaged state, it seems absolutely right that the person or persons responsible for taking it should be assumed to be responsible for causing the damage unless they can prove the contrary. After all, they removed it from the custody of its owner and, prima facie, they should bear the responsibility for any damage which occurs between that time and the owner getting it back. Some hon. Members may think that that is unfair, but I believe that car owners whose vehicles have been taken would think differently.

The unlawful taking and driving away of vehicles goes well beyond damage to property. Car thieves are usually young and unused to driving the particular car that they have taken, and they are usually attracted to high performance cars. That is a lethal combination. "Lethal" is the right word. A few years ago, a Government publication entitled "Practical Ways to Crack Crime" stated:

"A stolen car is about 200 times more likely to be involved in an accident than the same car driven by its owner."

The unlawful theft of cars all too often leads to injury and death.

We know that legislation alone cannot provide a remedy, but it can make convictions easier to obtain. It can increase deterrents. It can single out for special treatment the special aggravating features of a crime. The Bill does exactly that, and I believe that it deserves the support of the House.

6.29 pm

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): I begin with an apology to my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley), the Home Secretary and other hon. Members who spoke before I entered the Chamber. My late arrival was entirely due to an unenjoyable ride on British Rail. I must apologise if I repeat some of the points already made—I do not expect that I shall, except perhaps in my introduction.

In 1990, nearly 500,000 vehicles were stolen in the United Kingdom—one every minute of the night and day. Some 30,000 vehicles were stolen in Northumbria alone, and more than 770,000 thefts were reported from vehicles.

Insurers paid out nearly £500 million for car theft claims. Nearly one third of all recorded crimes were due to thefts from or of motor vehicles. About one quarter of missing vehicles were never recovered. A stolen car is 200 times more likely to be involved in an accident than one driven by its owner. At least three car owners out of every 20 have experienced theft from their vehicles, and it takes as little as four seconds for a car thief to break into a car without a key.

Most joy riders—or death-riders, as they should more accurately be described—are aged between 13 and 16, and the Bill does little to deal with that problem. My hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) gave one example from his constituency. In a recent case in Northumbria, a youth under 15 years of age was arrested and admitted 100 offences of taking vehicles without their owners' consent. He eventually appeared before the court and was placed in the custody of the local authority. He soon escaped and was rearrested five hours later, when he admitted having taken 10 vehicles within those five hours. That is a serious problem. The perpetrators, who are usually male, come from all social classes and backgrounds, and all districts of the country. It is against that background that we must examine the Bill's likely impact.

While heavier penalties may be appropriate, they will not affect the level of car crime to any significant degree. I believe that the Bill, when enacted, will make no contribution to relieving the communities on Tyneside and elsewhere of the terrifying levels of car-related crime and its sometimes lethal consequences. The heavier penalties outlined in the Bill will go some way to balance the punishment and the seriousness of the crime to which that punishment relates. I have no doubt that those penalties will be welcomed by many who, day and night, suffer from the madness of high-speed driving through residential districts. However, I fear that the welcome will be short-lived once it becomes clear that, while those who are caught may be dealt with more severely, the level of car crime will not be noticeably reduced.

The Bill would not have altered the punishment meted out to those responsible for the death of baby Richard Harthill, who was killed by car thieves in my constituency just over a year ago. Even if the penalty had been increased, it would not have brought back Richard Harthill. Those who commit such crimes will not be deterred by the measures outlined in the Bill. Such people often lack the intellect to comprehend or fear legal reprisals and, more often, do not expect to be caught.

There have been many instances in which car thieves have been killed or badly injured while committing their crimes. The misplaced hero worship of two such thieves was recently blamed for an outbreak of disturbances on north Tyneside later spreading to Newcastle. The knowledge that there is a great risk of death or serious injury has not led to a reduction in the rate of such crimes. One must therefore ask: if people are not deterred by the thought of losing their lives, what deterrent will a longer gaol sentence provide?

While I welcome the Bill in so far as it at long last recognises that something must be done, I believe that, it avoids the issue of prevention. It is far too easy for cars to be taken; often drivers make it easy by not taking the proper precautions—as the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) said. I have heard of people with company cars, hire cars or contract vehicles who take a relaxed view of car security because they believe that, if the car is stolen, they will be supplied with another one. Such reckless and irresponsible behaviour could lead to the death or serious injury of an innocent victim.

I welcome the fact that the Government have said that new British standards have been introduced for car security and that the Department of Transport is pressing for such standards to be included in a new European directive. However, I do not accept the argument put to me by the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department in a letter of 24 February.

> "It would be a breach of European Community law for the Government to introduce national legislation to strengthen the existing community requirements for vehicle security since this would constitute a technical barrier to trade with other Member States."

That would be true only if British legislation required all new cars sold to be fitted with anti-theft devices. Surely there is nothing in the European legislation to prevent Her Majesty's Government from introducing measures requiring drivers to ensure that their vehicles are properly secured against theft. That would not necessitate any technical changes in imported vehicles.

I should like all new cars to be fitted with good quality security devices. I do not know why we should have to wait for European directives, or the 20 years or so that it would take for a new generation of such cars to find their way on to our roads. By placing the onus on the driver in the first instance, our Government could introduce measures quickly and independently. I know that that would not be universally popular, but if it saved one innocent life, who could say that it was not worth it?

What standards should be set in such legislation? Car alarms are one form of deterrent, but they are often not detected by a thief until triggered, by which time he is already in the vehicle and often merely continues in his task. A visible and substantial immobilising device should be fitted to the gear stick or steering wheel. That would deter most opportunist thieves, particularly if the device were complemented by an alarm. Some 90 per cent. of car thefts are committed by opportunist thieves. Minimum standards laid down by the Department of Transport would prevent the use of cheap and easily overcome equipment.

I must add—in some way against my own argument—that I am still awaiting a reply to my letter of 27 September to the Home Office, in which I once again asked what was to be done to stop the general sale of skeleton car keys. The House will no doubt be as shocked as I was to hear of the following recently circulated advertisement. I shall leave out the name of the device and its manufacturer for obvious reasons, but I will quote from the rest of the advertisement:

> "The . . . Key Set consists of three skeleton keys to suit different types of lock, and will open the majority of British and foreign cars. Previously only available to the Motor Trade these keys are now available to other businesses."

A note at the bottom of the advertisement states:

> "These keys are intended for use by management and authorised staff only, in connection with their trade and must not be used for any illegitimate reasons."

I do not think that potential car thieves are likely to take much notice of that qualification. The Government must take action urgently to stop the sale of general equipment which makes stealing cars so much easier.

If we are to make an impact on the astronomical levels of car crime in the short term, substantial and visible security devices are a must, but they will be useless unless

[Mr. David Clelland]

they are used by drivers. I have already referred to the irresponsible attitude of some drivers, so alongside the requirement to have such devices fitted must go the legal requirement to use them. It should be an offence for a car to be left unattended without such a device properly engaged. Because they are visible it would be quite easy for a patrolling policeman or traffic warden to spot offenders and issue a ticket. Finally, to ensure that the devices are kept in good working order, they should form part of the inspection required for the issuing of an MOT certificate.

The motor car can be a joy. It brings freedom and mobility to millions of people, but it can also be a lethal weapon in the wrong hands. It is within our power hugely to reduce the number of thefts, accidents and fatalities which too often result from that. Unfortunately, the Bill does not introduce measures that would be effective. I realise that to legislate effectively will mean as it so often does that there will be some cost, inconvenience and loss of liberty on the part of the innocent and the victims, but that is the price we pay for not tackling seriously and effectively enough the root social causes of such crimes. They are, however, another issue for another day.

6.41 p.m

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): Later, I shall say something about car security which follows on from what the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) said.

Many Back Benchers have highlighted the dangers of joyriding and the urgent need to do something about it. I believe that they reflected public anxiety in so doing, but the nitpicking approach of the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman was entirely out of keeping with the public mood and will be seen as such. It would take a wizard to find out precisely what the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) was proposing as an alternative.

I declare an interest: I have the honour to be president of the Guild of Experienced Motorists, a body wholly dedicated to road safety. It has been so for many years. For a long time we have urged tougher measures to stop the curse of joyriding, which should never have been given that name in the first place. I do not know what ass coined the phrase, but it gives the impression that this is just a harmless frolic on the part of light-hearted youngsters. Sometimes the courts have tended to take the same view. Of course, it is nothing of the sort; it is a serious crime which all too often leads to more serious crime—to death or injury for life and to human suffering. I would call it misery-riding.

I welcome the Bill, therefore. The Theft Act 1968 was hopelessly inadequate to deal with the problem, so I hope that the Bill will reach the statute book without delay—and with enough publicity to show criminals, young and old, that the public are not prepared to tolerate this menace any longer.

I wish to question some of the Bill's provisions, nevertheless. The Opposition amendments seem half-baked; their only effect would be to water down the Bill. I take a rather different view which might be called draconian, but the issue calls for draconian measures. I do not know whether my alterations to the Bill may be considered in another place, but I did not have time to table amendments for this debate.

My amendments would increase the severity of the penalties. The maximum sentence of five years when death is caused—clause 1(4)—is inadequate. I would be happy to increase that to 10 or 14 years, or even to life if the offence was serious enough. The two-year maximum sentence for other offences may not be enough to deter, either. I hope that that will be considered in another place.

As for clause 2, I cannot see why the offence should not be triable by magistrates courts or the Crown courts without the rigmarole stipulating the amount of damages. One can imagine wicked cases in which only a small amount of damage was caused. This curse must be stamped out, but it will not be stamped out by probation or wishy-washy telling off from the Bench—or by some of the alternatives mentioned by Opposition Members. We need a much more severe approach and that will usually come only from the Crown courts, to which many of these cases should go.

The courts have used disqualification far too feebly. I see no reason why there should not be a minimum rather than a maximum period of disqualification. When death or permanent injury result from an offence, I would have no objection to imposing a life ban. It may be said that many offenders are young people who do not even have a licence, but if they were threatened with not being able to get one for some years until they were more sensible or mature, that would constitute a deterrent. I should like the courts to use disqualification more frequently.

As the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge said, the real deterrent is better security. Not only those who let out company cars but car manufacturers must accept some responsibility. It is ridiculous that security systems should be regarded as no more important than cassette players. They should be as compulsory as seat belts. I sometimes wonder whether car manufacturers would have fitted brakes if there were no sales benefit in them. I hope that the Minister will be robust in the discussions that he is pursuing with the manufacturers, and I hope that they will respond with a sense of responsibility.

I also hope that the Home Secretary will deal robustly with the European Community, and will resist any nonsense about non-tariff barriers to trade, on which the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge touched. It is possible to get round such nonsense. The Minister should remind Europe that, despite what some people think, car crime is just as prevalent there—it happens in Germany and France, too, as some of our colleagues on the Council of Europe know to their cost. The Minister should receive a sympathetic hearing from the European Community, and the sooner a directive in this area is introduced the better.

No system is 100 per cent. foolproof, but many new ideas are emerging. Since I published a letter in *The Times*, I have been sent suggestions from all over the country, some of them rather wild and others which I am not qualified to understand. I have, however, gone in some detail into one sent to me by a constituent. My constituent, Mr. Musker, has patented a practical device involving a simple combination lock, the number of which—as with an executive case—is held only in the mind of the user of the car. I shall not go into more detail now, but I have asked the Home Secretary to put Mr. Musker in touch with the experts in his Department or in the Department

of Transport and to ask them to study the device in great detail with my constituent. I hope that my right hon. Friend will respond as soon as possible.

We regard this Bill as urgently needed, but the study of these new devices is equally urgently needed. I have made a special plea to the Home Secretary in writing that Mr. Musker's case be seriously considered.

The criticism has been levelled that the Bill is being rushed through. It is not the first Bill to be rushed through in my time in the House, nor will it be the last. It is certainly one of the most necessary Bills to be rushed through the House, and I wish it well.

6.48 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I, too, welcome the legislation and the mood of the House. It shows that hon. Members are deeply concerned about joyriding and about the need to ensure that proper measures are taken to resolve the terrible wave of crime that is affecting people in this country. Like the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant), hon. Members are prepared to put forward fresh ideas which we hope will be considered by the Minister of State. I also intend to put forward a couple of new ideas, and I hope that they will be examined.

I realise the enormous pressure that must now bear on right hon. and hon. Members to pass the legislation as quickly as possible. I, too, am not a great fan of any procedure which would prevent hon. Members from taking a careful and measured look at proposed legislation. One of our most important functions is to study carefully what the Government present, and to make suggestions that would directly benefit the victims of that appalling crime.

On 22 July 1991, four people needlessly died in Leicestershire. Two of them were a husband and wife who had travelled to Leicestershire the previous afternoon. The other two were teenagers, the driver and passenger of a stolen Austin Metro involved in a two-car crash. In April last year, four people died near Melton Mowbray. Two were 16-year-olds, the others were a husband and wife in their 60s. In May, a 16-year-old died after the car he had stolen careered off the road between Loughborough and Copt Oak. Earlier this year, a 16-year-old passenger died after a crash at Wanlip. The car had been stolen. Hon. Members will have other examples of the horror that such crime perpetrates. The few examples that I give are an appalling record for a county such as Leicestershire. According to the police, every day about 22 cars are stolen in Leicestershire.

There are, of course, suggestions on which we can all agree. We would like car manufacturers to play a much more important role in installing locks which halt thieves. Far too few ensure that that happens. I accept the need for car manufacturers to meet the Home Secretary early and regularly, and I hope that the Minister of State will tell us when the Home Secretary or he last met car manufacturers.

Mr. John Patten: I will tell the hon. Gentleman now. We last met car manufacturers within the past two months. My right hon. Friend and I will be seeing all car manufacturers—not only British Car manufacturers, but representatives of European and Japanese car manufacturers—on Wednesday, and we shall speak very forcefully to them.

Mr. Vaz: I welcome that intervention. I am pleased that the Minister will speak forcefully to car manufacturers. When he says that he will do something, he does it. I hope that he will also take on board the comments of car manufacturers and retailers who have told me that they face a difficult situation in terms of this country's economic conditions. The recession is affecting them. If they are to allocate resources to installing devices to prevent theft, they should be helped in some way by the Government. For example, they refer to car tax as one form of help, but they have other suggestions, including the price of petrol and other issues. I hope that in Wednesday's dialogue the Government will take car manufacturers' concerns on board.

The next matter relates to the need for the police to be able to allocate more resources to deal with car theft and to be able to provide the necessary personpower and administrative help. I am sure that all hon. Members will agree with that. The problem is that police forces such as Leicestershire police force find it difficult to allocate more resources when they have not been given sufficient resources over several years. The Minister of State, with his encyclopaedic knowledge, will jump up and tell the House that the police force in Leicestershire has been allocated an extra 27 police officers. We know that, but the Leicestershire police force asked for considerably more officers than that. It asked for additional resources to deal with the high level of crime.

We are talking about car theft and about what happens when cars are taken away and damaged and injury is caused. That is only one matter that the police have to examine. The Leicestershire police force pleads for additional resources. I hope that the Government will bear that point in mind. It is not sufficient just to pass legislation to ensure that there are new criminal offences. We must have police officers to detect crime and to bring people to justice and to ensure that the administration of justice is properly examined.

We need to ensure that our courts take a much tougher line. They will welcome the proposed penalties. Some of our magistrates in Leicestershire have other ideas. Councillor Adoline Smith JP was quoted earlier this year as calling for culprits to be birched. She said that Parliament was not acting quickly enough. I see the hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) getting very excited. The Minister of State will recall that, last week, he incorrectly said that the hon. Member for Northampton, North had called for castration in respect of certain matters, but he later realised that it was another Conservative Member.

The hon. Gentleman finds a friend in Councillor Adoline Smith, who says that birching is one way to ensure that young people are aware of what they are doing. I am sure that it will come as no surprise to hon. Members—it will be a relief to the Opposition Front Bench—that I do not support birching, and I do not intend to move amendments in Committee suggesting that we should birch young people.

Councillor Adoline Smith also said that Parliament had not acted quickly enough. I hope that, on reading *Hansard* and realising the timetable that has been set, she will know that we are taking this matter very seriously indeed. Another suggestion has been put forward by Mr. Alan Gayton, the head magistrate in Leicestershire.

Mr. Greg Knight (Derby, North): He is a very good magistrate.

Mr. Vaz: The hon. Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) will remember him, as the hon. Gentleman practised in the Leicestershire courts. Mr. Gayton's suggestion is a result of his great frustration. He suggested that those who perpetrate such crimes should be taken to the scene of the crime. He feels that young people will be more aware of the damage that they do if they are taken to watch what the emergency services have to do and see the carnage that has been wreaked. He said:

"Actually watching the emergency services prising the killed and injured out of mangled metal might just bring home to these fools the enormity of the likely consequences of their behaviour."

The probation service in Leicestershire has welcomed such a suggestion. I do not know how it will work in practice, but Mr. Gayton, who has 27 years' legal experience, says that there is a need to remind young people of what they have done. Of course there are psychological and psychiatric implications of that suggestion. I am neither a psychiatrist nor a psychologist, but that suggestion was put by one of our most senior magistrates.

I should be grateful if the Minister could comment also on the suggestion made by the chief constable of Leicestershire. On 17 April, he suggested that young people should be taught to drive as young as 13. He felt strongly that that would be one way to show young people that driving a car was not exciting or different. It would mean that young people would not have to steal cars if they wanted to drive, and it would enable them to understand that driving a car was something responsible. He said:

"I would like to see introduced into schools car driving and maintenance for children as young as 13.

A third of reported crime in the county is juvenile crime."

That is an interesting suggestion, upon which local people have seized as one way of dealing with the problem. I hope that when the Minister will say whether he agrees with the chief constable and whether he hopes to examine that practical suggestion carefully. Such matters need to be examined carefully.

I turn finally to a couple of things that should have been in the Bill, but which are not. We need to place greater emphasis on preventing such crimes. The chief constable's suggestion that those as young as 13 should be taught to drive is one way in which such preventive work could operate. However, it is important that the Government make more resources available at local level and ring fence them so that we can deal with the issue and prevent young people from embarking on such careers. That is the only way to deal with the long-term problems of car theft and death riding.

We must ensure that young people are made aware of what is happening. That means putting much more emphasis on teaching about such things in our schools. We should ensure that police officers spend time in schools on this. Many schools in my constituency invite police officers who are on the beat to explain the law to young people at school. Too few people are made available by police forces —no doubt because of the personpower implications—to ensure that such educative and preventive work is carried out, but that would be one way to ensure that young people are made aware of the serious issues at stake.

I very much hope that the Minister will respond to the debate in the spirit that has been evident in the speeches of hon. Members from all parties. This is a serious problem and the public demand that we should do something, and do it quickly. We should be aware of the tremendous implications of such legislation, especially because it brings into question the fundamental principles of the way in which we prosecute and the way in which our criminal justice system operates. Bearing all that in mind, we must listen to the real fears and concerns of local people.

I had intended to conclude on that point, but very finally, I should like to bring another suggestion to the Minister's attention. I had almost forgotten it, but I should never have been forgiven if I had. I refer to the *Leicester Mercury's* Leicestershire vehicle watch campaign, which was initiated and launched by our local newspaper with the support of all local Members of Parliament. Given that that newspaper's editor and other journalists are coming down here tomorrow, I would be seriously criticised if I did not mention their serious suggestion.

The campaign involves the owners of vehicles putting a fluorescent sign in their windscreen, proclaiming their membership of the campaign. About 30,000 motorists signed up for the scheme, and fewer cars bearing the mark were stolen than would otherwise have been expected. We all support that new idea and campaign. I very much hope that the Minister will also support what the *Leicester Mercury* and Leicestershire constabulary are doing, and that he will adopt the scheme and apply it nationally.

7.4 pm

Mr. Iain Mills (Meriden): As the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) is not in his place, perhaps the hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) will inform him of my opening comments. I had asked the right hon. Gentleman, if he disagreed with the Bill, to tell us the Labour party's policy, and the right hon. Gentleman referred me to his speech in our debate on the Loyal Address. Although I have now read the right hon. Gentleman's speech three or four times during this excellent debate, I must advise the House that I cannot see a clear policy.

When the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman replies to the debate—I do not know whether that will be the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook or one of his right hon. Friends—I hope that the Labour party's policy will be made absolutely clear. I find it bewildering that so many of the right hon. Gentleman's colleagues, including the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), have made it clear that they want action and teeth. Although they may want teeth of a different shape from those of the Government, they do want action. I should therefore be grateful if the Opposition could make their policy clear.

I agree with colleagues of all parties who have talked about "joyriding" being a most inappropriate term. We should use either the phrase "misery riding" or, as has been suggested, "death riding". They would be much better terms and might help to discourage those who indulge in what is a deliberate crime, not a disease.

Although I do not want to detain the House for too long, I should like first to make a few points about demographics. I am informed that there is no easy demographic feature to this problem, except age. The problem involves the young and men, but they are not social class C2s and DEs only. They also include ABs. I

have seen reports stating that the perpetrators' designer jeans, jackets and trainers, together with money and credit cards in their wallets, show clearly that those who commit the crime of death riding are not unemployed or doing it through boredom because they do not have a job. Often they have money and are doing it for fun.

Let us go a little further and look at how it happens. I do not know whether hon. Members realise what happens at the sort of scenes that have occurred in my constituency. It contains the national exhibition centre, Birmingham international airport and Birmingham international station, which have given rise to what is possibly the largest concentration of car parks for high-powered, new and decent cars in the west midlands, if not in the country. Those areas are difficult to police because they are huge. Anybody who passes down the M6 and looks at the national exhibition centre knows how gigantic its car parks are. They have to be to service that most excellent institution. They are a target.

What happens is often quite well organised. One of the lads will spot a really good car, such as a Ford Sierra Cosworth, a BMW 7 series or the right sort of Jaguar entering the car park at either the station or the NEC. His mates will be alerted and will come down the road from the north of my constituency. It takes them about three minutes at most to get into the car. They do not operate by having only one fellow who sneaks up to drive the car away; a whole group is involved. The more people they can get into the car, the more fun it is. I assure the House that all this is true. They then spray on the back of the car, "Chase me, Charlie" or "This is stolen", and deliberately look for a police car so that they can induce a chase.

One of the guys who does this has said—this has been published in a national newspaper—that they like cars with big boots because they can then get lads not only in the car, but also in the boot. That is why nobody, including my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence), can convince me that those who indulge as passengers do not have equal responsibility for what happens. In fact, those involved vie with each other about who will drive. It is a case of peer group pressure. Driving the car becomes a way of proving one's manhood or that one is macho. Sometimes they take it in turns to drive. Indeed, having spotted the cars, they sometimes steal them and store them in garages for use on special occasions.

This is not a crime committed by young people who are bored and out looking for a bit of fun. It is a deliberate crime. The offenders intend to take the car and use it for dangerous purposes. The aggravated taking of a car is not just for fun. It is serious and the more dangerous young people can make it, the more they enjoy it. That is why I greatly welcome the penalties introduced by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary for those who take cars in such circumstances.

I urge my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to ignore any comments made about the speed of the legislation. I assure him that in the west midlands and in my constituency where, as I said, we have a particular problem, it will be welcomed just as soon as it can be put on the statute book. The Bill will be welcomed not just by me but by the many magistrates in Birmingham and Solihull who have come to me wringing their hands. They understand that I, too, am worried about the problem, but they ask what they can do in their courts to make sure that the criminals are given adequate penalties that will act as a deterrent.

I remind hon. Members on both sides of the House, but perhaps especially Labour Members, that they should not fool themselves that the lads who gather together around the boot of a Sierra Cosworth and say, "Let's get this Cossie and go lads," are unaware of the penalties. They know the penalties very well. They look at the lad who is under 17 and say, "You have a better chance. If they catch us, you will not get the penalties that we would." But in any case, what does it matter to them? They do not have any money, or, if they have, it is their parents' money.

The introduction of extra responsibilities for parents in the Criminal Justice Act 1991 is welcome. Perhaps my right hon. Friend the Minister will expand slightly on the penalties that 15 and 16-year-olds who commit this crime would attract. I am aware that driving under a ban is in itself a further offence which carries a six-month penalty, and that the ban on driving can be extended until after the offender is old enough to drive. The magistrates in my area are greatly worried about how the under-17s and particularly the 15 and 16-year-olds will see the sentence.

Mr. John Patten: My hon. Friend gives way with characteristic courtesy. Once the Bill becomes law and the parallel changes made in the Criminal Justice Act 1991 are brought into force, as my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary intends to do in October next year, offenders in the 15-to-17 age group could be sentenced to up to one year in a young offenders institution rather than six months, as was previously the case.

Mr. Mills: I welcome that, and thank my right hon. Friend for his interjection.

As one who spent 20 years in the car industry, I know that the market demands goodies and nice things. It has never demanded safety. Therefore, the ability to sell cars on the basis of safety or security is limited. The motives are simply not there. The provision of greater security will need some encouragement. The industry has responded well, but I ask the House to recall a story which I gather is correct. In the Members' Cloakroom, we all have our hooks to hang our coats on and our pink strings to hang our swords on. To prevent his car from being stolen from just up the river, one hon. Member used to take the steering wheel off his car and hang it on the pink string.

The House will forgive me for saying that, in these days of high technology, there must be some way in which the vehicle industry could provide more foolproof methods of preventing people from breaking into cars. It might be deadlocking or visual identification. The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) spoke about vehicle watch schemes. Such schemes have been established in Warwickshire, near my constituency, and in the west midlands in my constituency. They are extremely important, and I ask my right hon. Friend the Minister to encourage them.

Mr. Clelland: The hon. Gentleman has touched on prosecution, which is the key to the problem, if the hon. Gentleman will pardon the pun. He talked about encouraging manufacturers to fit security devices. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we should consider legislating to make manufacturers fit such devices? We did not talk about encouraging manufacturers to fit safety belts: we legislated on safety belts. We should also legislate on car security.

Mr. Mills: The hon. Gentleman puts me in a difficult position. I was one of the prime supporters of the Bill which introduced compulsory wearing of seat belts. I have also worked in the car industry. I am not sure that we need primary legislation. British standards exist now. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary attended a meeting of the Association of British Insurers, which provides good incentives for car manufacturers to produce more secure cars by reducing the insurance premiums for the people who buy them.

My right hon. Friend's speech to the association was excellent. He has also met the car manufacturers and, as my right hon. Friend the Minister said, is seeing them again on Wednesday. Perhaps we shall have to legislate, but I believe that out of their technological skills car manufacturers could provide the necessary mechanisms. I cannot believe that in these days of high technology there is not a relatively simple and inexpensive way of immobilising a car.

In the old days in the army we used to take the rotor arm off the vehicles. The lads in the other battalion had the same rotor arms, so they put it on and drove the vehicle off. The House will forgive me for being slightly facetious.

Mr. Vaz: I was interested to hear about the vehicle watch scheme in the west midlands, which is similar to the scheme in Leicester. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that different parts of the country do different things and that it would be helpful to have a national scheme supported by the Home Secretary which could be supported everywhere? At present we run the risk that, if some vehicles from my area go into the hon. Gentleman's area, people may not understand what the sign means. If we had one scheme supported by the Home Secretary, it could be of great help in solving the problem.

Mr. Mills: I would have no objection to a national scheme. The Warwickshire and West Midlands police work closely together, especially in policing the M6. I understand that the fluorescent disc is common to both police forces. I would not disagree with some form of national co-ordination.

I had hoped to raise in more detail one of the matters raised by my eminent constituent, His Honour Frank Blennerhasset. He asked me to say that many of the crimes with which we are dealing are aggravated by drug and alcohol abuse. He is still worried about the difficulty that the courts have when dealing with death riding or other matters. The definition of alcohol abuse by the World Health Organisation as a serious disability creates a disadvantage for the court in giving serious penalties for ignoring and breaking the law where alcohol or drug abuse is involved. Alcohol and drug abuse is certainly a factor in death riding and aggravated taking of cars. If it is not appropriate to deal with it tonight, I have written to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, and I should be grateful if he would respond in writing.

7.17 pm

Mr. Ted Leadbitter (Hartlepool): This is one of the rare occasions when the two sides of the House are at one. The Secretary of State and the Minister of State, who has just left the Chamber, agree that we have a problem on our hands. Members of Parliament have a common interest in doing something about a serious problem and doing it quickly. The interesting thing is that there is a tendency to presume that an action takes place, the culprit is found and we have to decide what sentence to apply in the courts to settle the matter. It is not so easy as that.

Experience has shown that the idea of getting caught takes into account very little the sentence that might be around the corner. Accessory to murder is a particular example. The notion of not getting caught is much stronger than the deterrent of a sentence. Nevertheless, we need some judicial procedure to deal with the matter. Where does the responsibility really lie? First, as the vehicle is created and manufactured by someone, that person has a responsibility. There is no point in putting on the market a product that will cause death, if that can be avoided.

The hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland), among others, pinpointed the fact that in the first place responsibility rests with the manufacturers. Undoubtedly, the technology exists to make stationary cars safer. Therefore, we should not be talking in terms merely of encouragement; we should get the thing done. The Government should require car manufacturers to provide the necessary safety. If motorists have to pay a little more for their cars, so what? It is far better to be a law-abiding motorist—as the majority of us are—and to know that we have made some contribution to our added safety. It is not only the poor woman with her child living on an estate who may be killed—as in the case cited by my hon. Friend the Member for Tyne Bridge—because motorists use the roads while death riders are about.

Where does the next responsibility lie? It lies with motorists who, as the customers, should encourage motor manufacturers by saying that they want safe cars and are prepared to pay whatever it costs—I believe that the sum would be nominal—to make the car safe when it is stationary and not being used.

The first two responsibilities lie with the manufacturer and the buyer. Where is the third? It is with the parent. It serves no useful purpose when a parent boasts on television that his son is the best of the bunch and not likely to be caught, as happened in the case of the ram raiders in Tyne Bridge during the riots some weeks ago. The total ignorance of some parents must be attacked and public consensus must provide another responsibility. Where does that lie? It lies with the media, which serve no good if they are prepared to give time to parents who are so blatantly ignorant. Other parents, who are equally ignorant, may think that it is bravado to appear on television and boast about a serious wrong, which is potentially murder.

Where else does responsibility lie? It lies in schools, colleges of further education and polytechnics, where young people should be given regular reminders—from the police, through video and by other means—of the full horror that their actions can bring about, and the loss and distress that can be caused to families, whether young or old. When grandmothers and grandfathers lose children, they suffer grief. Whenever someone is hurt, their family suffers grievously, and that may take years to overcome.

I have listed a number of responsibilities on which I call upon the House to take action. The final responsibility lies with the police.

Mr. Clelland: My hon. Friend referred to the fact that manufacturers have some responsibility to provide safe and secure vehicles. He is making the same mistake as the Minister of State and the Home Secretary. Even if

manufacturers could be encouraged to produce vehicles with security devices, it would take about 20 years for the new generation of cars to find their way on to our roads. The problem is here and now. What is to be done about cars on our roads now, which do not have adequate security devices?

Mr. Leadbitter: I thought that I had made it clear that manufacturers should be obliged to provide such vehicles. My hon. Friend the Member for Tyne Bridge mentions cars on the road now. If we can modify our cars to use lead-free petrol at reasonable extra cost, it will surely not be too difficult to overcome that little matter. Some time would need to be taken because of the large numbers involved, but I should have thought that a programme lasting between one year and 18 months could mop up the cars on the road now and ensure that they comply with the safety standards to which the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge rightly referred. I note that he has tabled an amendment to deal with that in Committee.

The police also have a responsibility. Although they do excellent work and face many problems, there is nevertheless a weakness in their deployment of forces and in their operations. Too many police officers seem to be driving around in patrol cars and too few are on their feet in the estates. While the police may have felt that patrol cars were a priority to ensure efficient operations, perhaps there should now be a shift of emphasis, with more police on the beat around the neighbourhoods.

I have referred only in passing to the victims. There is no doubt that in modern times we seem to be becoming partially immune to regular, daily reports of tragedy. We seem to take it for granted that it will happen. We are sorry, but the next day another incident occurs. This problem has been with us for some time, and we have taken it for granted. Due to recent publicity, we are urging that a Bill be pushed through the House quickly, and quite rightly so.

The House must remember that we have a responsibility to highlight the real tragedy of this type of offence. Unless we do so, tomorrow will be just another occasion. Next week, after the Bill has passed through another stage, it will be just another occasion. Like cats playing with pieces of different coloured wool, in a few weeks' time we shall have another interest. That is one of the penalties of modern life, which is very racy and interesting, and it is bound to happen. It is not a fault, but we must recognise that it exists.

I am pleased that the Minister of State said that he would speak firmly to the manufacturers next week. There is no doubt that we have a common interest, but as well as meeting a legislative requirement we must provide a service, using what publicity we can, to make it abundantly clear that there is a disease called death riding in our society, and that it must be brought to a halt. That will happen only if all those responsible act together to end it.

7.29 pm

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I welcome my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary's introduction of the Bill and certainly support the need for urgent action. I only wish that we could perhaps have tougher action, because the level of car crime is absolutely intolerable. The figures for 1989 showed that we had the worst problem in Europe, with 400,000 thefts in England and Wales. The latest figure, if I heard my right hon. Friend correctly, is 550,000.

The hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Mr. Young) referred to the figures for Bolton. I do not know whether he saw the editorial in today's *Bolton Evening News* headed "Car crime puzzle", asking why we should have such high car crime figures. The hon. Gentleman mentioned what he described as 11,000 innocent Boltonians who were affected in the past 10 months, and the editorial asks what the Government are intending to do about it.

If the national surveys are to be believed, 25 per cent. of people who had their cars stolen did not lock them. With the inadequacy of the locks fitted by some manufacturers, they perhaps felt that locking the car did not make any difference. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister is successful in his efforts to persuade manufacturers to fit better locks, and I hope that people will lock their cars when they have those better locks.

The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) spoke about the vehicle watch scheme in Leicester. I am pleased to say that I helped to launch such a scheme in Bolton, and I recommend that everybody should use the stickers.

The Government certainly support the police. What annoys me about the Opposition is that they are ambivalent in their support of the police. The hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Leadbitter) said that we had a common approach and that the police face many problems. One of their problems is the sort of statement made by the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant). I hope that the hon. Member for Hartlepool would dissociate himself from the remarks of the hon. Member for Tottenham, who said that if the killer of PC Blakelock

"came forward and said he did it, but didn't want me to tell the police, I would not tell them."

I hope that Labour Members would completely dissociate themselves from such an attitude. Our first duty is to support the police, if we are to get on top of these crime figures.

Mr. Leadbitter: That is an easy one. I have no hesitation in saying that I found that comment disgusting. I rebut it and I would have nothing whatever to do with it.

Mr. Thurnham: I am pleased to hear the hon. Gentleman say that. Perhaps the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) and others who have intimated that they would not support the police will do likewise.

The Government have supported the police with an extra 16,000 men and women in uniform and an extra 12,000 on civilian duties, totalling 28,000 extra posts. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, West (Mr. Sackville) has already welcomed the extra £20 million for Greater Manchester police, although I am not able to translate that into the equivalent number of police positions that one would expect from that sum. It would appear that only 20 extra police are allocated for Greater Manchester police in 1992-93.

I support the extra powers in the Bill making all passengers liable and increasing the maximum sentence to two years, or five years in the case of a death, and the maximum fine to £5,000. There is a problem with 17-year-olds. The proposal that we should ban them from driving after their 17th birthday, even if the offence was committed before that, is long overdue.

[Mr. Thurnham]

I should like to draw attention to repeated offenders. When I intervened in my right hon. Friend's speech to ask about an offender in Bolton who had already stolen 30 vehicles this year, he said that the Bill would not address that problem and that we would have to wait for his proposals in the new year. Why do we have to wait? Of the 400,000 offences that occurred in 1990, only 5,000 offenders went to prison or a youth offenders institution, of whom 4,000 went in for six months or less, so only 1,000 were given sentences of six months or more. No doubt many of those were released before the six months were up. I call on my right hon. Friend to do all he can to introduce measures urgently.

The study by the Northumbria police shows that 40 per cent. of crimes detected by the police in 1989 were committed by people on bail. Those likely to reoffend on bail must be deterred either by a new offence or by altering the rules governing the granting of bail. The chief superintendent in Bolton wrote to me saying:

"the current legal system is not capable of dealing with the worst offenders effectively."

The chief clerk to Bolton magistrates court, Mr. Peter Dawson, sent me a letter from Mr. Moiser of Plymouth magistrates court, which appeared in *The Times* in September. He wrote:

"the Bail Act needs immediate amendment . . . there is no reason why"

the Government

"cannot act quickly".

I would have hoped that we could have included an amendment to the Bail Act 1976 in this Bill to put that matter right immediately. Obviously, measures should be taken to provide more places in bail hostels. Not enough is being done in that area. There are 500 extra places now and 700 extra places to come in the next two years or so, but we should do a great deal more.

We have a great problem knowing what to do with criminal youths. Some 30 per cent. of crime is committed by youths under 17. We have heard about special schemes in Salford and elsewhere, and they seem to have promise, but social services in Bolton and everywhere else must face up to the challenge. We need more secure units and special schools.

The other day, when we debated child abuse in Leicestershire, I drew the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health to the chasm in social services provision for juvenile delinquents. In some local authority homes, 85 per cent. of the staff are unqualified. In other words, only 15 per cent. are properly qualified. When we consider the best provision outside local authority provision, it raises many questions. There is a great challenge which social services must face up to.

In considering the best practice elsewhere, Mr. Melvyn Rose has spoken of the work done at Peper Harow. I understand that the charge there is £1,000 per week. If that is what it costs to bring offenders back into society as helpful and constructive people, it is well worth while. We need to see what provision is being made. There are profitable organisations as well as the non-profitable, charitable ones, such as Peper Harow.

I was somewhat surprised the other day to look at the accounts of a private sector company which provides homes for disturbed children. The proprietor of Helsey Hall Ltd. Mr. Stephen Lloyd whom I meet shortly, draws substantial sums for his work running these special schools. The accounts for 1990 show that his salary was £507,750 and his total emoluments, including pension contributions, were £782,750. Substantial sums are being made by people in the private sector who are addressing the problem.

What are the social services doing? There seems to be an enormous chasm between what local authority homes provide and the provision elsewhere. Can my right hon. Friend consider that problem? In Bolton we have a young Houdini aged 14 or perhaps 15 now who, when I last spoke to the police, had committed more than 140 offences at colossal cost to society. It is worth facing up to the costs of institutions such as Peper Harow if we are to put such offenders on to the right track.

I look forward to my right hon. Friend's proposals for dealing with repeated offenders. I hope that he can bear to listen to all that is said to him by the police and other community workers. What further action will follow from the "Safer Communities" report that came out in the summer? I have certainly written to my right hon. Friend about that and I am awaiting a reply to my recent letters. I hope that my right hon. Friend will be able to visit Bolton in the near future. He was in Manchester recently. I can assure him that every opinion survey that I have done shows that law and order is the number one issue for my constituents.

Obviously I could speak for much longer on this subject, but I know that time is pressing. I look forward to my right hon. Friend visiting Bolton and seeing for himself some of the problems that we have.

7.38 pm

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): I apologise to the House for my absence at the beginning of the debate on this important matter. As usual on a Monday, I was held up by British Rail. I was held up for two hours today; last week I was held up for an hour, so things are getting worse.

I support the Bill. Obviously, it has been put together quickly—I would not use the harsh expression "cobbled together"—and I accept that it may contain one or two quirks. I do not criticise the Government for that, because I believe that we needed such a Bill three months ago. I am more than happy to see it now. If there are any problems, adjustments can be made. I look forward to discussing the amendments that have been tabled by my hon. Friends, which will improve the Bill.

I am not sure whether the true reasons for young people, particularly those in my constituency, committing this type of crime have been identified. I know of no young person in the socio-economic category A who has stolen a car; most of the young people involved seem to belong to the C and D groups. I hesitate to put people in such categories, but those young people have little income and little or no prospect of getting a job. I know of children as young as 10 in my constituency who are worried about getting a job. Perhaps that concern accurately reflects the attitude of young people there. The possibility of such young people owning a car without a wait of many years is slim. Perhaps that is one more reason why they indulge in such a "hobby".

In my younger days, a hobby meant playing with a top and whip, playing marbles as well as cricket and football in the right season. Stealing cars and computer hacking are modern versions of such hobbies. I have no ability to do

either, especially computer hacking. Car crime seems to be the in thing. The other guy is a chicken if he has not stolen a car, and the thief considers himself one better. Perhaps that person is more attractive to the girls, as well. Perhaps they encourage young men to do such things.

I accept what has been said about the influence of the media. In the limited time available to hon. Members to watch television, I have seen some of the American police programmes. Inevitably, those programmes involve a car chase at high speed, and numerous cars are smashed up and damaged. Surely that must influence young people. That is yet another reason for car crime—there are as many reasons as there are answers to the problem. However, something must be done, and I am delighted that the Bill has been introduced.

The son of one of my constituents, Mrs. McVitie, was killed as a result of a crash in a stolen car. He was not driving, and there is some doubt whether he got into the car voluntarily or whether it was a case of him being judged a chicken if he had not. He went through the windscreen when the car crashed. Mrs. McVitie, all credit to her, recognised that her son had committed, in essence, an offence, although it is not in the book as such. She has campaigned for months for the introduction of relevant legislation to deal with the problem. I pay tribute to Mrs. McVitie because she tries to discourage other young people from doing the same as her son.

I believe that prevention is better than cure. I do not want to argue the pros and cons of the sentences and fines advocated; time will tell whether they are appropriate. It will be possible to adjust them if they are not. I would prefer the introduction of the means to prevent car crime. A number of good suggestions have been made.

Many sophisticated devices have been developed to improve house security. I recently had a new system installed in my house, and I am amazed at how it works. Those developments came about because of the demands of house owners who did not want their houses burgled. The market has responded to that demand by producing new, sophisticated devices. They cannot guarantee the absolute security of a house, but they can make it more secure. Perhaps some of those marvellous devices can be considered for cars.

A simple device has been used by a number of car showrooms in my constituency. I do not know how efficient it is, but it is worth considering. Many of those companies are unable to put the cars on sale inside when the showrooms are locked up, so they put a wheel clamp on the vehicles, which is a simple device. Its use originated in London as a means of preventing people from parking in the wrong place, but I believe that it is a useful device to prevent the theft of a car.

I pass a car showroom in my constituency regularly and the cars on display do not seem to have been disturbed —because it uses wheel clamps. At least that device reduces the chance of cars being stolen. I do not know how much such a device costs, but, given the ready market, I am sure that it could be reasonably priced. I have even considered using one myself, but I have a secure garage, I hope.

Mr. Clelland: The wheel clamp is extremely useful, because it is visible. Potential thieves are put off because they can see that it would be difficult to steal the car. I am not sure whether a wheel clamp would be particularly attractive to owners in inclement weather, but does my hon. Friend agree that, if a device is visible, inside or outside a car, it acts as a valuable deterrent?

Mr. Thompson: Yes. I hope that the Home Secretary will consider all the suggestions that have been made in this sensible debate.

The debate has been marred only by the snide remarks of the hon. Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) about my hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant). This issue has generated cross-party support and those remarks were a bit off, given what we are trying to achieve.

7.46 pm

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): I support the aims of the Bill, and I shall vote for it tonight. I want to concentrate on whether it will provide a sufficiently good means of dealing with young people.

As we heard from my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, the maximum penalty for someone aged 16 or 17 is subject to a ceiling of one year. However, if one takes off time for remission and good behaviour, one is left with a sentence of four months. We are often talking about young people who have been through the entire menu of alternatives to imprisonment before they are sent to a young offenders institution, formerly known as a detention centre. The penalty offers little deterrent to those youngsters.

In the summer, I visited my local crime prevention panel and the police to discuss this matter. I was told of one particular youngster in Stockton-on-Tees who has been arrested and charged no fewer than 17 times this year. He has been convicted of car crimes 16 times and had one charge pending at the time of our discussions three months ago.

The last time that that young person went into secure accommodation in Middlesbrough, he went in through the front door at 3.30 pm, and at 5.30 pm he disappeared out the back door and stole a car to make his escape. He was rounded up about a week later, having stolen four more vehicles. That one 14-year-old has been responsible for the loss of cars to the value of £2·5 million in the last year alone.

The superintendent of police in my area has told me that, were we to round up about 150 people in the county of Cleveland, it would eradicate about 80 per cent. of all car crime, which itself constitutes about 60 per cent. of total crime in the county.

Two types of car crime offenders concern us. First, there are those juveniles who steal and wreck fast cars. They are the death riders or joyriders—just stupid and irresponsible people. Above that is a thin veneer of hard cases, who continue offending into their twenties. They are the people to whom the Bill will have some relevance.

There are many other hon. Members present from the north-east, who have struggled down on British Rail to participate in this debate because we have seen in recent months horrifying scenes on our televisions. They include high-speed chases through densely packed suburban areas, filmed from the air by helicopters. At the crime prevention panel, I watched a video of a police chase through the centre of Middlesbrough, in which a 14-year-old drove a Vauxhall Astra at 90 miles per hour on the wrong side of the road, weaving in and out of oncoming traffic.

[Mr. Tim Devlin]

That offender damaged no fewer than eight vehicles, and the police gave up the chase on four separate occasions because it was too dangerous to continue pursuing the stolen vehicle at various stages. The situation is getting completely out of hand.

In the north-east, we also saw on our televisions a gentleman—if one can call him that—being interviewed after the death of his son in a 90-mph crash involving a stolen car on the outskirts of Newcastle. That father said, "No, my son wasn't a joy rider. He was a professional car thief. He was one of the best in the business." Many hon. Members are nodding, because they remember that interview. Our constituents were horrified that the media should have given such a person a platform, and that the father's attitude was so wholly irresponsible.

What are we to do? The Bill makes a good start, but it is only a start. It does not deal with hard-core, habitual car thieves—most of whom are in their teens, and who will grow out of it by their mid-twenties. I am told by the probation service, social workers, educationists, and those involved in the youth offenders institute in my constituency that the turning point comes in the late teens, when such offenders get a regular girl friend and decide that it is about time that they acted a little more responsibly. However, in that window between the ages of 13 and 17, there are some dangerous young men who will not be taught any lessons until they are contained.

I would like the Bill to contain a first offence penalty of a six-month custodial sentence—with no remission and no time off for good behaviour—in a properly funded and managed institution. A second offence would merit two six-month sentences; a third, three six-month sentences, and so on.

If the individual kept on offending, he would simply be given six months' custodial sentence for each offence—not to run concurrently, but consecutively. Then, a youngster who stole three cars would go to a young offenders institution for one and a half years. I am told by those who have responsibility for the care and custody of young people that they can actually do something with them over that period—but little can be achieved with a young man in one or two months. He returns to the same circumstances as before, to associate with the same peer group, and starts behaving the same way as before.

I have written at great length to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. I emphasise that juvenile crime is not the same as adult crime. I once defended a juvenile on a charge of reckless driving, and he was banned from driving for two years after being found guilty of the most horrific driving at night without lights. As I pulled out of the court car park into the road afterwards, I was almost rammed by some genius in a gold Capri. It was none other than the juvenile that I had just been defending. The way such people behave is quite unbelievable.

We must recognise the essential difference between juvenile crime and adult crime, and start to treat it seriously. The opposition to the Bill that we have heard tonight, to the effect that it will make such offences more difficult to prove, will not go down well in the country. The public want the House to do something serious about the problem. I doubt that the public will think that the Bill goes far enough—but it makes a good start.

7.54 pm

Sir Giles Shaw (Pudsey): I apologise to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department for being unable to attend at the start of the debate, due to the aggravated taking of British Rail, which took three hours to take me from York to the metropolis. I am none the less glad to make a short contribution to the cross-party connection in support of the Bill. Right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House agree that something must be done, and quickly.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) that the Bill is a rapid reaction to the tip of what is obviously a substantial iceberg—and rightly, because the extent of public anger had to be addressed. The iceberg is the result of a rapid rise in vehicle theft by young persons which goes back some time. It is at its most active in urban areas such as my constituency, the metropolitan city of Leeds, and other big cities such as Newcastle, Bradford and Manchester, whose Members of Parliament have contributed to the debate.

Figures from the police forces of North and West Yorkshire show the astonishing rate at which vehicle theft has risen. In 1990-91, the six-monthly average for vehicle thefts in West Yorkshire was 20,900. Between 1989-90, there was a 53 per cent. increase in recorded vehicle theft offences in the county and the number recorded in the Leeds metropolitan district rose by 85 per cent.

There is a disturbing trend for younger children to involve themselves in that kind of crime. In 1989, 19 per cent. of all those convicted of vehicle theft were aged under 17. So far this year, the figure has risen to 27 per cent. West Yorkshire police statistics suggest that the peak age for the offence of taking a vehicle without consent is 15. That is the outrageous undercurrent against which the real bravados—the macho bunch—have participated in so-called joyriding or death riding. That is a dangerous cult and it must be dealt with harshly.

Between July and October this year in Leeds, two children aged under 10 came to the attention of the police for vehicle theft offences. The Bill does not attempt to address that aspect—and understandably so, because the problem must be dealt with in a short and concise way.

Many devices and initiatives are available, but the view of West Yorkshire's chief constable is this:

> "It is interesting to note that the upsurge in vehicle crime began in earnest in 1989. It may be no coincidence that just prior to this the Criminal Justice Act 1988 reduced the unauthorised taking of motor vehicles to a summary offence, triable only at magistrates courts. Following this reduction to a 'less serious' offence, sentencing policy seems to be that the offence of taking vehicles without consent is not in isolation deemed to be serious enough to attract a custodial sentence. In consequence, young offenders may take many cars and never face the prospect of a deterrent sentence."

That point was well made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South. The chief constable adds:

> "The proposed legislation to deal with aggravated taking of vehicles is most welcomed as recognition that there is a real problem to be addressed. I am left wondering, however, whether it will address the basic problem of the volume of car crime committed, particularly by significant numbers of young offenders who are not dealt with in a way that effectively deters their criminal activities."

There are only three reasons for the Bill. First, we have seen a rapid growth of horrendous proportions in the incidence of this crime. Secondly, the Home Secretary and his colleagues have found a way in which to deal with the

problem swiftly and, I believe, to remove the uppermost element. Thirdly, the Bill has received all-party support, which has enabled us to deal with it in the current Session.

I am bound to say, however, that the Bill does nothing to deter younger vehicle takers—and it will stand or fall according to its deterrent qualities. We do not want to see a massive amount of custodial sentencing, although we are glad that provision is made for it; what we do want is a reduction in the number of people who participate in such a horrendous cult and in the equally horrendous statistics relating to youngsters who take cars, go to court and then take more cars.

8 pm

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): I support the Bill because it seeks to address a serious problem, but I believe that that problem is greater than it appears to be. My right hon. Friend will not be surprised to learn that I speak from gut reaction rather than a detailed knowledge of the law or the statistics, but I believe that my gut reaction is shared by the vast majority of people in this country.

Over the past few years, there has been a massive increase in hooligan crime—crime perpetrated by maladjusted, ill-disciplined adolescents: vehicle theft, theft from vehicles, vandalism, mugging and, at a lower level, intimidatory cycling on modern pedestrian estates, which is very disturbing for residents. In short, young hooligans are terrorising and destroying the neighbourhoods in which they live.

At the weekend, a constituent came to see me. A neighbour's child had been breaking my constituent's windows, hurling abusive language and stealing property at will. The youth in question had been before the courts, but was still at large. The police had been round to have a supportive chat; there was nothing else that they could do in the circumstances. While a police constable was in the living room, the car parked outside was being daubed by the youth.

How much worse the problem must be in our larger inner-city areas, whose suffering has recently been laid bare by the national press. The fact that it is concentrated in the poorer areas is no justification for such behaviour, for which there can be no justification; it increases the urgency of the need to find a solution. Until the blight is eradicated, no one will wish to employ people from the areas where this menace exists, and the poor will become poorer.

Of course there are people who come from disadvantaged backgrounds; of course we must do what we can about it. Sadly, however, there will always be people from disadvantaged backgrounds and there will always be a few people—many of them not from disadvantaged backgrounds—with strong and perverted personalities, who, through macho perversity, gain satisfaction from bullying and terrorism. The influence of their degradation is way beyond their puny numbers.

Where the problem exists in one part of the country, or in one community, it is greatly magnified through the small screens in the sitting room, which multiply that problem by stimulating its imitation. The situation is becoming worse, not better. This is a useful Bill, but it papers over only one crack. To be effective, justice must deter and it must be swift; at present, it is neither.

Manifestly, we have no effective deterrent for hooligan crime, or we would not be debating the issue. What about fines? Fines—for people with no jobs and no money? My right hon. Friend the Minister rightly said that their parents could be fined, but some parents have less control over their children than Robert Maxwell's children had over their fraudulent father.

What about prison? Should we send such people to prison, so that they can learn how to become professional criminals? In the majority of cases, neither society nor the youths in question would be served by that. What about community service? In some cases, yes; but, in general, the people with whom we are concerned would not be deterred. We require a proper deterrent and I am increasingly of the view that we need some threat of pain and humiliation to purge people of the pseudo-macho personalities that cause the problem. The realisation must be forced on the "big man" that, in reality, he is a little man.

Last week in the House, I suggested that such people should be given a sound thrashing. I believe that my suggestion caused something of a stir. I am not sure why; perhaps it was due to the appreciation that, in the country as a whole, the idea would—not surprisingly—gain considerable support. It is done; it is over; it is finished. It is a deterrent. I wonder how the young Napoleons who terrorise their neighbourhoods would react if they believed that, in the end, they would suffer a sound thrashing.

Alternatively, what about a kind of hooligan litter squad? Perhaps hooligans should be attired in some drab and identifying dress and required to carry out repairs and clean up the areas in which their depredations have taken place. William the Conqueror was a cruel and harsh ruler, and I do not suggest that we should harry the north; but during his reign, although people were fearful of the monarch, they were not fearful of their fellow citizens. There may be a moral here: perhaps we need a touch of barbarism to secure civilisation.

We must also have swifter justice. A large proportion of these anti-social crimes are committed by young people who are on bail or yet to be tried—people who laugh at the law while continuing to break it. Notwithstanding the striking lessons of the Birmingham Six and the other cases, I feel that we are in great danger of over-indulging civil libertarians at the expense of civil peace.

For one reason or another, either it is too long before the courts are available to try the cases, or the lawyers appear to require too much time to prepare the defence. To say the very least, there is a suspicion that the legal system has been devised to suit the lawyers rather than to protect the public. Justice without immediacy is justice perverted, not least when the guilty go free after a case has lapsed because the credibility of identity evidence has been undermined by delay.

I recently wrote to my right hon. Friend about a specific case. I received an answer, but I am afraid that it was a long catalogue of half-measures and good intentions. We need action—action this day. It is fine for many of us, given the privileged lives that we lead; it is hell for many of our citizens and we owe them a great deal more urgency than is provided by this useful but inadequate measure.

8.7 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): It is a pleasure to speak in the debate, although it is a little depressing that some hon. Members should despair of finding any real answers to the problem. After all, law and order has collapsed in this country. The crime rate has doubled in the past 12 years, and there has been a whirlwind of crime committed by young people: 50 per cent. of all crime, and 75 per cent. of burglary, is carried out by them. That is very worrying. Surely a Government's job is to address the overall rise in crime that has taken place while they have been in office, and also to deal with this new phenomenon —the amazing increase in youth crime.

If we consider only the superficial elements of these changes in society, and deal with the problem purely at the level at which the Bill deals with it, we shall not do justice to the House or to the people of this country. Although we support elements of the Bill, we want to modify it; that is why we have tabled amendments, which we hope will improve it. We had considerable reservations last week about the Prison Security Bill: we felt that our debate missed the opportunity to create a real piece of penal reform—legislation that would change our penal system radically, along the lines of the Woolf report. We do not have great enthusiasm for the Bill. We believe that it is a missed opportunity for tackling the deep-seated causes of crime.

The Aggravated Vehicle-Taking Bill follows a course that we have come to expect from the Home Secretary and the Government. When a matter of serious public concern arises which leads to a great deal of media interest, someone in central office says, "We must show that something is being done." To the horror of Home Department civil servants, they suddenly receive an order from the Home Secretary, to the effect that a quick fix is needed to make it look as though something is being done. This, therefore, is a quick fix Bill.

Car theft is a matter of great public concern. More than half of all recorded crimes are car crimes, involving the theft of vehicles or the theft of property from vehicles. These offences are very much in the public eye, due to the appalling scenes that we saw on television. Oxford, Bristol —which I visited last week—and Newcastle are suffering great problems. The appalling scenes that we saw on television were brought home to us there. Some of the reporting was irresponsible. With hindsight, it appears that disturbances in other towns and cities can be attributed to the copycat element.

Most people do not want such offences to be tolerated. Councils that conduct local polls say that that is the primary concern. Only a couple of months ago, I visited a major industrial city where a poll had taken place. I was told that people in that city were more concerned about being able to live safely in their homes, not having their cars stolen, and not being burgled or mugged than about unemployment or any of the other big economic issues.

This is not a new offence. It involves predominantly young people who have been involved in taking vehicles without consent for many years. The problem, however, has become very much worse. It is escalating and taking on worryingly new manifestations. It is happening with many other crimes, as crime figures spiral out of control. The tragedy is that the Government have stood idly by and done little to prevent youth crime in general and this aspect of youth crime in particular.

I draw the Government's attention to the Home Office standing conference on crime prevention, chaired by James Morgan, which reported in August this year. The working party, chaired by James Morgan, studied crime prevention programmes. Of youth crime, it said:

> "Considering the significant contribution that young people make to the crime problem, both as victims and offenders, the working group was surprised by the lack of references to specific strategies for preventing crime by and against young people."

That is an important point.

We know that almost half of all recorded crime is carried out by people under the age of 21, yet far from developing a strategy that focuses on youth, as other countries, such as France, have done, the Government have been involved in a war of attrition against young people. I do not draw the simple conclusion that young people have been badly treated—as they have—during the last 12 years. One only has to look at the halving of the value of the youth training allowance and the way in which young people between the ages of 16 and 18 can no longer claim benefit, including housing benefit. Many of them have been forced into having no stake in society. All that is true, but I do not say that young people who have been deprived in that way should go out and steal cars. There is, however, a clear relationship, as the Home Office research and all the other research shows, between deprivation and crime.

The Home Secretary pointed out in the debate on the Metropolitan police that Sir Peter Imbert had said that the map of deprivation matched almost exactly the map of crime in London. The Home Office's own research shows the same close relationship. I have studied some interesting research which shows that, on previous occasions, the Home Secretary and the Minister of State have drawn a comparison with the depression in the 1930s. They state that crime did not rise then, and they ask why it did not rise then. The research now available shows that crime tripled between the two world wars, particularly at the time of the great depression.

There is therefore a clear relationship between deprivation and crime. The training and employment opportunities available to young people have declined and benefit has been reduced. The result has been a substantial increase in homelessness and deprivation. We can see it on the streets of London.

Mr. Mills: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sheerman: No, not for the moment. I am trying to keep to a very strict timetable.

All those factors are linked to rising crime rates. No doubt a Conservative Member will cite the 1930s, just as has happened in the past. I refer Conservative Members to the research, and I hope that they will learn a little from it.

Painfully little has been done specifically to tackle car crime, which is a major aspect of youth crime. This is even more depressing when one realises that in various parts of the country there are projects run by the probation service and the voluntary organisations which provide an alternative to custody. Hon. Members in all parts of the House have said that these schemes are successful.

The hon. Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) has some interesting ways of looking at the problem, but he did not look at the fact that there are proven ways of taking young people who have committed offences and giving them a chance to confront their

criminality. They become involved in schemes which allow them to use up their energy. The schemes involve the use of motor vehicles off the road. There is a high success rate.

All too often, when I visit successful schemes throughout the country, I find that they are about to announce that they cannot carry on, or that they cannot diversify or increase the take-up because the Government have not provided any money. I visited a scheme in Kirklees, near my constituency, which wants to turn into a car project instead of remaining a motor cycle project, but there is no money available for that purpose, even though it is a proven, cost-effective way of deterring young people from continuing to commit this kind of car crime.

The Government have done little to encourage such schemes. The Opposition believe that we should consider alternatives and the ability of magistrates to say that something must be done with first offenders and that an alternative can work. Instead of a young person being sentenced to a period in custody, which means that it is all too likely that he or she will continue in a life of crime, become a professional criminal and never get out of the criminal world, the alternative makes both moral and economic sense. Is it morally right to sentence a young person to a period in custody?

The Home Office has also been remiss about security devices, an important subject that has been debated at length today. The hon. Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills) knows a lot about the car industry, but my patience with it is wearing a little thin. Six years ago, the Prime Minister invited the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders to No. 10. They told her that they would respond, but they have not done so. If uniformly high standards were imposed, manufacturers would have to meet them. Competition would be the same and vehicle security would rapidly improve. That is what people want. With the change of cars, higher security would soon be achieved.

Young people often steal the most attractive and new models rather than old bangers. I have been told that, in some cities, if someone wants to ensure that their car is not tampered with or taken, they should buy the rustiest and least attractive car available.

Against the background of Government inertia, we have a Bill that will achieve little, because powers already exist to deal with the taking of a car and aggravating factors. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) said this afternoon, any passenger who encourages and any driver who recklessly drives causing injury or damage is guilty of reckless driving, which was renamed dangerous driving in the Road Traffic Act 1991 and is liable to two years imprisonment. The offence of causing death by reckless driving carries a maximum of five years, manslaughter carries a maximum of life, and deliberately damaging a vehicle carries a maximum of 10 years. One wonders what contribution the Bill will make.

I share the misgivings of my right hon. Friend the Member for Sparkbrook about the speed of the passage of the Bill. Hurried legislation is never good legislation; there are many examples of that. There are deep deficiencies in the drafting of the Bill. The Opposition have tabled a cluster of amendments. We hope that the Government will listen reasonably to them, because they have been tabled in a reasonable frame of mind and do not make party political points. If the Government use their majority, the only guarantee of consideration is another place. We do not think that that is good enough. The Bill should have been investigated in Committee.

I say that with some feeling because, in the three years, that I have been doing this job I have not heard so many well-qualified solicitors and barristers, people from the legal community and inquests and from pressure groups say that there are areas of deep concern. That is not an ideological or party-political point; real concern has been expressed by our professional associations and by those who practise in the courts. They worry that the Bill will damage British justice.

The most worrying feature of the Bill is the issue of fault. A passenger who is screaming to get out of a car, who is trying to stop a driver driving dangerously, will still be guilty of the aggravated offence. If any damage is done or if any injury occurs after the initial taking while the car is being driven, the aggravated offence is committed, even if the car is being driven sensibly or carefully. The car does not have to be driven recklessly. If it was travelling at 20 mph and someone else recklessly drove into it, the aggravated offence would have been committed. The situation is the same if someone walked in front of the car and the driver had no chance of stopping. A defendant would be guilty of the offence if he took the car, abandoned it and someone else damaged it before it was recovered.

The chairman of the Bar Council, Mr. Tony Scrivener —*[Interruption.]* I hope that the remarks of Conservative Members from a sedentary position are not an attack on the Bar Council, which I think all of us would regard as an important and esteemed body. Mr. Tony Scrivener referred to the Bill. *[Interruption.]* If the Home Secretary would listen to more experts, he would probably be a better Home Secretary. If he listened to Anthony Scrivener, he would be a darned sight better.

Anthony Scrivener referred to the Bill as unique in jurisprudence because a defendant can be guilty of the aggravated offence even though he does no other act than commit the basic offence, and the event which makes the crime aggravated is outside his or her control. That is bad law, which will lead to miscarriages of justice, and we shall seek to amend it.

It was refreshing to hear the hon. and learned Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) express his misgivings about this part of the Bill. I say again—this is not based on party acrimony—that we have severe reservations about two clauses, which must be given serious consideration today or in another place. There is the important question of the reversal of the burden of proof. The defendant has to prove that he was not in, or in the immediate vicinity of, a car rather than the prosecution having to prove that he was.

On the face of it, that seems to be in breach of article 6(2) of the European convention on human rights, which states that a person is innocent until proven guilty. Have the Government taken legal advice? The reversal of the burden of proof is wrong in principle and will lead to injustice. Surely we have had enough problems in the British judicial system with miscarriages of justice. As the hon. and learned Member for Burton said, that reversal could easily lead to miscarriages of justice that we could sort out now. It should not be an issue between us. I hope that the Minister of State will respond positively to my criticisms.

[Mr. Sheerman]

The use of the term "in the immediate vicinity" will raise enormous problems. What if the passenger gets out because he is terrified by what is going on and the car crashes at the next corner? He is still in the immediate vicinity. What if the passenger gets out half an hour before the crash, but the driver continues driving in the area and crashes near where the passenger is still standing talking to his mates? The reversal of the burden of proof would also affect alibi evidence called on behalf of the accused.

In many cases, a disqualification will be appropriate. We believe that that is right, but the court should have a discretion, particularly where no fault lies with the defendant.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: What?

Mr. Sheerman: Where perhaps a defendant has been a passenger and is not accused of reckless driving. May I finish my argument?

Disqualification can have a counter-productive effect. Young people with years of disqualification ahead of them have no opportunity to take part in motor projects, to drive legitimately and to channel enthusiasm into responsible behaviour. The Minister will know from many of the schemes that he visits that one of the carrots that they hold out to young people is the ability to drive vehicles off road and eventually to train for a full licence. That is often the spur which gets them back to a proper relationship with the almighty car.

There is a national crisis of youth crime, but the Bill does not deal with its roots. If Dickens could come back and watch the debate, he would see that most of us are dwelling on the surface of the problem, while beneath the surface something is wrong in England and Wales.

Mr. Anderson: But not, apparently, in Scotland.

Mr. Sheerman: But not, apparently, in Scotland or in Northern Ireland.

There is something deeply wrong. The Labour party has a crime prevention policy and a youth crime prevention policy which will begin to deal with that problem. We shall support the Bill but we shall also try to amend it sensibly. We do not believe that it is the full answer which could have been brought to the House.

8.29 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): I shall not follow the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) down every path of his argument, particularly the last third of his speech. If the House so decides, we may be able to consider some of the detailed points during the debate on the four sets of amendments which will be considered in Committee.

This has been a good debate. I say that because some lawyers have spoken—my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) and the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson). Most of us listened carefully to those hon. Members whose constituencies have been affected by this hooliganism—the hon. Members for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland), for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson) and for Hartlepool (Mr. Leadbitter). I was particularly taken by a good phrase used by the hon. Member for Hartlepool, who suggested that we should stop using the word "joyriding"—none of us in the House does so any longer, except in unspoken inverted commas. My hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow) said that we should refer to "car hooliganism", which is another exceptionally good phrase.

Much closer to home for me, we listened to the hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), who represents and lives in the Blackbird Leys part of Oxford. I represent the other half and represented the area in which he now lives until the boundary commissioners so cruelly took it from me in 1983.

I begin by revisiting the arguments in the opening speeches about why we need the Bill. When the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) kindly let me intervene, I said that the Bill, should it pass into law, would provide us with not only a deterrent but a punishment and a way of keeping repetitive car crime offenders off the streets.

We need to legislate on this offence because of an evidential difficulty, which is compounded in several ways. It is compounded when several people are involved in the aggravated taking of a vehicle—my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills) said that such people were not content with being in a car but wanted to be in the boot as well—and by the speed and lethal power of the Cosworths and other vehicles which they steal. It is difficult for the forces of law and order to identify who is responsible for what, as the hon. Member for Oxford, East saw in Oxford in the autumn. It is also difficult to establish when the damage occurred.

There are three problems—of identification, of intent and of witnesses. That is why we need the Bill. The difficulties are demonstrated by a simple statistic—only 6 per cent. of the people who take without consent are charged with criminal damage, yet four out of every 10 vehicles returned to their unfortunate owners suffer substantial damage.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook and the hon. Member for Huddersfield spoke about the unintended consequences of people's actions, and I understand the worries about that matter. That an offender can be held criminally liable for the unintended consequences of his or her actions is a well-established legal principle. A person who attacks someone and who wishes to do grievous bodily harm but unfortunately kills his victim can be convicted of murder after due process.

Moving closer to home, on the offence of causing death by dangerous or drunken driving, the hon. Member for Huddersfield referred to the Road Traffic Act 1991, whereby an offender will be found guilty if he drives dangerously, thereby causing someone's death, whether or not he intended to do so or even knew about it.

Mr. Anderson: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Patten: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, following the example of the hon. Member for Huddersfield, I must try to make progress in the interests of speed. The hon. Member for Swansea, East obviously believes that the matter is important. I always think that my points are important as well. I give way to him.

Mr. Anderson: Surely it is not difficult to distinguish the point that the right hon. Gentleman makes about assaults. That is done by considering a case in which a passenger can be held equally liable even though he sought to avoid being identified with the aggravated crime. He may know

that the vehicle has been taken, but seek positively to absent himself from the scene and the commission of the aggravated offence.

Mr. Patten: I gave way to the hon. Gentleman because he felt that his point was important, but it is covered by section 12(1) of the Theft Act 1968. People who get in a car when it is stolen are associated with that act and can be convicted of exactly the same offence.

I shall take a more up-to-date example than one from 1968. In the recent House of Lords judgment in the aptly named Savage case, the court ruled that a person can be guilty of actual bodily harm regardless of whether she—in that case—intended any harm or was reckless about causing harm, so long as she intended the assault. In that case, Mrs. or Miss Savage emptied a beer glass over a person's head, the glass went with the beer and the person was hurt. There was no intent, but she was found guilty and the conviction was sustained on appeal.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook made an important point about the minimum and maximum periods for banning and questioned whether that would help or hinder rehabilitation of an offender. A youngster may have committed the offence only once. However, such people must not be favoured, as the hon. Member for Oxford, East said in his powerful speech. If a court decides on a two-year probation order, during the first year the person is mandatorily banned under the Bill and there is nothing to stop the court ruling that during the second year he or she should attend a motor course. I have been to many throughout the country. As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said, we are funding a great many such courses.

I have referred to some of the powerful speeches made by Opposition Members with particular constituency interests. Among Conservative Members, my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) asked in her characteristically robust way why the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats do not see the urgency of this matter. That urgency is self-evident. Several hon. Members who spoke after the opening speakers—I shall not name them for fear of causing inter-party embarrassment—said that it was an urgent matter, and I applaud them. Clearly, there is a gap between the Opposition Front Bench and those who have experienced these problems in their constituencies.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) and the police for their warm welcome of the Bill. My hon. Friend raised the important point of what happens under the Bill if a man or woman leaves a child in the car and the car is taken. He gave two examples. I hope that I am not thought too patronising or authoritarian when I say that I do not believe that parents should leave children in unattended cars and they certainly should not leave the keys in the car as well. But should parents do that and should the car be taken away with a child in it, those who took the car could be charged with a much more serious offence under section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984, punishable by up to seven years' imprisonment.

My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton is a member of the council of Justice—an organisation for which I have great respect and which operates under the presidency of Lord Alexander of Weedon. He raised two particular areas where he felt that there might be some danger of miscarriages of justice should the legislation go through in its present form. I listened carefully to what he said, and I have some answers.

First, on the "liability for others' acts" point, the Bill contains safeguards—as my hon. and learned Friend knows from his study of it—when the accused can show that the aggravating event occurred before he committed his basic offence or that he was not near the vehicle at the time. However, the general principle of liability for the acts of others to which my hon. and learned Friend referred is not at all out of line with the Theft Act 1968. The basic taking without consent offence is that the taker and any passenger may be punished equally.

That was the point I made when responding to the intervention of the hon. Member for Swansea, East, when I mentioned section 12(1) of the Theft Act 1968. It is also precedented in section 35(2) of the Powers of Criminal Courts Act 1973—*[Interruption.]* It is important that those who are concerned about the possibility of injustice pay attention.

That section states that a person convicted of taking without consent is liable to pay compensation for any—and I emphasise that word—damage to the property "occurring while it was out of the owner's possession" and that such damage is to be treated as

"having resulted from the offence, 'however and by whomsoever' the damage was caused."

The precedents are clear for the action which my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is taking in the Bill.

Secondly, on the issue of the precedents for making a defendant prove his defence in the way in which the Bill requires, I argue that every year—certainly since I have been in the House—we have created numerous new offences which have defences attached to them, usually for those who can show that they acted reasonably or that they used due diligence to ensure that they avoided committing an offence. All those defences are for the defendant to establish on the balance of probabilities.

We have traditional defences on, for example, diminished responsibility which allow murder to be reduced to manslaughter, or defences introduced in Acts that have been passed in the last couple of years. The Food Safety Act 1990 is one which has a large number of such defences built into it, as does the recent Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Lawrence: I hope that my right hon. Friend will appreciate that objection is taken to eating more and more into the principle by which the burden of proof is on the prosecution to establish guilt and not on the defendant to establish innocence. He is perfectly right that in recent years we have been eating into that principle, but if we continue to do so, the principle will go, and that is the civil liberties issue which the system of justice has always been anxious to maintain.

Mr. Patten: I entirely agree with my hon. and learned Friend about the civil liberties issue. If the principle ever was firmly established, it has gone, but the principle's underlying weight is protected by the fact that the defences are there in law. That is the way we have evolved the law over the years, but I shall consider carefully what my hon. and learned Friend said, and I shall read it tomorrow in *Hansard*.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Mr. Irvine) was pretty savage about Labour Front-Bench spokesmen and criticised muddled Opposition speeches. The notable

[Mr. Patten]

fellow East Anglian and friend to both of us—my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant)—was not satisfied and added "nit-picking" to that criticism. He also wanted us to be more severe in our handling of these offenders. A life term is available for those who are convicted of deliberately causing death, whether the conviction is manslaughter——

Mr. Sheerman: Under the present law.

Mr. Patten: I am finishing my sentence. The hon. Gentleman is treating me as though he were talking to someone from Louisiana and wanting to finish the sentence before it has been started. However, I shall complete what I was saying.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West was right about car security and what he said was reflected in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden, who urged us to do more about car security. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and I will meet car manufacturers for a return match this Wednesday and there will be some plain speaking.

I pay tribute to the Association of British Insurers, to which we began talking a couple of years ago. It said that it was difficult to use insurance mechanisms to cut car crime, but two years on, it is now using insurance premiums formidably well. We look to the British car manufacturing industry and its European counterparts to do the same as quickly as possible.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, North-East (Mr. Thurnham) was concerned about people who reoffend while on bail, and we shall deal as quickly as we can with the reports—and the analysis of them—which deal with that. He and my hon. Friends the Members for Pudsey (Sir G. Shaw) and for Stockton, South (Mr. Devlin) were concerned about 15, 16 and 17-year-olds and their involvement with the social services. I understand that the social services want to help people, but sometimes one can help people a bit more by nipping problems in the bud and dealing with them at an earlier stage.

Sometimes, to be firm with people can be more helpful than leaving problems until it is too late. It is much better to step in and help people firmly rather than having to punish them at a later stage. My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South and others were quite right. The strongest support of all for the Bill came from my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, North (Mr. Marlow), who had a range of interesting ways in which to stoke up the legislation to higher and higher levels of severity.

I hope that there will not be a vote on Second Reading. I understand that there will not be one, but I end on this note: that will allow the official Opposition to say that they did not oppose the Bill because there was no vote on Second Reading. However, should we decide to consider the Bill in a Committee of the whole House, the first set of amendments tabled by the Opposition—should the Opposition win the vote or should we accede to them—would torpedo the Bill below the water line and sink it lock, stock and barrel. They are wrecking amendments of the worst type.

The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook and the hon. Member for Huddersfield are trying to have their political cake and eat it. They are trying to say to the general public and to their constituents that they have supported the Bill, but, in a few moments, if we resolve to go into a Committee of the whole House, they will then try to sink the Bill. I have a message for them. We have no intention of allowing the Bill to be sunk, and we shall make it as clear as we possibly can to our constituents and to the hon. Gentleman who tried to have their cake and eat it exactly what they have done. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 61 (Committal of Bills), That the Bill be committed to a Committee of the whole House.—*[Mr. David Davis.]*

Question agreed to.

Bill immediately considered in Committee.

[SIR PAUL DEAN *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

NEW OFFENCE OF AGGRAVATED VEHICLE-TAKING

Mr. Sheerman: I beg to move amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 22, after 'place', insert 'by the accused or by another person incited by the accused'.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Paul Dean): With this it will be convenient to take the following amendments: No. 3, in page 1, line 23, after 'vehicle', insert

'by the accused or by another person incited by the accused'.

No. 5, in page 1, line 26, after 'vehicle', insert

'by the accused or by another person incited by the accused'.

No. 7, in page 1, line 29, after 'vehicle', insert

'by the accused or by another person incited by the accused'.

Mr. Sheerman: To the cries of "Wrecker Sheerman", I argue that the amendments would not wreck the Bill. Indeed, they would vastly improve it. They would limit the new offence of aggravated taking to cases where the aggravating behaviour was carried out by the accused or by another person incited by the accused. That does not sound unreasonable to me, or, I am sure, to my hon. Friends.

The Bill makes passengers liable to the new offence because of aggravating behaviour by another person who was driving the vehicle. Those people will be liable, even though they were not ringleaders, did not incite, encourage, intend or foresee the behaviour. For example, a passenger screaming to be let out of the car will be guilty of the aggravated offence, if guilty of the original taking. A passenger who pleaded with the driver to stop would be equally liable, as would a younger passenger, influenced by older ringleaders.

I cannot understand why the Minister said that this was a wrecking amendment. A passenger will be liable to the aggravated offence, even though he or she was not responsible for the events that made the offence an aggravated one. That cannot be right; it offends all the normal canons of criminal responsibility. It is a bad law that will lead to miscarriages of justice, as Opposition Members said on Second Reading. If a young person is to be convicted of such a serious offence, rendering him or her liable to a lengthy term of imprisonment, there should be some element of fault in the aggravated behaviour.

We all know the negative effects of custody on young people. In their White Paper "Crime, Justice and Protecting the Public", the Government referred to custody as

"an expensive way of making bad people worse."

Some two thirds of teenage offenders leaving custody, and 80 per cent. of those under the age of 17, are reconvicted within two years of their release. It is patently daft to imprison for lengthy periods young people who are on the fringe of such activities. It is a recipe for turning delinquents into more serious criminals.

The amendments seek to ensure that the new offence of aggravated taking is linked much more closely to the individual's degree of personal responsibility for the offence. I cannot believe that that could be construed as wrecking the Bill; it surely improves the Bill, as it focuses it more on the people who took the car and the ringleaders, not those who were on the periphery.

Under the amendments, in order to be guilty an individual will have to have carried out the aggravated behaviour or incited another person to do so. That will not mean that the main offenders will get off. The amendments will also ensure that the prosecution has to prove the guilt of the defendant. They will remove the dangerous proposal to reverse the burden of proof, which would cause grave injustice and is of great concern to many practising lawyers in London.

The Bill as drafted is seriously flawed. The amendments will ensure that those at fault, not those on the periphery, pay the price.

Mr. Anderson: I rise only to adopt the arguments advanced by my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman). I shall not expand on them, because we have already given examples of how it would offend against common justice if someone were deemed to be guilty of the aggravated offence when he or she had not given assent to that offence, as aggravated.

I shall argue somewhat against myself by commending to the Government a possible amendment to weaken the defence. It is a purely legal point: a defence is currently provided for the person who can prove, on the balance of probabilities, that the relevant aggravating event occurred before he or she committed the basic offence or that he or she was not—this is the relevant part—in or near the vehicle when the aggravating event occurred.

The phrase "in or near" is relevant, because it makes it seem as though it is a solely geographical matter. That does not cover all relevant circumstances. It is not difficult to conceive of circumstances in which a person participated in the commission of the offence in that he or she encouraged it, without necessarily being geographically in or near the vicinity of the offence. Therefore, the Government may wish to consider strengthening the case for the prosecution by adding to the description of a person being in or near the vehicle when the aggravating event occurred, the following words:

"or did not otherwise participate in the commission of the offence".

Mr. John Patten: I thought that I was right. There is no doubt that the amendments are wreckers—what the hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) has just said makes that absolutely clear.

I listened with particular care to what the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) said about the workings of the group of amendments. I did so because, when they appeared on the Notice Paper, I was at a loss to understand how the Opposition spokesmen could reconcile them with their public stance of support for tough new measures against such people. The answer is now clear: they cannot. The amendments are about negating, not creating, a new offence of vehicle taking. The amendments would emasculate the offence. Their net effect would be to leave the law fundamentally unchanged in practice.

I see that my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman), who is learned in the law, nods in agreement. The amendments would erect around each of the what the Bill describes as aggravated circumstances of the basic Theft Act offence considerable and unnecessary evidential difficulties. Should the amendments have their way, it would never be enough for the prosecution to prove that there was danger, damage or death. To the contrary: it would never be enough to say, as the Bill states, that the events would not have occurred if the vehicle had not been taken in the first place. Instead, the prosecution would have to prove the existing basic taking offence.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Swansea, East for his ingenious suggestion on how to improve the prosecution's lot. The prosecution would also have to prove exactly who did what damage at what time, what injury occurred, who was driving and why. The clock would be turned back to the pre-existing law.

As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary explained, so-called joyriding is habitually accompanied by dangerous driving, damage, injury and sometimes, tragically, death—all of which are already covered by criminal law. The difficulty lies in proving an offence such as criminal damage against one member of a gang, when it is often not clear who has done what or even who was in the driving seat at a certain time. The evidential difficulties are fiendishly complex and trying for the prosecution. There is not only a strong practical case, but a strong moral case, for saying that everyone is equally to blame—exactly as the Theft Act 1968 does in section 12(1).

I understand that there may be a worry that we are tipping the scales of justice against defendants and that the aggravated offence is an erosion of traditional legal standards—a point made by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence) on Second Reading. I hope that I satisfied him on that matter then. Such concern is misplaced; the new offence is justified not merely on pragmatic grounds but also on grounds of principle and precedent. I refer the House to the arguments that I deployed on Second Reading.

Someone who takes and drives away a car and then aggravates that by damaging, injuring or killing is not justified in then saying that he did not mean to do it. The law will say, "You had no business doing it in the first place." So if someone decides to commit the basic offence, he must accept responsibility when things go wrong, and he has no one to blame but himself.

Defences are provided for people who can show on the balance of probabilities that they had no connection with the aggravating offence. The hon. Member for Swansea, East referred to geographical proximity and to other ways of judging the issue.

I must tell the hon. Member for Huddersfield that either he does not understand his amendments or he must know

[Mr. John Patten]

that, if they were agreed to, the Bill would be completely wrecked and the law would return to where it was. I urge the Committee to resist the amendments.

9 pm

Mr. Sheerman: Far from trying to wreck the Bill, we have been trying to improve it by means of these amendments, on which we have consulted the finest legal opinion. I should like a guarantee at this late stage that the Minister of State and the Home Secretary will consult the Law Society and the Criminal Bar Association before the Bill emerges from another place. We are not trying to torpedo the legislation; we are trying to reflect a view widely held by lawyers. I ask the Minister for such a commitment.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 40, Noes 149.

Division No. 24] [9 pm

AYES

Anderson, Donald
Ashton, Joe
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Bermingham, Gerald
Boyes, Roland
Callaghan, Jim
Cummings, John
Darling, Alistair
Dixon, Don
Duffy, Sir A. E. P.
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Grocott, Bruce
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Hood, Jimmy
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
McFall, John
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Redmond, Martin
Sheerman, Barry
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Wilson, Brian
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Jimmy Dunnachie.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bright, Graham
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dunn, Bob
Emery, Sir Peter
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronald
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Franks, Cecil
French, Douglas
Gale, Roger
Goodlad, Alastair
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hanley, Jeremy
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Harris, David
Hawkins, Christopher
Haywood, Robert
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Kirkwood, Archy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Latham, Michael
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lightbown, David
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marshall, Sir Michael *(Arundel)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mills, Iain
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morrison, Sir Charles
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Rathbone, Tim
Redwood, John
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Speed, Keith
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nicholas Baker and
Mr. Tim Boswell.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Sheerman: I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 1, line 23, after first 'the', insert 'reckless'.

The First Deputy Chairman: With this, it will be convenient to discuss also the following amendments: Nos. 4, in page 1, line 26, after 'the', insert 'reckless'.

No. 6, in page 1, line 29, after 'was', insert 'intentionally or recklessly'.

No. 8, in page 2, line 28, leave out paragraph (a) and insert—

'(a) it is driven in such a manner as to create an obvious and serious risk of causing physical harm to another person; and'.

Mr. Sheerman: This class of amendments makes the intention of recklessness a necessary ingredient for the aggravated offence. The thrust of the amendments is common sense. They make an offence an "aggravated offence" when that was the intention.

Clarifying the legislation is an important priority for us. As currently drafted, the offence of unauthorised taking would become aggravated if dangerous driving occurred. That is fair enough, and we would agree with the Government on that. However, under sub-section 2(b) and (c), the offence would be aggravated also if, owing to the

driving of the vehicle, an accident occurred that caused injury to a person or damage to property. The driving would not have to be dangerous or reckless in itself.

In other words, if a car is taken and the driver is driving carefully but another car is recklessly driven into it, an aggravated offence will have taken place. I know that I am going over some of the ground that we rehearsed on Second Reading, but I shall be brief. If the car is stationary at traffic lights and another car hits it, the aggravated offence will still have occurred. Similarly, if a person runs in front of the car when it is being driven carefully and even if the driver cannot avoid hitting that person, the aggravated offence will have taken place. I asked the Minister about this important point on Second Reading, but he did not mention it in his reply.

Subsection 2(d) also raises an anomaly. The aggravated offence is committed when damage is caused to the stolen vehicle, but there is no requirement that that damage should have been caused intentionally or recklessly. The defendant will be guilty if someone else damages the car after he has left it but when he is still in the immediate vicinity or if he cannot prove that he had left the vicinity.

The amendments seek to ensure that the car must have been driven recklessly, that there must have been some fault on the part of the defendant and that the defendant should not be guilty of a serious criminal offence if the events that make that offence aggravated and serious lie outside his or her control. Similarly, damage to the stolen car must have been intentional or reckless. Without those safeguards, the Bill will be unjust and will be seen by many members of the public as unjust.

The public are worried about young people taking cars and driving them in a reckless fashion down the streets, causing mayhem. We had some graphic descriptions of that on Second Reading. That is altogether different from some of the examples that I have described which will be caught by the clause.

We believe that it is wrong for young people to be held responsible for a serious criminal offence when they were not at fault beyond the original offence of taking a car, for which they will be punished and will be liable under the ordinary legislation. What is at issue here is whether the offence is aggravated. That is what we seek to clarify in the amendment.

The amendments arise from the real anxiety in the legal community that the Bill will create great difficulties. I hope that the Government will consider the amendments without prejudice.

9.15 pm

Mr. John Patten: One travels hopefully in legislating. I had hoped that, after my crystal-clear exposition of the wrecking element in the first group of amendments, the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) would have had a quick look and seen that what he was attempting to do in the second group was again to wreck.

The amendments ask the Committee to turn the clock back to the legal position on reckless driving, before the thorough review of the subject by the principal of Jesus college and the consequent decision of the House in the Road Traffic Act 1991 during the previous Session of Parliament to substitute a new concept, that of dangerous driving, with a new statutory test to go with it. That report and the subsequent legislation were welcome.

The amendments also invite the Committee in effect to convert our objectively determined aggravating circumstances all over again into subjectively determined acts committed by a particular person. The amendments are misconceived and wrong-headed. It is as plain as a pikestaff that, if we return to subjectivity, the central core of the Bill will be completely wrecked and the vessel will be sunk.

I had better go on to explain that it is important to recall why we took the decision in the Road Traffic Act 1991 to change the reckless driving offences—"reckless" is the word that the hon. Member for Huddersfield used. In the words of the principal of Jesus college, the Welsh college in Oxford, the background was the

"widespread dissatisfaction with the present state of the law on reckless driving".

That dissatisfaction was rooted in the difficulty in securing convictions in England and Wales under the then reckless driving offences. Professor North's committee had put its collective finger on the problem: that reckless driving as previously defined by the courts referred to the accused's state of mind—whether he was reckless—and therefore required some proof of the state of mind of the offender to bring a successful prosecution.

Professor North recommended that the offences should be based much more firmly on the observable standard of driving, not the state of mind of the person who committed the offence. We should focus on the nature of the conduct, not the state of mind of the person involved. The nature of the conduct is the dangerousness of the driving, not the recklessness shown by the driver.

Mr. Sheerman: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Patten: I give way to the hon. Gentleman. I hope that he has understood.

Mr. Sheerman: I have understood. I should like to bring the Minister down to earth and ask him to consider not states of mind but what happens when such crimes are committed. Will he answer on the point which worries us?

A person may not have taken part in any reckless behaviour. He may merely have driven a car without doing so recklessly. He may have stolen a car and then stopped or even parked the car and got out of it. If the car is damaged, whether severely or not, after they have left the car, what will be the position? Could such a person be guilty of reckless driving? Under the Bill, he will be considered to be reckless when at no stage did he take part in any reckless behaviour.

It is not the state of mind but what the person did that will count. The person took a car without the owner's permission. Yes, that is against the law, and the law will have him for that. If he drives the car for three miles and when he stops at the traffic lights someone crashes into the back of the car, will he be guilty of reckless driving? I should appreciate it if the Minister would confirm that.

Mr. Patten: I should appreciate the chance to do so after that intervention, which was longer than normal from the hon. Gentleman, who is usually succinct.

It is clearly the intention of the Bill that a man, or more rarely a woman, who takes and drives away a car and as a result causes injury or damage, can be tried for the aggravation of the offence, and that anyone travelling in the car with them should be tried in exactly the same way.

[Mr. Patten]

There are two defences in the Bill that a person can use, and it is up to the courts to decide whether those defences are valid.

To complete my argument, we should focus on the nature of the conduct—the dangerousness of the driving—not the degree of recklessness shown by the driver. The new offences in the Road Traffic Act 1991 follow that form. They will allow more drivers who drive badly to be convicted of more serious offences with proper punishment, and quite right too.

Subsection 7 of the new section 12A of the Theft Act, 1968—which would be inserted by clause 1 of the Bill—follows the concept and definition of dangerous driving in the Road Traffic Act. Therefore, having heard my exposition of what the amendments would do to the Bill, I believe that the hon. Member for Huddersfield will seek to withdraw it immediately from the consideration of this Committee.

Mr. Sheerman: We shall withdraw our amendments in the hope that they will emerge somewhere else and be debated more fully.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Donald Anderson: I hope that the Minister can help with clarification of one matter. Perhaps he will set on record why the words "mechanically propelled vehicle" are used and not the word "conveyance", as in section 12(7) of the 1968 Act. Would he confirm that the definition, as set out, is sufficient to cover speedboats? In many of our coastal resorts, there is a problem because young people, in particular, take boats and drive them to the danger of people who are bathing or who are in those waters. Will the Minister give an assurance that the term as used is sufficiently wide to include speedboats?

Mr. Patten: I suppose that the advice given by a senior and ancient Home Office or ex-Home Office Minister, or a Department of Transport or ex-Department of Transport Minister to a junior Minister just taking up his or her post would be, never to forget to cover oneself for the old skateboard question—does this piece of road traffic legislation deal with skateboards? I never go into the arena in this place without that information.

Luckily, thanks to the excellence of those who advise me, I am fully conversant with the speedboat issue, which is a derivation of the skateboard question, but is a serious issue. The hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) is right—boat theft has been a problem. People have been using twin-screwed diesel boats, which are very powerful and are used for towing water skiers, in an extremely dangerous fashion.

This stand part debate is useful to discuss subsection 1(a) of the Bill, which provides that the new aggravated offence arises in relation to "mechanically propelled vehicles", as the hon. Member for Swansea, East pointed out. That term, which is used in road traffic legislation, has a wide meaning and covers tractors, mechanical plant, mobile cranes, bulldozers, as well as motor cars and motor cycles. However, it is narrower in meaning than "conveyance", as defined in section 12(7) of the Theft Act, 1968, which I dare say the hon. Member for Swansea, East has in front of him. "Conveyance" includes non-mechanically propelled vehicles, such as rowing boats and horse-drawn carriages.

Ultimately, the question whether "mechanically propelled" covers speedboats is for the courts to decide. My view is that it does not, for Theft Act purposes. Certainly, the policy with which I have been concerned in drawing up this Bill relates to motor vehicles on roads. That was the policy impetus behind the Bill. Therefore, the legislation as drafted would probably not be of much use for speedboats, but I undertake to consider the hon. Gentleman's point if he is happy with that undertaking.

Mr. Anderson *indicated assent.*

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2

Offence to be tried only summarily if value of damage is small

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Anderson: I have a brief point in respect of the summary offence. It is said that clause 2 provides that the aggravated offence is to be tried summarily if the only aggravating circumstance is damage, the total value of which is below a specified amount, which is the same as for the substantive offence of criminal damage. The point that I wish to put to the Minister, again for consideration later by the Home Office, is this. Magistrates courts have a problem with summary jurisdiction in respect of this matter. Although a jury may convict a defendant charged with theft under section 1 of the Theft Act 1968 of taking a vehicle without authority under section 12, a magistrates court cannot do so unless the defendant has been specifically charged in the alternative. It may well be that, in this or related legislation, the Government might deal with that point to give magistrates courts greater jurisdiction in this matter.

Mr. John Patten: That is an interesting point, which had not occurred to me. The hon. Gentleman speaks with some knowledge of the criminal law. Certainly, I should like to consider the point and take advice on it at a later stage. I doubt whether we could do anything about it during the passage of the Bill in this or another place. It may well be a sensible piece of tidying up in subsequent legislation and I am grateful to him.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3

Obligatory disqualification

Mr. Sheerman: I beg to move amendment No. 9, in page 4, line 21, leave out 'Obligatory' and insert 'Discretionary'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): With this it will be convenient to consider amendment No. 10, in page 4, line 21, leave out first 'Obligatory' and insert—

'(a) Obligatory where the vehicle was driven or the damage was caused by the offender or by another person incited by the offender.

(b) Discretionary in any other case.'.

Mr. Sheerman: The purpose of the amendment is to make disqualification discretionary rather than obligatory. One is even more in danger of repeating the arguments that one made on Second Reading on a short Bill such as this, especially given the time scale, so I shall be brief.

As it stands, the Bill requires all those convicted of the new offence to be mandatorily disqualified for at least 12 months, even when they were a passenger rather than the driver or where the consequences which aggravated the offence were neither intended nor foreseen by the accused personally. That could lead to a great feeling of injustice, perhaps rightly.

Most of us involved in criminal justice want offenders to cease offending as soon as possible, to learn the error of their ways as soon as possible and to return to society as fully law-abiding citizens as quickly as possible. Therefore, it is important that we do not introduce barriers to that process. The purpose of the amendment is to ensure that we encourage young people to become law-abiding, fully operating young citizens as soon as possible. Discretion should be exercised in those circumstances where the aggravated factors are outside the control of the defendant.

In some cases, a juvenile will be banned from driving two years after the offence was committed. A ban on driving imposed on a 15-year-old obviously will not come into force until that person is eligible to drive at the age of 17. However, two years is a long time. The individual may have paid his debt through some form of treatment or participation in a scheme. He may have become a model citizen. As the Minister acknowledged, young people change a great deal in a short time. They may mature and grow out of such a ghastly fashionable crime. If such a person is barred from driving for a year at the age of 17, that could hamper the process of making that young person a law-abiding member of society. The frustration felt may provide the spur for further offending.

9.30 pm

The magistrates courts and other courts are better able to make the relevant decision. They should have the discretion to decide whether a ban should be enforced. In many cases, disqualification will be the right course of action, but the courts should have the ability to exercise that discretion. The amendment aims to provide such flexibility.

We had similar arguments when considering the Criminal Justice Bill last winter. The amendments have been tabled in a positive spirit, and there are two reasons why they should be supported. The first is one of principle, because justice requires that the courts should have the ability to tailor their penalties to provide the just deserts to the individual offender. That principle underpinned the Criminal Justice Act 1991. Local magistrates and judges should have the option not to disqualify if the offender had no personal responsibility for the aggravating factors.

This argument will be repeated when we consider those found guilty of an aggravated offence who were not driving. Other offences which carry mandatory disqualification require bad or drunken driving on the part of the offender. It cannot be right to provide for mandatory disqualification for an offence with no such requirement.

The second argument in favour of the amendments is a practical one. Disqualification will often hinder the work of motor projects, which hon. Members have identified as a positive step. They divert offenders and potential offenders away from car crime and they are extremely effective.

I recently visited a motor project and was told that, to have maximum impact, that programme must consist of five essential elements. First, auto offenders should be confronted with the reality of their behaviour, and their attitudes should be challenged. That is no soft option, because the young people were made to meet victims and also relatives of those who had been killed or seriously injured. Secondly, offenders should receive education and training in the legal use of motor cars. Such training is a carrot to encourage young people. They are taught how to drive a car and to pass a test, which is a positive incentive.

The third element in any programme should obviously be practical hands-on driving experience with a view to taking a driving test which requires a full driving licence. Much of the preparatory work in many such projects is done off the road, but it is important to have some experience on the road when getting ready for a test.

Fourthly, a programme should contain a range of activities which are equally, if not more, exciting than driving illegally. Such programmes should provide excitement to young people. I know of programmes which involve climbing and other outdoor pursuits as well as difficult tasks to be completed with cars and motor cycles. They were challenging, got the young people on their mettle, tested their skill, and consumed a lot of their energy.

The fifth element in most courses is training in basic auto mechanics. I have been impressed by the enthusiasm shown by instructors and young people. All that is very good.

The sixth, unscripted, element that I would throw in is that many young people find themselves, for the first time in their lives, involved in something that interests them, and able to share their enthusiasm with a group of people who care about them. That is a very positive aspect. I wish motor schemes every success, and I would not want the Bill to harm the chances of those who run them working successfully with young people.

The opportunity for a young offender to obtain a driving licence is important. Project workers say that one of the most powerful incentives that they can offer young people is the prospect that they will eventually be able to drive legally and safely. As the Bill stands, that incentive could be eliminated in many cases because of disqualification, and because insurance companies require high premiums of recently disqualified drivers, in addition to those that they already require of drivers under the age of 25. If we stop young people who very much want to drive from doing so by that combination of factors, we might edge them into reoffending.

The courts must have flexibility in such cases, and the amendments provide alternative ways of providing it. Amendment No. 9 would make disqualification discretionary in any case, and amendment No. 10 in cases where the accused was not personally responsible for the aggravating behaviour. They are not wrecking amendments, but positive amendments which will improve the Bill, and they are sensitive to the real situation.

Mr. Anderson: I am against mandatory penalties in principle, but there are probably some cases in which they would work in justice. We should perhaps concede from the start that, in the overwhelming majority of cases, there

[Mr. Anderson]

must be disqualification, but the Minister must accept that, in a small number of cases, mandatory disqualification would not work in the interests of justice.

For example, a young man of good character may enter a vehicle, then learn that it has been taken without the owner's authority—and after travelling just a few hundred yards, it might collide with another vehicle in such a way that the gravity of the incident makes it an aggravated offence.

The Bill would impose disqualification for at least one year on such a person which would have the insurance repercussions that my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) mentioned. In a number of cases, that could be viewed by the bench or the judge as working against the prospects of rehabilitation. There must be some scope for discretion in a limited number of cases. I hope that the Government will reconsider.

Mr. John Patten: The young offender cited by the hon. Member for Swansea, East might not, in the circumstances that he described, fall foul of the law, because he might not be convicted of the basic offence under section 12 of the Theft Act 1968. He could be found not guilty, because an individual could not be found guilty of the aggravating offence unless he was found to have transgressed in respect of the basic offence.

I do not disagree with the hon. Member for Huddersfield about the value of motor projects. Any sensible programme aimed at dealing with car crime committed by young men should address prevention and punishment. Those schemes are valuable on the prevention side—as, in my opinion, are the adequate punishment and deterrence measures proposed in the Bill.

Disqualification will begin to take effect at the moment of conviction: that is, when the hands of the clock will start moving. There will be no delay, even when the offender is only 15 or 16. That may seem peculiar, but I believe that it is in the interests of justice. Between the ages of 15½ and 17, the offender might go straight, in which event it would be entirely wrong for any part of the punishment—the driving ban, for instance—to come into effect on his or, more rarely, her 17th birthday.

The ban would be recorded at an early stage. When the person concerned obtained a driving licence on, say, his 17th birthday, the endorsement would still be on that licence and it would remain there for up to four years.

Mr. Sheerman: I was under the impression that the disqualification of a person aged 15½ would not become meaningful until that person became eligible, at 17, to obtain a licence. I would take a rather different view if the Minister meant that the disqualification would be spent by the time the person reached the age of 17.

Mr. Patten: It could well be spent by that time if the offender was younger than 16 when convicted and if the driving ban was for less than 12 months. That, of course, is merely the mandatory minimum; the bench could impose a ban lasting five or 10 years or longer—although I understand that the Court of Appeal has advised against long bans, because people find it difficult to keep to them and may reoffend. That is a guideline judgment which has been handed down in a leading case.

What is the point of disqualifying a person who is not yet old enough to drive, the hon. Member for Huddersfield asks? I have given one answer: any punishment should happen from the moment of sentence. I believe that it flies in the face of natural justice to delay punishment. Secondly, if a person offends while banned from driving —even if he is still only 15 or 16; at any time before his 17th birthday—he will have committed a serious offence, as the hon. Member for Swansea, East will testify. Driving in defiance of a ban carries a sentence of six months' imprisonment, even if the offender is not yet old enough to hold a licence. The courts are free to impose a period of disqualification that extends beyond the offender's 17th birthday, if they see fit.

Surely it is right for every offender who commits and is found guilty of the more serious offence to be kept away from the wheel of a vehicle for at least 12 months. Similarly, the Bill is not concerned with who was directly responsible for the specific aggravating event; it is concerned with the illegal taking of a vehicle and its consequences. It is not relevant that a person who was a willing participant in the crime was not driving the vehicle at a particular time, or that he had not incited the driver —if I may revert to the language of an earlier set of amendments. Passengers and drivers will be equally liable, as they are for the basic section 12(1) offence in the Theft Act 1968. It makes no sense to differentiate between them for the purposes of endorsement.

This is a serious offence. The Government view it seriously and so, I believe, do the public. All who become involved should be equally liable for the penalties incurred by their criminal behaviour. I hope that, following that explanation, the hon. Member for Huddersfield will see fit to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Sheerman: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

9.45 pm

Mr. Sheerman: I beg to move amendment No. 11, in page 4, line 26, leave out subsection (2).

The First Deputy Chairman: With this, we shall take the following amendments: No. 12, in page 4, line 29, leave out 'subsection' and insert 'subsections'.

No. 13, in page 4, line 34, at end insert—

'(1AA) Where a person is convicted of an offence under section 12A of the Theft Act 1968 (aggravated vehicle-taking), a special reason for the purposes of subsection (1) above may relate either to the offence or to the offender'.

Mr. Sheerman: The Committee will be pleased to know that this is the last group of amendments. Like the previous group, they are designed to provide the courts with greater flexibility over disqualification. They approach the issue in a different way, through the use of special reasons for not disqualifying a person. The effect of the amendments is to permit the courts to regard the fact that the offender was not driving as a special reason for not disqualifying him. However, the court could still disqualify, if it thought that that was appropriate. The amendment would also enable a court to take into account special reasons relating to the offender as well as the offence.

The last group of amendments builds on the main thrust of trying to make the Bill more reasonable and effective. We strongly believe that if the Bill eventually

becomes an Act retaining some of its present imperfections, it will not address the very real problems that it should address.

Mr. John Patten: It is important to be clear about what the special reasons are, for the purposes of the legislation. Special reasons must relate to the offence, not to the offender. Special reasons do not include and have never included ill health and loss of employment. They might —I say "might" with a heavy emphasis on that word— cover an accident victim being carried to hospital in an emergency after a crash has been caused where special reasons could be pleaded, although not necessarily accepted. The courts are loth to find special reasons. The hon. Member for Huddersfield will find that section 34 of the Road Traffic Offenders Act 1988 is the legislation that governs special offences.

Amendment No. 11 would allow a court not to impose obligatory disqualification if it felt that there was a special reason—I have tried to explain, I hope to the Committee's satisfaction, what a special reason is—for not doing so: the fact that the offender was not driving the vehicle at the particular time. That runs entirely counter to the point of the Bill, which is that all those involved in the offence of illegally taking a vehicle are guilty and should be treated as such.

I can see no reason why this offence should be singled out in a way that would allow people to have taken into account the fact that inconvenience would be caused at work, when it is a long-established legal principle that special reasons do not relate to an offender's circumstances. To do so would seriously weaken the effectiveness of obligatory disqualification. I can see no reason for it.

In the light of what I have said, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Sheerman: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 4

SHORT TITLE, COMMENCEMENT AND EXTENT

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Anderson: Again I raise the question of Scotland. How can the Government justify this Bill in respect of England and Wales only? The Government say, properly, that the offence is prevalent in England and Wales and argue that there is considerable public concern about it. They say that it merits urgent attention and that the present law is inadequate in terms of its scope and penalties. What, therefore, makes Scotland different?

Is it said that the offence is less prevalent in Scotland and that degrees of latitude make the offence less frequently committed in Scotland? Is it said that there is less public concern in Scotland and that there is less urgency about the matter? Or is it said that the relevant legislation, as applied to Scotland—the 1988 Act—is such that there are no lacunae in the law as it applies to Scotland? I do not think that the Government can argue that there is a serious difference between England and Wales and Scotland, so will they assure the House that legislation for Scotland will be introduced with the same urgency?

Mr. John Patten: We are often told that Scotland is different, that it is a nation and that it has its own laws. Home Office Ministers are often lectured by Scottish Members that we should import decent bits of the Scottish law into the English and Welsh legal code. I see the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) nodding in agreement.

In Scotland, aggravated taking is dealt with under section 178 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 and under other statutory or common law offences, some of which were described graphically by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) in his brief intervention earlier this afternoon.

Measures suitable for one area of the United Kingdom may not be equally applicable to another.

Mr. Anderson: Surely the common law offences that the hon. and learned Member for Perth and Kinross (Sir N. Fairbairn) related in respect of Scotland are equally applicable in England. The Minister will be aware that the penalties available under section 178 are lower than those in England and Wales—three months imprisonment or a fine, but not both. On indictment, I believe that the maximum penalty is 12 months imprisonment. Surely the Minister is not arguing that the offence is less prevalent, or that there is less public concern, in Scotland, so why is there a difference?

Mr. Patten: I recognise that the penalties available under section 178 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 are different. The maximum penalty north of the border is 12 months imprisonment. I am not arguing that there are no differences between us. On the contrary, I am arguing that there are substantial differences between us, but all that I can say is that these are matters for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, not for the Home Secretary or myself.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 4 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Bill reported without amendment; not amended, considered.

Order for Third reading read.

Motion made and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

9.53 pm

Mr. Jim Lester (Broxtowe): I support the Bill because I know that this serious offence was drawn to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Minister of State by the chief constable of Nottinghamshire two years ago. I rise simply to ask whether it is possible for the Home Office to publish a pamphlet on the change to the law that can be widely distributed to sixth forms and to many others who commit this offence—many of whom have been charged once but have repeatedly offended—so that our young people understand how serious it is to steal a car, to drive it dangerously and in some cases to set it on fire wilfully? We want to ensure that they understand the way in which the law has changed and how it can be reinforced. I ask my right hon. Friend the Minister to find out whether that can be undertaken as early as possible on completion of the Bill's passage.

9.54 pm

Mr. John Patten: My hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) makes a constructive suggestion. I know how long he has been concerned about the aggravated taking of vehicles and the mayhem caused by young men in parts of Nottinghamshire over the past couple of years. His concern has been reflected by the chief constable.

I have not contemplated production of the type of leaflet to which my hon. Friend referred, but it is a good idea. We shall try to do more about car crime during 1992, and I shall reflect on my hon. Friend's comments to see whether we can accommodate his request.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science—the Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon)—is on the Front Bench with me. We know how important it is to educate children, sometimes even those in their late primary school years, about the offending temptations with which they may be faced. Last week, I was at a Salford school, having visited one of those motor projects to which the hon. Member for Huddersfield referred. I was struck by one of the comments of the primary school headmistress. She said that she felt that children aged between seven and 11 were at particular risk of being cloned by their elder brothers or elder friends into people with the same offending habits. We may well want to follow my hon. Friend's suggestion.

I believe that the Bill, as it goes to another place, has been properly and fully scrutinised on Second Reading and in Committee—as will be shown in *Hansard*. I hope that this excellent measure will receive not only the assent of the House but the strong support of everyone who has been so concerned about this issue during 1991. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Teachers' Pay and Conditions

9.56 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Michael Fallon): I beg to move,

That the draft Teachers' Pay and Conditions Act 1987 (Continuation) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 20th November, be approved.

In each of the past two years, Parliament has approved continuation orders extending the life of the Teachers' Pay and Conditions Act 1987. Last year, an order was needed to ensure that the recommendations of the Interim Advisory Committee on School Teachers' Pay and Conditions in 1991-92 could be given effect. The IAC reported for the last time in January this year and, under the terms of the 1990 continuation order, the 1987 Act is due to expire on 31 March 1992.

During the debate one year ago, my hon. Friend the Minister of State assured the House that new arrangements for deciding teachers' pay would be in place by 31 March 1992, and so they are. The School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Act 1991 received Royal Assent on 25 July. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has appointed the eight members of the schoolteachers' review body under the chairmanship of Sir Graham Day. On 20 September, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science asked the review body to submit its first report in January 1992, making recommendations on teachers' pay and conditions in the year commencing 1 April 1992.

There is, however, a need for a further continuation order, for entirely technical reasons. Before my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State makes the order giving statutory force to the 1992 schoolteachers' pay and conditions document, he is required under the 1991 Act to consult interested parties on the review body's recommendations on the Government's proposals for implementation. He has also agreed, following the practice adopted in previous years and as specifically requested by the employers and the teachers' unions, to consult the same interested parties on the details of the draft pay document giving effect to the Government's recommendations. We will, of course, move as quickly as possible, but it is most unlikely that my right hon. and learned Friend will be in a position to make the first pay and conditions order under the new Act immediately upon the expiry of the 1987 Act on 31 March 1992.

Until the first new pay and conditions order is made under the new Act, the 1987 Act needs to be kept in being for a very short time for a very specific and limited purpose—to ensure that all teachers continue to be covered by the existing pay and conditions order made under that Act. Section 6(3) of the 1987 Act provides for statutory conditions of service to continue to apply to existing contracts until new provision is made.

Teachers who enter with new contracts of employment after the Act expires will not, however, be covered. Therefore, we must ensure tonight that there is a smooth transition between the old and new pay and conditions orders and that the provisions of the 1991 pay document will continue to apply in the case of contracts of employment entered into after 31 March 1992, but before the new order giving effect to the 1992 pay and conditions document comes into force.

That is why we are obliged to take the House's time to seek approval for the final continuation order. I commend the order to the House to afford continued statutory protection to the very small number of teachers taking up new contracts of employment during any hiatus between the current date of expiry of the 1987 Act and the coming into force of the first pay and conditions order under the 1991 Act. The 1987 Act will finally be repealed alongside the making of the first pay and conditions order under the 1991 Act.

The continuation order has no bearing on arrangements for next year's pay settlement. The new schoolteachers review body is hard at work. It has received evidence from the teachers' associations, the employers and the Department of Education and Science, and has listened to the representations of all those bodies. As I have already explained, it will present its first report to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister around the end of January next year. That report will make recommendations on the pay increase to be given to schoolteachers next year, with particular regard to any modifications which might be introduced to the system of selective payments to increase the flexibility of employers in meeting the needs of recruitment and retention. It will also consider how the pay of schoolteachers might be more closely related to their performance, in line with the principles of the citizens charter.

The review body will recommend precisely as it sees fit. The Government for their part have given a firm commitment to implement the recommendations of the review body unless there are clear and compelling reasons to do otherwise. I am confident that the work of the review body will reinforce teachers' professionalism and raise still further the esteem in which society holds our teachers.

In the meantime, this order is required simply to ensure a smooth transition between the old and new statutory arrangements and to ensure that there are no gaps in the statutory provision for the pay and conditions of schoolteachers. As such, I commend it to the House.

10.2 pm

Mr. Derek Fatchett (Leeds, Central): I thank the Minister for the way in which he introduced the debate and set out the technical reasons for the order. We shall certainly not oppose the order because, as the Minister rightly explained, it deals with a particular provision relating to new teachers and their contracts of employment. While we have had our differences with the Government about the interim advisory committee and the way in which it has worked, it might be worthwhile at this stage, in what might be our final debate on the work of the interim advisory committee, to thank its members for the work that they have done in the past few years. They may not always have turned up with what teachers would have wished, but I am sure that there has been a great acceptance of the way in which they have carried out a very difficult task. We wish those who worked on the interim advisory committee well and we look forward to the next phase in the determination of teachers' pay which is the work of the pay review body under the chairmanship of Sir Graham Day.

As the Minister knows, we had our disagreements on the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Bill and on the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions (No. 2) Bill last year. To get to the pay review body involved an interesting and long gestation period by Ministers. It would not be appropriate to go through the arguments again today, but I suspect that teachers will judge the effectiveness of the pay review body not by our arguments on the Floor of the House or in Committee last year, but merely by the way in which it delivers. We expressed our reservations about the conditions attached to the pay review body—both the preconditions and the ability of the Minister or the Secretary of State to interfere at a later date. We look forward with interest to what the pay review body will report in January. We note that the Government are asking that organisation to bear in mind an increase in line with inflation, and feel that that may well not be sufficient, but we await the outcome with interest.

I agree with the Minister that there is a need for a consultation process. It is almost unique to hear a Minister —particularly, perhaps, the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science—talk about the need for consultation. It has not been a characteristic of the Department of Education and Science in the past few years —*[Interruption.]* The Minister seems not to accept that, but if he talked to teachers about one or two recent arbitrary changes in education provision, he might well hear the view that there could have been more consultation. We welcome the promise of consultation on the report of the pay review body and hope that when that consultation takes place the Government will listen to the views expressed. It is no use having a one-way consultation process: the Government must listen.

We recognise the need for and the purpose of the order, and we shall not oppose it today.

10.7 pm

Mr. George Walden (Buckingham): I begin by echoing what the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) said about the interim advisory body. I have always felt a little uncomfortable about the interim stage. The Government cannot say that because, by definition, the Government have to be comfortable with everything, but it has not been a profitable period for teachers in terms of their pay.

It seems that it is impossible—or should be impossible —to discuss any aspect of teachers' pay, however technical, without relating it to the quality of teachers' performance and teaching methods. If my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State does not object, I should like to pay tribute to the Government's overall strategy. While the Government are rightly pursuing the pay review body, which I believe and certainly hope will result in a substantial rise in teachers' pay, they are simultaneously engaged—not before time—in asking serious questions about some of the methods used in our schools, most recently in primary schools.

I hope that you, Mr. Speaker, will agree that there is a fundamental connection between teachers' pay—and the mechanics of it—the esteem in which teachers are held and the methods that they use. One of the main reasons why teachers have fallen in public esteem is that the public have lost confidence in teaching methods, which, in turn, seem to have lost contact with common sense as perceived by the man on the Clapham omnibus.

In supporting the order—one could scarcely do otherwise—I should like to stress that the way forward does not lie merely in improvements in teachers' pay, necessary though they are. The way forward must also lie

[Mr. George Walden]

in a two-track policy by which we continue to promote a public debate on some of the catastrophic failed philosophies of the past. Last week, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science said that he was not going to tell teachers how to teach in primary schools or pre-empt the outcome of the inquiry that he had just announced. He then proceeded to make some characteristically common-sense comments which might seem to carping critics to pre-empt that inquiry, but who cares about that, provided his comments made good sense, which they did?

I commend the Government's handling of the pay review body and their general approach of marrying this policy, which will lead to higher pay for teachers, with a determined critique of the elements of teachers' performance which need to be discussed and openly and rigorously criticised.

10.9 pm

Mr. Fallon: This has been a brief but interesting debate. I thank those who took part in it, and I echo the gratitude that they expressed to the interim advisory committee as the end of its days draws nigh.

I was a little surprised to hear the hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Fatchett) looking forward to the review body's recommendations. We should not forget that his party voted against a review body. Even though tonight's debate has been reasonably even-tempered, we shall lose no opportunity when the time comes next year to remind teachers who supported a review body and who opposed it.

The hon. Member for Leeds, Central suggested that we wanted the increase from the review body to be in line with inflation. That is not quite what we suggested, which was that it should have regard to affordability. The hon. Gentleman has read one too many union submissions to that body.

My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Walden) must be right to say that pay should increasingly be linked to performance. That idea is in the Secretary of State's remit letter to the review body. I look forward to that beginning to apply to the teaching profession. It is long overdue and it will be warmly welcomed by senior and successful classroom teachers, who can look forward to seeing the additional efforts and successes that they have achieved in the classroom being properly rewarded in their pay structure.

In general, we look forward to the recommendations of the review body——

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be wrong for a local education authority to pay teachers and others to go around and interfere when a ballot has taken place for a school to opt for grant-maintained status? The headmaster of a school in my constituency, Alan Bentley, says that people claiming to represent the LEA are calling on parents and trying to persuade them against voting to give their school grant-maintained status. Is that not wholly wrong?

Mr. Fallon: That is an extraordinary allegation and it sounds a disgraceful state of affairs. If my hon. Friend will send me the details, I will have the matter investigated.

We are confident that the review body will do much to enhance the status and professionalism of the teaching profession. I commend the order to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved.

That the draft Teachers' Pay and Conditions Act 1987 (Continuation) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 20th November, be approved.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Mr. Speaker: With the leave of the House, I shall put together the next seven motions on the Order Paper.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

DOUBLE TAXATION

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Isle of Man) Order 1991 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 4th November.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Morocco) Order 1991 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 4th November.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Papua New Guinea) Order 1991 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 4th November.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Czechoslovkia) Order 1991 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 4th November.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Iceland) Order 1991 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 12th November.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Finland) Order 1991 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 12th November.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Denmark) Order 1991 be made in the form of the draft laid before this House on 12th November.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

VAT (BUILDINGS AND LAND)

That the Value Added Tax (Buildings and Land) Order 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 2569), dated 13th November 1991, a copy of which was laid before this House on 14th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

CUSTOMS DUTIES

That the Customs Duties (ECSC) (Amendment No. 6) Order 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 2583), dated 15th November 1991, a copy of which was laid before this House on 18th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

CRIMINAL LAW

That the draft Criminal Justice Act 1988 (Designated Countries and Territories) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 25th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 102 (European Standing Committees).

INDIRECT TAXATION

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 6762/89 and the Supplementary Explanatory Memorandum submitted by H. M. Customs and Excise on 15th July 1991, relating to completion of the Internal Market and approximation of indirect taxes, 6641/90 and the Supplementary Explanatory Memoranda submitted by H. M. Customs and Excise on 12th November 1990, 17th May 1991, 15th October 1991 and 25th November 1991, relating to the common system of Value Added Tax, 6642/90 and the Supplementary Explanatory Memorandum submitted by H. M. Customs and Excise on 12th November 1991, relating to administrative co-operation in the field of indirect taxation, and 9670/90 and the Supplementary Explanatory Memorandum submitted by H. M. Customs and Excise on 12th November 1991, relating to the general arrangements for the holding, movement and control of products subject to excise duty; and congratulates the Government on negotiating an agreement on indirect tax rates, which in particular safeguards the Government's right to continue its existing zero rates for VAT and an agreement on the VAT technical system which provides for the effective operation of the intra-Community VAT system after 1992, and includes provision for the continuation of intra-Community tax-free shopping for a transitional period, together with an agreement on enhanced administrative co-operation arrangements which will help to combat fraud; supports the proposals on the movement and control of excise goods, which in particular include provision for the continuation of intra-Community duty-free shopping for a transitional period, and for minimum indicative limits to distinguish between commercial and private cross-border transactions in alcohol and tobacco; and welcomes the significant progress which these agreements and proposals represent toward the abolition of fiscal frontiers and the creation of the single market.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

Question agreed to.

Ex-Service Men

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Neil Hamilton.]*

10.14 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): I am delighted to have the opportunity briefly to raise the subject of Government policies affecting ex-service men. It is particularly apposite that I should do so, because I believe that my constituency of Gosport contains more service men and probably more retired service personnel than any other, and a very fine contribution to the constituency they make too, although, of course, the subject is one of general application throughout the United Kingdom.

The Royal British Legion, which deals with more cases of ex-service men's welfare than any other organisation, draws on its experience to say that it would be extremely helpful if, in dealing with issues, it could deal with one Government Department. The Royal British Legion finds that, as it deals with 15 or 16 Government Departments, there can be problems of complication in dealing with different Departments, there can be duplication of information provided to the Ministry of Defence, the Department of Social Security, the Department of Health and the Department of the Environment, and there can be delays arising from that duplication.

In the case, for instance, of an invalided service man, there can be a special problem with the individual's health, there can be a problem with his housing if he is living in service accommodation, there can be a problem with the Department of Employment if he is seeking a job, and there can be a problem with the Department of Social Security.

The suggestion of the Royal British Legion is that there should be a Department for ex-service men's and ex-service women's affairs—a Department which would be comparable with departments of veterans' affairs in other countries. In other countries, such departments are found to be extremely helpful. For example, in the United States, Canada and Australia, the structure operates to provide one department in which one Minister can answer for all matters relating to all veterans' and ex-service men's affairs and can co-ordinate the work that is required in dealing with their special problems.

Why do we need a special Department? Why should ex-service personnel be treated differently from any other group of people? There are 18 million service men and women and their dependants, and their experience and service exposes them to special strains and pressures. Much is demanded of service personnel, as we all know. Service life provides its own framework, which is of great assistance to individuals when they are in their service occupation, but some people find that, on withdrawing from service life, the loss of that framework provides them with special problems. Most, of course, adapt very well. They are capable, adaptable people and in most cases there are no problems. However, I know from my constituency experience that when there are problems, they tend to be multiple ones. There would be great benefit in having one Department.

It is not a new suggestion, nor is it a party political suggestion, that there should be a Department for ex-service men's affairs. The hon. Member for Knowsley, North (Mr. Howarth), with all-party support, presented a ten-minute Bill on 26 February 1991. My hon. Friend the

[Mr. Peter Viggers]

Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey), in a written question to the Prime Minister which was answered on 13 June, again asked whether there could be a separate Department for ex-service men's affairs. The Prime Minister answered that he did not consider that such a Department would be appropriate. I respect the fact that the request was rejected on that occasion, but I hope that the idea will be borne in mind by Ministers.

If Ministers consider the matter further, it is suggested—this view would be shared by the Royal British Legion and by the Officers Pension Society—that it is the self-evident responsibility of the Ministry of Defence to defend this country and that it is the responsibility of the Department of Social Security to deal with pensions and social affairs generally. The general view, therefore, would be that it would be better to include a separate Department and a separate Minister within the Department of Social Security if that idea should find attraction.

In dealing with service pensions, it would be wrong and churlish of me not to pay respect to what the Government have already done in respect of service pensions. The Government's pay and pensions record is quite outstanding. One of the very first actions of the Government when they were elected in 1979 was to rectify the problem which had been created by the previous Labour Government, who held back service pay as part of their pay restraint policy, in an attempt to contol inflation.

One of our first acts in government was to increase service pay by a massive 32·1 per cent. That in itself was of great assistance in rectifying the problems of service pensions, because pensions are calibrated against pay. As a Government, we have consistently held service pay and pensions at a reasonable level for those currently serving and now retiring.

On a separate issue, I am proud to have been personally associated with a five-year campaign to win pensions for the first time for a completely different group of women, the pre-1950 widows who, until 1979, had no service pension at all. That anomaly has also been rectified by the Government. I am proud that more than 20,000 pre-1950 widows are or have been enjoying service pensions because of the Government's actions in introducing such pensions in November 1979.

It was also this Government who recognised the special problems of the war widows whose husbands had served before 1973. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence introduced a new extra ex-gratia war widow's pension of a further £40 per week, making that payment tax-free so that it would not count against income-related benefits. The Government's record is therefore a proud one.

Nevertheless, there are anomalies, and the Officers' Pensions Society has been assiduous, as always, in pointing them out to the Government. I could recite a long catalogue of them, but the first major one relates to the disparities in retired pay, which depends on the level of remuneration of the individual officer or man at the date of his retirement. There are serious pension troughs. Those who retired under the 1956 code of pensions, for instance, are worse off than those who retired under the 1950 or 1945 pension codes. Similarly, those who retired in 1976 or 1977 are in a serious pension trough. The amounts can be substantial.

I should like my hon. Friend the Minister to give serious consideration at the earliest opportunity to introducing a floor—a minimum level of pension—for each rank. It is wrong that an individual of one rank can be paid a lower pension than an individual in a lower rank simply because the individual in the higher rank happened to retire in the wrong month or year and is thereby disadvantaged.

My second major point relates to a subject that I have been pursuing for many years. I raise it this evening because I fear that there is a grave risk that the Government are going seriously wrong on one point which, although it affects only a tiny number of people, is extremely important. The war pensions scrutiny report was due to be discussed by the Central Advisory Committee on War Pensions on 5 December. It is interesting that that report is being considered by a committee which is chaired by our noble Friend, Lord Henley, who is a Minister at the Department of Social Security, not the Ministry of Defence. That is a good example of the problem of the multiplicity of Departments to which I drew attention earlier.

The war pensions scrutiny report highlights the surprising point that whereas the Ministry of Defence is responsible for defence pensions, the Department of Social Security is responsible for war widows' pensions. At the moment, an officer's war widow has the right to have her pension restored if she remarries and is then bereaved a second time. However, the opposite is true for a widow of an other rank. If that widow remarries, she receives a gratuity but does not have the right to have her pension restored. This is a serious issue: I know from my constituency experience that as, fortunately, people are living longer, it is becoming increasingly likely that elderly ladies will wish to remarry, but they are faced with an agonising choice, knowing that, if they remarry, they will forfeit the service pension. That is an extremely serious point.

It worries me that the scrutiny committee may be moving towards taking the view that the pension arrangements that apply to other ranks should apply in the case of officers' widows as well. That would be wrong. To deprive war widows of the right to have their pensions restored at the time of second bereavement would be socially wrong. All widows in receipt of pensions should be in a position where it is advantageous and attractive for them to remarry, recognising that they will forfeit their pension during the period of remarriage, but that they have an automatic right to have the pension restored should they be bereaved a second time. That will encourage second marriages, which is socially desirable. It is proper and fair for us to encourage remarriage in that way.

I could mention a catalogue of other anomalies in the treatment of service pensioners and their widows, but I hope that I have given enough examples to persuade my right hon. Friend the Minister that problems exist which could be diminished by creating a single Department to deal with the affairs of ex-service men and women.

10.25 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) on securing this debate. I am sure that the issues that he has raised are of interest to many

hon. Members. I am aware that, for several years, he has taken a particular interest in the provision made for service personnel and their dependants after retirement.

My hon. Friend suggested that a separate Department of ex-service men's affairs should be established within Government. I understand that such departments exist in several countries. However, there is a tendency for the interest to centre on medical programmes for veterans. Such programmes are unnecessary in the United Kingdom, because ex-service personnel, like other citizens, have access to the national health service. In the particular case of those who have disabilities which are attributed to their service in the armed forces, or of the dependants of those who die as a result of their service, special provision is made in the Department of Social Security through the war pensions scheme. Associated with that scheme is the war pensions welfare service, which is available to assist war pensioners and their families.

As my hon. Friend said, in the United Kingdom several Government Departments are involved in matters which have an impact on ex-service personnel Major social and welfare provision for them is rightly integrated with that for the population as a whole, as is the case with the national health service.

My hon. Friend referred to service pensions. As the House will be aware, we have in place a pension scheme for the armed forces which is specially designed to recognise and provide for the type of careers that are available to service personnel. For those who are able to serve for a full career, which will normally end at the age of 55, the scheme provides benefits at a level which in most types of employment are not available until the age of 60 and possibly 65.

The armed forces scheme provides for those who retire at 55 a pension at approximately half the rate of the military salary that they received at the date of retirement and a lump sum of three times the rate of pension. However, the career of many service personnel must end much earlier than the age of 55, so the pension scheme must be flexible. For those who have to retire earlier, a pension is awarded for immediate payment after as little as 16 years' service for officers, counting service from the age of 21. For other ranks the minimum requirement is 22 years' service, counted from the age of 18.

Not only are those pensions brought into payment immediately, but, in addition to taking account of the length of reckonable service given, they include a further element to allow for the early termination of the service career. Those pensions are also accompanied by a lump sum of three times the annual rate of pension awarded.

On the relationship between the rate of pay earned on the last day of service and the amount of pension which will be awarded, I confirm that the appropriate annual rates of military salary in force at the date of retirement, not those enforced earlier or later, are used as the basis for calculating pension scales. That is one aspect of what is known as the "code system" under which service pensions are awarded.

Another aspect of the code is that pensions are based on what is known as a "representative" rate of pay for each rank, rather than on the rate received by each member. Thus, although service men of the same rank may receive different rates of pay, perhaps because they need specialist skills, they will be awarded exactly the same rate of pension provided that they retire on the same date and have given the same length of reckonable service.

The representative rate of pay for each rank is taken from the military salary payable to those who have a combatant role, and I am sure that the House would accept the logic of that.

I recognise that, although the arrangements achieve uniformity of awards within each "code" period, they also have the effect that those who retire on either side of the date on which pay increases come into effect will receive different awards of pension. Those differences may be appreciable if the pay award is large. That is not an ideal situation, but it is only one aspect of a pension system, which is recognised as having many advantageous features for service men.

The impact of increased living costs on those who rely on a service pension as their primary source of income in retirement is not overlooked. Service pensions are protected against inflation by index linking. In common with other public service schemes, that takes the form of annual increases, which reflect in full previous movement in the retail prices index.

While the purchasing power of pensions is maintained in that way, the increases awarded are likely to differ from those which occur in the rates of pay over a corresponding period. The difference can be in either direction. Under conditions of high price inflation, pensions in payment may move ahead at a faster rate than is the case for levels of pay. At other times, pay rates may increase at a faster rate than the level of price inflation then being experienced.

The two different mechanisms—the award of pensions according to the current rates of pay and the subsequent protection of those pensions against inflation by index-linking—do not achieve a perfect balance. Each is generally accepted as appropriate to its purpose, but, when viewed over an extended period, variations in the pensions received by individuals who retire at different times are likely to occur.

Only one other factor can have that effect. Pension schemes are not static, and the armed forces pension scheme is no exception. Particularly in the period since the end of world war two, there has been an increasing emphasis in this country on financial provision for retirement. That has been reflected in the increasing development of occupational pension schemes. Consequently, the nature and structure of the scheme for members of the armed forces has been subject to review and significant improvement on a number of occasions. Improvements have also been introduced at other times, as the scheme keeps pace with general developments, especially those adopted by other public service schemes, in line with the main thrust of Government policy on provision for retirement.

In making such improvements, a particular and important principle has to be taken into account—that of non-retrospection. Improvements are available to those who are serving at the time that a change is implemented and who retire subsequently. Eligibility is not extended to include those who had already retired. The reason for that is well understood. Any improvement increases the future costs of the scheme, but those will normally arise progressively, as people who are eligible for the improved terms retire, or otherwise qualify over an extended period. If all existing pensioners were also made eligible, there would be an immediate and, by comparison, disproportionate escalation in cost. In those circumstances, worthwhile improvements would be difficult to achieve.

[Mr. Archie Hamilton]

I have gone into these matters at some length because it is important to make three points. There are a variety of reasons why the pensions of individuals who have similar rank and length of service, but who retire at different times, may differ. The general considerations and principles which give rise to that for retired members of the armed forces are potentially applicable to the generality of occupational schemes, both within the public service and outside.

Action which was specifically designed to modify existing pensions in payment, so as to diminish differences which may exist today, would be contrary to long-established principles and practices.

My hon. Friend mentioned minimum rates of pension. I note the suggestion that minimum rates of pension should be established and that all service personnel whose pension is below such a minimum should have it increased accordingly. To decide what those minima should be would, in itself, be an arbitrary exercise. More important, it would be contrary to normal principles to proceed in that way. All existing pensions were correctly calculated in accordance with the provisions in force at the time of retirement. They have subsequently been increased through index linking. I acknowledge the attraction for those at the lower end of any comparison to levelling-up process, but I cannot agree that we should undertake it. The implications are widespread and extremely costly.

My hon. Friend mentioned the case of war widows who marry again and subsequently lose their pensions on being widowed for a second time. He pointed out that other ranks are treated differently from officers' widows. As he said, the whole question is being considered by my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, who is well aware of the problem and is addressing it. It is basically the responsibility of the Department of Social Security, and it would not be appropriate for me to comment on how its work is progressing.

I shall now spell out the main provisions of the armed forces pension scheme as it applies to service widows. The widows of service men who retired before 30 March 1973 generally receive a pension which is one third of that received by their husband. Service given from 31 March 1973 onwards generates widow's pension at one half of that received by the husband. On subsequent remarriage, entitlement to a widow's pension ceases, except to the extent that there is an entitlement to a widow's guaranteed minimum pension.

Except for some small variations in the effective date of the change from one third to one half rate, these provisions correspond with those of other public service schemes. As with other improvements, the increased proportion of a husband's pension payable to his widow was not extended to include those who had already retired.

The point has been made that the relatively lower rates of pension received by those men who retired at various times in the past also result in lower pensions for their widows. I acknowledge that that is so and that there is a direct proportional relationship between the two. However, I cannot accept that that is in some way wrong.

In each case, the pensions that result are a reflection of the entitlements of the scheme at the time when the service was given. Of course, they have the significant benefit of being fully index-linked. I recognise that it would be attractive for those concerned if their pensions could be made greater, but, as I said earlier, it is a basic principle in the management of occupational pension schemes that improvements are not made retrospectively. Without it, we would not have been able to achieve the benefits that are available nowadays.

Mention has been made of the position of widows who lose their pension on remarriage and who are unfortunately widowed again. The position under the armed forces scheme is that an entitlement to a widow's pension ceases, or is restricted to the guaranteed minimum pension, in the event of remarriage. That applies also in other public service schemes, although I am aware that it is not always the case in the private sector. In public service schemes, however, the view is taken that the effect of remarriage is to terminate the condition of widowhood.

I am aware of the concern that, under these arrangements, the former widow may find herself in difficult financial circumstances if she is widowed for a second time. I believe that it is widely known that my Department has discretionary powers to restore the original service widow's pension to payment, if circumstances are felt to be appropriate. Indeed, it has been made clear that restoration will normally be agreed if a widow is worse off on second widowhood than when she was receiving her widow's pension.

It has been suggested that restoration should be automatic, thus enabling widows to remarry with absolute confidence that, whatever may happen, they will have a service pension to fall back on if they are again left on their own. My hon. Friend referred to such circumstances. However, to operate in such a way would be to make assumptions about future events. The result of remarriage may enhance a former widow's pension as her second husband may provide for her in the event of his death. Other events may also affect her financial circumstances. There are factors that could be sensibly allowed for if and when the need for a decision on restoration arises.

Under our current arrangements, I accept that there is no guarantee that a widow's pension will be restored once entitlement has ceased. However, there can be a reasonable degree of assurance that it will be restored if there is a need. There is no real prospect that a widow will be left worse off than she had been originally. I believe that that is fair to both sides.

We are talking about public money. It would be wrong to restore a war widow's pension if she was widowed the second time and her second husband was a man of financial probity who was able to leave her in comfortable circumstances. In that event, restoration would mean that that widow was being paid out of public funds when she did not have an obvious need for that money.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the matter and for the opportunity to explain my Ministry's position on it.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at nineteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 10 December 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

COMMERCIAL AND PRIVATE BANK BILL *[Lords]*

Motion made, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Amendment made: in clause 6, page 5, line 19, leave out "paragraph" and insert "sub-paragraph". *[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Question, That the Bill, as amended, be now read the Third time, *put and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed, with amendment.

TORQUAY MARKET BILL *[Lords]*

Read the Third time, and passed.

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Pupil-teacher Ratio

1. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will state the current pupil-teacher ratio, and that of May 1979; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Michael Fallon): In January 1979 there were 18·9 pupils per teacher in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in England. By January this year the ratio had fallen to 17·2 pupils per teacher.

Mr. Greenway: Will my hon. Friend accept the congratulations and thanks of parents, children, teachers and all concerned with education on the great improvement on the 1979 figures? Will he also confirm that overall teacher vacancies have improved by 30 per cent. in the past year? Will he consider conducting an inquiry into what the optimum pupil-teacher ratio should be for each age of children, because that ratio will differ? Some people could not teach five children very well, while others can teach 75 perfectly well.

Mr. Fallon: The situation today is a big improvement on the 1970s. What is most important is how classes are taught and how a school manages its teaching staff, rather than the actual number employed or the number of pupils per class.

Mr. Fatchett: Will the Minister confirm that since the previous election in 1987 the number of youngsters in primary schools who are taught in classes of more than 30 has increased by 100,000? We now face the disgraceful situation of nearly 1 million children in primary schools being taught in classes of more than 30. Are those figures unacceptable even to the Government? Is it not true that Ministers would not accept such class sizes for their children in the private sector?

Mr. Fallon: Primary class sizes were much bigger in the 1970s under the last Labour Government. I cannot confirm the figures that the hon. Gentleman has given. I repeat that what is important is how a school deploys its teaching staff, not the number of people it happens to have on its books.

Mr. Anthony Coombs: I welcome the significant improvement in teacher-pupil ratios since the last Labour Government were in power. My hon. Friend should be aware how much we welcome his statement and that of the Secretary of State, which concentrate on how children are taught in schools rather than on the number of teachers employed. In that regard, does my hon. Friend agree that the commission that the Secretary of State has set up under Professor Alexander to look at the way in which primary school children are taught is particularly welcome? In that way we shall be able to improve standards of education in primary schools.

Mr. Fallon: The statement that my right hon. and learned Friend made about primary education has been warmly welcomed by parents right across the country who are increasingly concerned about the methods and organisation of delivering primary education in our schools.

City Technology Colleges

2. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much money has to date been contributed by the private sector to city technology colleges.

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mr. Tim Eggar): By the end of the colleges' last school year on 31 August, nearly £19 million had been contributed to city technology colleges by the private sector. More than £30 million has been committed in all.

Mr. Grocott: Can the Minister confirm that in the last financial year, 1990-91, no less than 88 per cent. of the capital costs of the CTC programme, including those of the Telford college in my constituency, were paid for by the taxpayer? Industrialists have been notably unwilling and unforthcoming in responding to the Government's requests. Can the Minister allay my suspicions about this by assuring me that as a result of a few industrialists having contributed to the programme we shall not find the names of certain chairmen and managing directors appearing in the new year honours list? Since we the taxpayers are having to pay for the programme, can the Minister at least listen to the taxpayers on this and spend these huge sums of money on all our children and not just a few?

Mr. Eggar: The hon. Gentleman should be doing the listening. He should be listening to parents in his constituency who have opted overwhelmingly for the CTC, with more than 500 applications for 248 places last year and with 660 applications for next year. Before he

makes wild aspersions about other people, he should visit the school in his constituency, where he will find excellent education going on.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Will the Minister pay tribute to the generosity of Mr. Harry Djanogly, who gave £1 million of his personal money to see that Nottingham has a CTC? Will he confirm that the capital cost of the school is no different from the cost of building a new school anywhere, that the funding per pupil is no different compared with any other state pupils and that the evil campaign by Nottingham county council would deny the most deprived children in our inner city a first-class education?

Mr. Eggar: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. Nottingham CTC is extremely attractive to parents and is very well supported. The attitude of Nottinghamshire local education authority has been quite disgraceful by any standards. Why should it be seeking to deprive children of a first-class education? I wish that Labour Members would make their position clear. Do they really want to deprive parents of the kind of choice that their policies would mean in Nottingham, Telford and elsewhere?

Mr. Flannery: Why does the Minister not talk reality about the city technology colleges? He knows as well as I do that, like the assisted places scheme, they are another step towards privatisation of the education system. The inspectorate is another example. The hon. Gentleman knows full well that the CTCs were intended to be paid for by private employers. That failed, so the Government are taking money from the taxpayer to the tune, with the assisted places scheme, of more than £500 million— *[Interruption.]* That is what it is costing, based on the Government's own figures. That is why I ask the Minister to admit the reality of the situation, with that amount of money being removed from the state system of education.

Mr. Eggar: The Labour party will simply never understand the position. Parents want choice. Whether they live in the inner cities or elsewhere, they want choice to send their children to independent schools with the benefit of an assisted place, choice to send their children to grammar schools and choice under the new technology schools initiative. Choice is hated by the Labour party because it cannot control what parents and children want if choice is offered. That is the old-fashioned type of socialism that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Mr. Flannery) has always pursued, and unfortunately the occupants of the Labour Front Bench have taken a lead from him rather than from more sensible parents.

Teachers' Pay

3. **Mr. Andrew MacKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the proposed independent pay review body for teachers.

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): The school teachers' review body has been asked to make recommendations on the pay and conditions of school teachers in 1992-93. It will report to the Prime Minister in the new year.

Mr. MacKay: Parents in my constituency are anxious that teachers should be properly remunerated because teachers with low morale are bad teachers, and they are particularly concerned that there might just be a slight possibility of a Labour Government next year, with a resultant cut in teachers' real pay, as happened when Labour was last in office. Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that under Conservative rule there has been a 30 per cent. increase in real terms in teachers' pay and that there was an increase of only 6 per cent. during the last Labour Government?

Mr. Clarke: My hon. Friend is correct. There has been a substantial advance in real-terms pay under our Administration, and this year the pay award that has been made for the current year is increasing the teachers' pay bill overall by 11·3 per cent. I agree with my hon. Friend that raising standards requires having a good quality teaching force, properly rewarded and encouraged. The public welcome the way we are treating teachers as a professional body by taking the advice of the independent review body, and we look forward to Graham Day and his colleagues producing the kind of advice that we require about how our teachers should be rewarded. The fact that Labour Members voted against the review body approach to teachers' pay should provide the warning that my hon. Friend described.

Mr. Skinner: Why should teachers have to submit to an incomes policy when the bosses made a 22·7 per cent. average increase last year? What is good enough for the bosses should be good enough for the teachers.

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman has just been reminded of the shabby teachers' pay record of the Labour Government whom he supported some years ago— *[Interruption.]* It was his Government then, although their successors may not be represented on the Front Bench in quite the way that the hon. Gentleman would wish.

We have set up a review body to advise the Government on the proper remuneration for teachers. It is a status that we give to very few public servants, but we are giving teachers a special status because we realise that their professionalism and commitment are essential to a good teaching service.

Examination Results

4. **Mr. Butterfill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the relationship between spending by local education authorities and examination results.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: There appears to be no direct relationship between the level of education spending and examination results. Some authorities obtain good results at much lower cost than others.

Mr. Butterfill: Can my right hon. and learned Friend confirm reports in *The Guardian* earlier this year that the 12 local authorities with the worst record in English, mathematics and modern language results were all controlled by the Liberal Democrats or the Labour party?

Mr. Clarke: I am not sure whether I can confirm that off the cuff, but *The Guardian* sometimes gets it right. The figures that I have before me certainly show that the highest spending authorities comprise almost entirely Labour and the occasional Liberal authority and that those have some of the worst results. There is an enormous gap between inner London boroughs, which spent £2,745

per pupil in 1989-90, under the old Inner London education authority, and Kent, which spent £1,570 per pupil in a comparable year and achieved much better results.

Mr. O'Hara: Will the Secretary of State confirm that local authorities that perform badly in the league tables, which cover a very narrow spectrum of examination results, often spend more on pupils with special educational needs? A local authority that spends less on special educational needs does so either because it has less incidence of such needs or because it is in dereliction of its duties to pupils with those needs. If it has less incidence of such needs, does it not follow that it should score highly in the narrow spectrum of examination results for the most able pupils?

Mr. Clarke: I am aware of no evidence that pupils with special educational needs are distributed unevenly across the country. Special educational needs include pupils with physical disabilities or particular difficulties in learning. It is simply not true that those needs correlate with high spending local authorities. There are great discrepancies in the amount spent by one authority compared with another, and in the amount that local authorities spend on central administration, but there is little correlation with the results. When we produce the seven-year-olds' test results local authority by local authority, good results will be shown for some authorities serving comparatively deprived urban areas, while shockingly poor results will be shown for others serving similar areas. The quality of education rather than the amount spent is what counts.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: Is it fair for young pupils in an area controlled by a Labour council to have their prospects of good examination results considerably reduced? Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that, year after year, the examination results of Wolverhampton education authority—a high-spending council—are in the bottom half of the national league? Is it any wonder that I now plead with my right hon. and learned Friend to intervene on behalf of pupils and parents who wish to move their children over the border to Staffordshire because they are fed up with their own high-spending council and they want that council to take responsibility?

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend's point. The figures for 1989-90 show that Wolverhampton was about 20th in the list of spenders but 83rd in the list of GCSE results.

Mr. Straw: Is the Secretary of State aware of the serious threat to standards in schools caused by his spending decision in the Prime Minister's county of Cambridgeshire, where the Cambridge branch of the Secondary Heads Association has said that impending cuts will cause

"larger classes . . . fewer books, less equipment, reduced sixth form provision and serious difficulty in providing the national curriculum"?

When will the Secretary of State accept responsibility for the crisis in education provision in Cambridgeshire, or does he believe that it is just another scare got up by pupils, parents, teachers and Conservative county councillors in that county?

Mr. Clarke: In fact, Cambridgeshire will enjoy an increase in real terms in resources next year. As the hon. Gentleman knows, I publicly criticised the so-called cuts announced by Cambridgeshire a short time ago. Cambridgeshire is planning substantially to increase spending on education, but has chosen, for some reason best known to itself, to make more money available by imposing sharp reductions in its secondary school budgets. I am prepared to criticise that action when taken by a Conservative council. The hon. Gentleman supports high spending and progressive teaching methods but seems indifferent to the results, which he does not want to give the public in any comprehensible form. He should not intervene in little local difficulties in Cambridgeshire which, sooner or later, will be sorted out when the authority spends its additional resources sensibly by devoting them to raising the quality of education.

Second Degrees

5. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will review the operation of the present system of discretionary awards for those undertaking courses for second degrees.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Alan Howarth): Detailed arrangements for postgraduate student support are kept under review, but we have no present plans for major changes.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does the Minister expect that while the award system is kept under review and resources are scarce, some consideration should be given to students who come from poor backgrounds and achieve high marks but are turned down because of a shortage of places? Does he accept in particular that there is a problem involving students from Northern Ireland who have attended English universities and been recommended for further degrees and second awards, but are turned down because they are from Northern Ireland?

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman raises two points. He recently raised two cases on behalf of his constituents. I appreciate his concern that the practical operation of the system for conferring postgraduate awards on Northern Ireland residents can be confusing and may create difficulties. I am grateful to him for drawing my attention to that. The practicalities are being considered by the research councils in the Department of Education in Northern Ireland. I hope that arrangements will be introduced which will be more convenient for Northern Ireland residents. As for the criteria for granting postgraduate awards, postgraduate study and research are academically demanding and candidates should be selected by competition to ensure that the resources available are used as effectively as possible.

Sir John Farr: Will my hon. Friend look at the issue again? In England there are cases where degree holders cannot get jobs and are therefore forced to attend further education courses to try to improve their qualifications. Will my hon. Friend look at the matter in light of the present strained position in the jobs market?

Mr. Howarth: The overall number of postgraduate awards has considerably increased over the years. Between 1979-80 and 1990-91, the total of new studentships awarded by research councils rose by almost 28 per cent. We must consider priorities for public expenditure on education, as elsewhere. It is questionable whether it

would be a topmost priority for us in the context of present economic circumstances to urge a substantial increase in the overall funding of postgraduate study.

Sport Funding

6. **Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will discuss with the chairman of the Sports Council when next they meet the long-term funding of sport in the United Kingdom.

9. **Ms. Hoey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he next plans to meet the chairman of the Sports Council to discuss funding for sport.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Robert Atkins): The funding of sport in the United Kingdom is one of many issues that I discuss regularly with the chairman of the Sports Council.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: The Minister will know that the Sports Council is funded on a year-by-year basis whereas, by contrast, the Arts Council receives its funding on a three-year rolling programme. Does the Minister agree that three-year funding for the Sports Council would allow it to plan better for development and expansion? Will he undertake to achieve a three-year funding programme for the Sports Council?

Mr. Atkins: That is an interesting point. There are differing views about whether three years or a single year period would be better or worse. Three years provide some degree of continuity, but they also build in a degree of inflexibility, making it difficult to react to change. I have no hard and fast views on the matter and I undertake to consider it, but there are no immediate plans to do as the hon. and learned Gentleman suggests.

Ms. Hoey: Has the Minister seen the Sports Council report on projected capital investment by local authorities? Does he realise that it shows huge decreases for the next five years, especially in London, with up to 95 per cent. cuts in inner London and 85 per cent. cuts in outer London? Does he share my view and that of the Sports Council that, with local authorities providing nearly 90 per cent. of all participatory sports facilities, unless we get more capital for our local authorities they will be able to spend money only on basic repairs?

Mr. Atkins: The most up-to-date figures that we have on these matters show a continuing increase in capital provision, but I recognise that there has been some indication of a downturn in the most recent, as yet uncompleted, year. Our view is that we should let local authorities make their own decisions about their priorities. We shall have to watch and see whether that will mean a cut in sports provision. I have my eye on the subject; the hon. Lady's point is well taken and, in so far as I have control over these matters, I shall make certain that local authorities concentrate as much of their resources on local sport and recreation provision as they should.

Mr. Cormack: On the point made by the hon. and learned Member for Fife, North-East (Mr. Campbell), does my hon. Friend agree that funding both for sport and the arts could be far higher and much more in line with demand if we had a national lottery? Will he undertake to support the Bill to be introduced by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Burton (Mr. Lawrence)?

Mr. Atkins: My hon. Friend knows full well that there are differing views on that subject. My own are well known. If my hon. Friend wants to hear them, I shall be more than happy to tell him afterwards.

Mr. Gregory: Will my hon. Friend agree, when considering the long-term funding for the Sports Council, to look sympathetically on its application for relocation expenses for its planned move from London to the city of York?

Mr. Atkins: My hon. Friend represents his city with as much assiduity as my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo) represents his, and both are keen on a move by the Sports Council to one of those two great cities. There are no plans at present for such a move. Any request for costs would have to go to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Denis Howell: When the Minister met the nine regional chairmen last week they regarded his statement that he sought to achieve no more funding for sport in this country—Wales received 8·5 per cent., Scotland 15 per cent. and the Arts Council 14 per cent., but the Minister went for only 4 per cent.—as a craven surrender to the Treasury. Is it not time the hon. Gentleman did the job he is paid for and stood up for British sport?

Mr. Atkins: The right hon. Gentleman is as wrong about that as he was in his assertion during the recent debate that I had refused to meet the regional Sports Council chairmen, which he knows to be untrue. In my discussions with the regional councils for sport and recreation—*[Interruption.]* There is a football hooligan shouting from the Opposition Benches——

Mr. Speaker: Do not stir it up.

Mr. Atkins: Wot me, guv?

The right hon. Gentleman's contention is quite wrong. We went for the rate of inflation, and that is what the Sports Council got. Adding to that all the other money that the Government have provided for sport, sport can reckon that it has had a pretty fair deal from the Government.

Mr. Dickens: Would my hon. Friend, the excellent Minister for Sport, agree that those who play and train for sport are the least likely to get involved in offences? Does he agree that sport is one of the most character-building of activities? Will he pursue sports within our schools?

Mr. Atkins: My hon. Friend is living proof of his own contention.

Student Loans

7. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many applications for student loans have been processed since their introduction.

Mr. Alan Howarth: More than 245,000 students have received loans since the introduction of the student loans scheme in autumn 1990.

Mr. Pike: Does the Minister accept that the Secretary of State was mistaken when he said that the initial slow

and small take-up of student loans showed that there was no widespread poverty and hardship among students since all the evidence of citizens advice bureaux, Members' mail and so on shows clearly that, because of the reducing value of student grants and the attack on student benefits, there is real and widespread hardship and poverty among the British student population?

Mr. Howarth: The rate of applications for student loans this year is almost double what it was a year ago, recruitment to higher education is soaring and student numbers have increased by 10 per cent. this autumn for the third year running. We are giving more public support to more students than ever before. During the 1980s the participation of 18-year-olds in higher education doubled from one in eight of the population to one in four. That is a widening of personal opportunity, a lifting of the nation's educational attainments and a sharpening of our competitive skills which will stand us in good stead for the future.

Mr. Batiste: Does my hon. Friend agree that the real problem facing students, particularly those from areas such as my own in Leeds, is that the local education authorities have been extraordinarily late in supplying their mandatory grants? For example, some eight weeks after the term began students in Leeds still had not had their grants. How long will it be before the Student Loans Company will be able to administer mandatory grants as well as cut out the middle man?

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend rightly draws attention to a deplorable state of affairs that applies in a limited number of authorities—about seven—of which his own in Leeds is a conspicuous example. We have a system of student support as generous as any in the world, but, under long-established arrangements, local education authorities administer the award system and students depend on their playing their part. I am concerned at the failure of Leeds in that regard. We wrote to the Leeds authority at the end of October but no one replied. We sent a reminder letter but received no reply. I am told that the authority is not answering the telephone and that is not good enough.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: The Minister will nevertheless be aware of the real hardship this summer and of the queues at the soup kitchens on the campuses. Does he believe that the loans plus grants system covers the full year or does it cover only the terms after the Christmas and Easter vacations and, if so, what does he recommend to students who cannot find work during the summer in the present employment conditions and who had to resort last summer to the soup kitchens?

Mr. Howarth: We introduced the new system of student support last year. We uprated the grant and introduced a top-up loan, the effect of which was that publicly provided support for students rose by 25 per cent. Most students became ineligible for social security benefits, but the loan that was made available was well above the average benefit claimed. To ensure that individual students were not losers under the system, access funds were distributed to higher education institutions for them to use at their discretion to help students in particular need. That is a soundly based principle. More students than ever before are entering higher education. It is important that colleges and universities use the access funds sensitively and target them on those who need them. If students do not take up the publicly provided loans that are available for them, they are neglecting an important element of the student support system.

Grant-maintained Schools

8. **Mr. Shersby:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many secondary schools in the London borough of Hillingdon have now been approved for grant-maintained status and how many applications are still outstanding.

Mr. Eggar: Eight schools in Hillingdon have now been approved for grant-maintained status. There are no outstanding applications. That number, which is almost half of Hillingdon's secondary schools, is both a testament to the support shown by Hillingdon to GM status and a rebuke to those local education authorities that remain hostile to the policy.

Mr. Shersby: Is my hon. Friend aware that Hillingdon is leading the country in recognising parents' wishes? Does he agree that grant-maintained status plays a significant role in raising the morale of the teaching profession, raising education standards and improving the fabric of buildings?

Mr. Eggar: I agree completely with my hon. Friend. The move to grant-maintained status has been overwhelmingly supported by the parents of pupils at the Hillingdon schools that opted to go grant-maintained. When I visited Bishopshalt school with my hon. Friend, I saw for myself the superb improvement in equipment and facilities that it has managed to achieve only shortly after attaining grant-maintained status.

Adult Education

10. **Mr. Latham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will make a statement on his replies to representations which he has received regarding the future financing of adult education.

Mr. Eggar: In reply to representations on that matter, my right hon. and learned Friend and I have made it clear that funding will continue to be available from central Government for all types of further education for adults. There is no question of courses being discontinued, or of fees rising, as a result of the Government's reforms.

Mr. Latham: Is my hon. Friend aware that, despite his welcome answer, deep concern is still felt by Leicestershire community colleges—which have a proud and long-standing record of providing adult education—that they will be squeezed out by the new proposals? Will he reconsider the matter in the interests of the widespread rural provision of that essential and popular service?

Mr. Eggar: I am aware of the concern felt by community colleges in Leicestershire, Devon and Cambridgeshire. My right hon. and learned Friend and I met several delegations and held discussions with a number of our right hon. and hon. Friends. We believe that the Further and Higher Education Bill's provisions meet the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham) and by others, and we can categorically reassure those colleges that they have nothing to fear.

Mr. James Lamond: Is the Minister aware of the deep concern felt also by those who attend non-vocational classes in the evenings and at other times who, I am sorry to say, do not believe a word that the Minister says about continuing those classes? They have read earlier statements by the Minister and by the Secretary of State, which convey a completely different point of view.

Mr. Eggar: Before making such statements, the hon. Gentleman should take the time and trouble to read the Further and Higher Education Bill that is going through another place. If he does, he will find that, among other things, it makes no division between vocational and non-vocational adult education. The hon. Gentleman should do his homework.

Mr. Haselhurst: Does my hon. Friend accept that the fears raised in some people's mind by the White Paper have not been entirely quelled by the reassurances that he and my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State have given? There is anxiety that there will be rationalisation and that some colleges and available classes in rural areas will cease to exist. Can my hon. Friend the Minister give any reassurances in that respect?

Mr. Eggar: I can reassure my hon. Friend that nothing in the Bill will make that sort of rationalisation necessary. Furthermore, both I and my right hon. and learned Friend have made it clear that we want more education provided locally for adults than is currently available. We believe that the Bill will make that possible.

Mr. Andrew Smith: Why does the Minister think that —as the hon. Member for Saffron Walden (Mr. Haselhurst) said—those having a close knowledge of adult education, including the voluntary sector, women's institutes and members of the Conservative party, are so deeply unconvinced by the Minister's replies that there were half a million signatures to a petition opposing the Government's proposals? Is it not the case that the decision to split adult education between a further education funding council and local education authorities is a recipe for disaster for an important sector of education, which has already been cut to the bone as a consequence of the Government's failed policies?

Mr. Eggar: In the context of the Bill, we will ensure that more adult education is available locally, and that it is of better quality. That is increasingly being recognised by many interested parties. I wish that the political posturing promoted by the Association of Metropolitan Authorities and by Mr. Stephen Byers in particular would cease.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Is my hon. Friend aware that, despite what has been said, there is continuing concern in Norfolk—as represented by those involved in Wensum Lodge in Norwich? Will my hon. Friend do all that he can to persuade local authorities to play their full part in ensuring the continuation of adult education?

Mr. Eggar: Undoubtedly, some local education authorities are now spending less on adult education than we think that they should be spending. It is important for those who are rightly keen to ensure the provision of plenty of adult education of an appropriate standard to address their concerns to the education authorities. They should make certain that the authorities are spending a suitable amount on adult education, and that it is available locally as well as centrally.

Youth Organisations

12. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he will next meet representatives of youth organisations to discuss youth matters.

Mr. Atkins: I met representatives of the National Association of Youth and Community Education Officers yesterday. I shall be meeting the representatives of the Standing Conference of Principal Youth and Community Officers for the London and south-east Region on 17 December, and I am meeting representatives of the British Youth Council and the Scout Association in the near future.

Mr. Hughes: I welcome that news. When the Minister meets those representatives—if not before—will he be able to tell them that the Government support the amendment to the Further and Higher Education Bill, which has been promoted by the National Youth Agency and the British Youth Council and backed by hon. Members from all parties? That amendment would put the youth service on a proper statutory basis.

Mr. Atkins: I cannot make any such commitment at this stage. It is, I think, generally felt that the youth service is already a statutory requirement under various education Acts. I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's point to the attention of my hon. Friends who will serve on the Standing Committee on the Bill. However, I do not encourage the hon. Gentleman to entertain high hopes in that regard.

Mr. Rowe: In recent years, there has been a welcome elision between the definitions of the responsibilities of the youth service and those of the community as a whole. Will my hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to the imaginative experiment that the Lord Mayor of London is supporting this year, in which young people go into schools to help pupils with learning difficulties and those who are quicker than the rest of the class? That experiment has had a remarkable effect on the performance of both pupils and helpers.

Mr. Atkins: I defer to none in my appreciation of the work done by the youth service all over the country. The idea to which my hon. Friend refers strikes me as excellent, and I am happy to support it.

Arts and Humanities

13. **Dr. Bray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what steps he is taking to improve support for research in the arts and humanities.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Government provide grant in aid for the British Academy to support postgraduate research in the humanities and social sciences. New financial arrangements introduced this year give the academy greater control over its resources, and enhance its discretion and determine spending priorities across the range of its activities. The Universities Funding Council provides substantial funding on research-based criteria for the humanities.

Dr. Bray: Is the Minister aware that, while the science research councils have fared badly under the present Government, the humanities have fared a good deal worse

under the direct rule of his Department? Is he aware of the part played by the humanities in preserving and developing our national heritage? Why is the Department pussyfooting around, extending the role of the Economic and Social Research Council—which does an entirely different job—instead of accepting the original recommendation of the British Academy for a humanities research council?

Mr. Howarth: Public provision for the research councils in support of the science budget has already increased by 23 per cent., and will have increased by more than 25 per cent. next year. I therefore cannot accept the hon. Gentleman's opening proposition. Like him, I attach enormous importance to humanities research. I regard the existence of flourishing humanities research as an index to the civilisation of our society; Labour, however, has committed itself prematurely to the establishment of a humanities research council.

A debate is in progress among scholars in the arts and humanities about whether it would be right to establish a humanities research council or a humanities, economic and social research council, or to continue with no research council at all. Such issues must be considered thoroughly and carefully; every scheme has its pros and cons.

The British Academy and the ESRC have agreed to establish a working party. I think that it would be best to listen to what it has to say before reaching a decision.

Special Needs Education

14. **Mr. Battle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what improvements there have been in the education provision in primary schools for children with special needs since 1979.

Mr. Fallon: Among the major improvements, The Education Act 1981 provided a coherent framework for identifying and assessing children with special educational needs. The introduction of the national curriculum and schemes for the local management of schools will build on that framework and bring about further improvements in provision for such children, not just in primary schools but throughout the state system.

Mr. Battle: Given the Government's stress on education selectivity and exclusivity in the national curriculum and in the league tests, did the Secretary of State insist on a special emphasis on educational special needs when he commissioned his report into primary education last week?

Mr. Fallon: The inquiry that my right hon. and learned Friend has commissioned into primary education will, of course, encompass the needs of children with special educational needs. I point out to the hon. Gentleman that the 1981 Act is now steadily being made more effective, that more resources are being made available every year and that parents are becoming more and more aware of their rights under that Act.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Ward:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 10 December.

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is attending the European Council in Maastricht.

Mr. Ward: I am sure that my right hon. Friend will join all his right hon. and hon. Friends in wishing the Prime Minister well in his important negotiations.

Has my right hon. Friend seen a recent public opinion poll which says that 66 per cent. of the people asked believed that taxes under the Labour party would be increased?—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I know, but the hon. Gentleman must relate his question to the Government's responsibilities.

Mr. Ward: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in contrast, the Government have been responsible and does he further agree that the policies of the Opposition seem to be—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is not very good, you see, on Government responsibility and this takes up a lot of time. The hon. Gentleman must bring his question to a conclusion, please.

Mr. Ward: Will my right hon. Friend further agree that the only hope of keeping low taxation is to return the Conservative party to Government?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that not only hon. Members on this side of the House but the majority of people in this country wish my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and my other right hon. Friends well in their very important negotiations in Maastricht.

As for my hon. Friend's other question, I confirm that it is as a result of this Government's economic policies and the growth achieved over the years that we have secured not only higher public spending but a substantial reduction in direct taxes. I saw the report to which my hon. Friend referred and I am not at all surprised that the Opposition tried to shout him down, for the simple fact is that the report revealed that the majority of people in this country recognise that the Labour party has now promised to increase spending on just about everything under the sun, which would mean higher borrowing, higher inflation and much higher taxes.

Mr. Kinnock: The British people will also note that all that came from the spokesman for the Government who have raised the tax burden to its highest level in British history.

The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that the draft of the treaty at Maastricht today provides for the improvement of employees' working conditions, for legal protection and for entitlement to consultation and to information. When other Community Governments are prepared—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Dickens *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not need any help from the hon. Member.

Mr. Kinnock: When other Community Governments are prepared to extend those rights to their people, is not it completely wrong for the British Government to refuse to do the same for the British people?

Mr. MacGregor: I am not surprised that the right hon. Gentleman avoided the first point, because the report to which my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Ward) referred produced the following answer within the Labour party:

"Some argue it will highlight one of our weaker points".

It certainly does.

On Maastricht, we are opposed to a number of the points in the social charter because in practice it would damage employment and prosperity. That is why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has been arguing against the social text. It will put a huge burden on industry and will cost jobs. Another point is that it offends the important principle of subsidiarity. I agree with the point made by the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) in today's edition of *The Guardian*. He said:

"It provides for an expansion of treaty-based Community competence into areas of wage bargaining and social security that should rightly remain with member states".

That is right and that is why we oppose so many elements in the social charter.

Mr. Kinnock: Is the right hon. Gentleman trying to tell us that other Community Governments, many with economies more successful than ours, do not care about employment, about costs and about competitiveness? Of course they do. Why is it that those countries can accept basic, decent minimum standards for their people whereas this Government will not accept them for the British people?

Mr. MacGregor: In trade union legislation and in other ways, there are different practices in different countries. The plain fact is that some elements of the social charter would run the risk—indeed, would make it a real possibility—of this country returning to some of the trade union practices that did so much damage during the 1970s. What is more, my right hon. Friend's position in Maastricht has the support of the Confederation of British Industry and of the majority of British industry which recognises the increasing burdens that the charter could impose on it, which would damage our competitiveness in relation to countries outside the Community which are not so burdened.

Mr. Kinnock: When it is obvious that the other 11 Governments are prepared to accept the draft before them at Maastricht today and that this Government are not, the Government are confessing to a unique combination of political prejudice and economic weakness which marks them out from the rest of the Community and which marks Britain down in the Community.

Mr. MacGregor: There is no question of marking Britain down. My right hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the dangers which lie within the social charter of making European industry uncompetitive in relation to Japanese industry and to others. It is no wonder that the right hon. Gentleman wants to support elements of the social charter being imposed here. That would result in a return to the period when 29 million days were lost to strikes and when substantial burdens were imposed on British industry. That is why we oppose the proposals.

Q2. **Mr. Stevens:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 10 December.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Stevens: Will my right hon. Friend today find time to join my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science in condemning Labour and Liberal Democrat councils, such as Nottingham, Derbyshire and Richmond, which have blocked the distribution of the parents charter? Does not that hostility to the charter give the lie to the Opposition parties' request for freedom of information?

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. Friend and I condemn those authorities. He is right to draw attention to the hypocrisy of those local authorities, as he has described it. They have advised schools not to make copies available to parents. It goes further than that. The Government's education policies in schools are designed entirely to raise standards, to increase choice and to improve information to parents. The parents charter is an important part of that and I am glad that most schools have ignored the attitudes of those Labour authorities.

Mr. Blunkett: In 1909, Winston Churchill, talking about workers' rights, said that there were necessary laws to be passed to ensure that the bad employer was not undercut by the very worst. Is not that why other Governments and employers across Europe understand well today that the Government are reneging on that and wish this country to undercut others by treating workers in the worst way possible?

Mr. MacGregor: This Government have implemented all 18 of the social measures that have so far been agreed under the social charter, which is more than can be said of a lot of our Community partners. We do implement such measures where we believe that it is right to do so, but we have opposed the working time directive, for example, because it could have added an extra £5 billion to British industry's costs. We believe that that would destroy jobs and make industry uncompetitive. We have been successful in going in the opposite direction—in increasing the number of jobs and in making British industry more competitive in the past 10 years.

Q3. **Mr. Gill:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 10 December.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave a few moments ago.

Mr. Gill: Does my right hon. Friend accept that the majority of my constituents believe that what they voted for in the referendum on Europe was a single market, not a single currency? Does he further accept that the failure of the common agricultural policy, coupled with doubts about the realisation of the level playing field for goods and services by the end of next year, mean that this is a singularly inappropriate time to extend the competence of the European Community? Does—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is enough.

Mr. Gill: Would my right hon. Friend——

Hon. Members: Sit down.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Gill: Does my right hon. Friend agree—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. In fairness to everyone else, the hon. Gentleman should sit down.

Mr. Gill: Does my right hon. Friend agree—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is very unfair to other hon. Members.

Mr. MacGregor: I am afraid that I could not catch the last part of my hon. Friend's question, but I agree with him about the importance that he attaches to the single market. That, of course, is why the United Kingdom Government have been in the lead in pressing for the completion of the single market and that is why, in the current negotiations, we are arguing for steps to strengthen the observance of Community law to ensure that a level playing field is included in the single market.

As to the steps that are now being taken at Maastricht on the development of the Community, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it clear that if he gets an agreement that is right for Britain and for Europe, he will sign, but if he cannot, he will not.

Q4. **Miss Lestor:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 10 December.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Lady to the reply that I gave a few moments ago.

Miss Lestor: Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that Britain was one of the countries that ruled against the inclusion of the role of overseas development and co-operation as part of the discussions at Maastricht? Was that because it could mean that Britain would have to increase the amount that we spend on overseas aid and development to match the contributions of other European countries?

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot comment on details of the negotiations—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"]—because I do not know the details of what is actually happening today, but it is quite clear that we have been arguing that matters affecting foreign policy should continue to be decided under the auspices of intergovernmental co-operation. On overseas aid, the hon. Lady knows that this year we have yet again increased the amount of money that is spent on that.

Q5. **Mr. Butterfill:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 10 December.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply.

I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave a few moments ago.

Mr. Butterfill: Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the courageous efforts of the European Community observers in Croatia? Does he share my concern that they have found almost universally that the aggression has been initiated by Serbia? Does he agree that it is desirable that today's events in Maastricht might lead to future improved co-operation on such matters by the European Community which may, in the end, lead to a reduction in the genocide in that country?

Mr. MacGregor: Like my hon. Friend, I pay tribute to the efforts of Lord Carrington and others within the Community who have been endeavouring to obtain a ceasefire, and to the efforts made by Mr. Cyrus Vance. My hon. Friend rightly draws attention to the benefits of Community co-operation. We have already seen much of that in the lead that has been given by the Community, which has taken special steps to limit the damage and the fighting to enable the parties to come together. Britain has played a large part in that. We have set up a peace conference, sent in monitors and have established ceasefires. I very much hope that that co-operation and the Community's continued efforts will produce the results that my hon. Friend seeks.

Q6. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 10 December.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Griffiths: Does the right hon. Gentleman think it right that under the Tory council tax every millionaire who lives alone will be entitled to a 25 per cent. rebate while the majority of pensioner couples with modest savings or occupational pensions will have to pay the full council tax? Is this the classless society but only open to millionaires?

Mr. MacGregor: The council tax will produce about 40 per cent. of total local authority revenue and people on higher incomes will contribute to local authority expenditure much more through the taxes that they pay.

Mr. Brazier: Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the Prime Minister on his initiative yesterday with President Mitterrand on the Soviet Union? Does he agree that it is a sign of considerable leadership that, right in the teeth of the complexity of the negotiations at Maastricht, the Prime Minister should have recognised that the awesome events on the other side of Europe may have an even larger say in the history of Europe?

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. Friend. Indeed, I pay tribute to all the work that my right hon. Friend has done throughout the year with regard to events in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Yesterday he drew attention to the three matters of concern to which I have no doubt that he will turn, in co-operation with other countries who are equally concerned, as soon as the Maastricht negotiations are complete.

Reserve Forces

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Tom King): With permission, I should like to make a statement on Britain's reserve forces for the 1990s.

Earlier this year I set out the structure of Britain's defence for the 1990s and in particular, in July, I announced the new structure for the Army and its role in NATO's new Rapid Reaction Corps. I referred to the vital contribution that reserves make to our defence effort, and said that we were studying the best mix of regulars and reserves, and would make a further announcement about this later in the year. I now turn to the details of our proposals.

In July, I set out the approach taken by the Royal Navy to rationalise the Royal Naval Reserve and Royal Naval Auxiliary Service and to develop naval reserves that are streamlined but more closely integrated with the Royal Navy.

We have also been looking for opportunities for the wider employment of reserves in the Royal Air Force. Two of these are Royal Auxiliary Air Force personnel in our Rapier anti-aircraft missile force, and as support for our mobile air defence radar convoys in the new United Kingdom air defence system. We are also looking to employ auxiliaries in mission planning for Nimrod maritime patrol aircraft. We intend to retain all the six current Royal Auxiliary Air Force Regiment field squadrons for the area defence of airfields. We are also aiming to increase the number of Royal Auxiliary Air Force defence force flights for the perimeter defence of other vital installations.

I turn now to the Territorial Army. We need to adapt its roles to support and complement the new roles of the regular army. Under the previous strategy, it had important roles defending positions close to the previous West German border in support of the substantial British stationed forces. Clearly this task is no longer relevant in a unified Germany and under the new NATO strategy of greater flexibility and mobility. Instead, new opportunities arise to be part of the Rapid Reaction Corps and in national defence, and it is for these new roles and responsibilities that the Territorial Army units must now be structured and trained.

In some of those roles they will take over from regular units. A TA Yeomanry Regiment will provide reconnaissance for the Rapid Reaction Corps with tracked armoured vehicles. Two TA Royal Artillery regiments will be equipped, for the first time, with 155mm FH70 towed howitzers. Three Air Defence regiments will be equipped with the new Starstreak surface-to-air missile when it enters service. The TA Royal Engineers will have wider roles and take on greater responsibility for airfield damage repair and support of the RAF Harrier force. Some TA Royal Signals units will be equipped with the Ptarmigan communications systems for both ARRC and national deployments.

Elsewhere, the TA will also take over from the Regular Army greater responsibility for the direct defence of the United Kingdom. It will not be limited to the more static tasks previously associated with military home defence. Longer warning times mean that that role will increasingly be seen as that of a more flexible general reserve for national defence.

The strength of the infantry will reduce by around 18 per cent., but the Royal Engineers, Royal Signals, Intelligence Corps and Army Air Corps will all need to attract substantially more volunteers to meet the new roles which they will be taking on. As with the Regular Army, the TA will in future be properly funded and trained to take on the roles required of it. There will be even closer links between the Regular and TA parts of what we see as 'one army'.

The main changes are set out in a briefing pack which will be available in the Vote Office at the end of this statement.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Why should these be available in the Press Gallery now, as they are not available to Members of Parliament in the Vote Office now?

Mr. Speaker: I do not disagree.

Mr. King: I agree with the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike), and I apologise if that is the case.

In summary, the changes will be as follows. Although reorganised, there will continue to be five yeomanry regiments. There will be 36 infantry battalions, compared to 41 today. With one exception, all will adopt a three-rifle-company organisation, compared with four companies today. In respect of the Parachute Regiment, 15 Para will amalgamate with 4 Para, and the new battalion will include one company based in Glasgow with its headquarters there and detachments where the battalion is currently based in Scotland.

In the Royal Artillery, two Air Defence regiments will amalgamate. Royal Signals and Royal Engineers will also reorganise for their new and expanded roles. A second Army Air Corps Squadron will be formed, building on the success of the first, which was raised in 1987. The Royal Army Medical Corps will be reorganised as smaller self-contained units, although its overall size is being studied further as part of a wider review of the defence medical services.

The Home Service Force was formed in 1985 to guard selected key points in the United Kingdom. Its members were permitted more flexible age and medical standards. Given the increased warning time, we no longer need a separate organisation. The HSF will therefore be absorbed within the mainstream TA and its members given the opportunity to transfer initially on their present terms of service. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to those who have served during those years in the Home Service Force.

The current facilities are established for a paper strength of the TA of some 91,000, significantly above the figure recently achieved, currently some 74,000. We have therefore been keeping a much larger infrastructure of regiments and buildings than the manpower justified. I said in July that we expected the long-term future strength of the TA would settle at between 60,000 jand 65,000. The force structure that we have developed, based on our future operational needs, requires a peacetime strength of around 63,500. It would be reinforced in war by the addition of regular reservists to a fully mobilised establishment of over 71,000. In particular while many units are presently under strength, we intend that the units in the new structure should be fully manned.

I have made it clear that, in the changes, we would not wish to turn away willing and suitable volunteers, and the

changes proposed will be achieved by natural turnover. Where units move or change their role every effort will be made to offer volunteers an alternative opportunity to serve, if not in the same TA centre then in another unit in the vicinity. Where necessary, local units will be allowed to keep a higher strength than their paper establishment.

In developing these proposals, we have consulted widely among those with an interest in the TA with senior serving volunteers, with regimental colonels, the Council of Territorial Auxiliary and Volunteer Reserve Associations, the TAVRAs, and, most recently, local associations. I am most grateful to all those who have contributed for the positive and consultative approach they have taken. Further consultation with local TAVRAs will now begin to determine the implications of the changes I have described for individual TA centres. The proposals will result in some modest reduction in the support staff of the TA. Every effort will be made to help those affected.

The highly successful Army Cadet Force often relies on the use of TA facilities. In restructuring we will ensure that this important and successful national youth movement is safeguarded. The current strength of the Army Cadet Force is around 40,000, supported by some 7,000 adult instructors. This has been recently reviewed, and there are no plans for further changes.

Detailed work will proceed in the new year to plan the implementation of these proposals and to enable decisions to be taken on regimental titles, affiliations and local estate matters, so that restructuring can begin from 1 April 1992.

To underpin the more flexible and responsive role which reserves can play in future, we shall seek in the next Parliament to amend the Reserve Forces Act 1980 to ensure their most effective use.

The whole House appreciates the commitment of those who give up their time to serve in the volunteer reserves, including a number of hon. Members. At a time of considerable change, when the structure and role of reserves is changing as well, this statement makes it clear that we see a continuing and important role for them, working as fully manned units in support of our regular forces and taking on a number of important and challenging roles in our future defences.

I commend my statement to the House.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. The whole House recognises the contribution made by the reserves—the Territorial Army, the Royal Naval Reserve, the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve and the Royal Auxiliary Air Force—to the defence of these islands and beyond. The review has provoked a flood of correspondence from our constituents. The high regard in which the forces are held is clear.

This is only an initial statement, and the information pack, which will add a great deal more meat to the bones of the Secretary of State's statement, will require close study. I hope, therefore, that the House will have the opportunity for a debate when we have had time not only to digest the information pack but to get the reactions of constituents to the important and wide-ranging statement.

The Secretary of State has missed an opportunity to be more explicit about attempting to secure the employment prospects——

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The documentation is not available in the Vote Office.

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for me, but I share the concern that is expressed. If the press have been issued with the information, it would be appropriate for it to be made available also to hon. Members. Perhaps the Minister will do something about it.

Mr. O'Neill *rose*——

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): On a further point of order, Mr. Speaker. You have already said that you have a certain sympathy because the documentation was not available before, and is not now available, in the Vote Office. Are we not left in an impossible position? We shall be forced to ask questions in the dark and we cannot properly probe on behalf of our constituents. Should there not be a period of reflection, an adjournment during which we can find out the facts to equip ourselves to ask appropriate questions?

Mr. Speaker: This is not a matter for me. However, hon. Members would be able to ask more pointed questions if they had the information available to them. I agree with the shadow Minister that perhaps the best thing would be to have a brief exchange today, especially in view of the business before the House, and to have a debate later.

Mr. O'Neill: I appreciate your remarks, Mr. Speaker. The Secretary of State has adopted a high-handed approach, either by accident or by intent. This issue will not go away, and doubtless we shall return to it—I hope in Government time and at mutual convenience.

The Secretary of State made an oblique reference to the Reserve Forces Act 1980. Can he confirm that that Act covers possible changes to employment protection legislation? That will ensure that the jobs of those members of the Territorial Army with less than two years' service with the company or firm will be guaranteed when they return from their summer camp. The voluntary scheme now in operation does not cover all members of the TA. We all know of TA members who went on summer camp and returned to find that their jobs no longer existed. They do not have recourse to employment tribunals to make an appropriate appeal against unfair dismissal.

How many pilots are there in the Royal Auxiliary Air Force? Can the Secretary of State tell the House whether there are plans to make use of flight simulators to train those pilots who have left the RAF and who are now working with commercial airlines? Those pilots have been trained at considerable cost to the taxpayer, but their skills are then lost to the armed services, because there are no means to enable them to keep up to scratch.

Can the Secretary of State confirm that the references he made to the 15 Para amalgamations and the location of the company in Glasgow will, nevertheless, mean a reduction in strength from a battalion to a company? How many people does he expect will be based in Scotland and the north of Britain, because 15 Para covers the area north of a line from the Wash to the Mersey?

What will be the significance of the contribution of the territorials to the Rapid Reaction Corps? The right hon. Gentleman gave an undertaking to NATO that that

[Mr. O'Neill]

contribution would be equivalent to no more than 20 per cent. of our forces in the second corps. Will the right hon. Gentleman guarantee to adhere to that figure?

Would the right hon. Gentleman also take account of the concern about the reductions in the infantry? Will he make every effort to ensure that those who are made redundant as a result of reductions in the infantry have an opportunity to volunteer for the other services where the right hon. Gentleman expects an increase in numbers? What does the right hon. Gentleman anticipate will happen to those members of the Home Service Force who are over the right age and whose fitness may not be the same as that of the members of other forces? Will they be discarded, or will they be able to continue in uniform as part of the reserve?

Finally, what savings will be made as a consequence of today's announcement?

Mr. King: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for a number of his comments. He referred to the flood of correspondence, and that is testimony to the degree of consultation that has taken place. People have had ample opportunity to make their comments.

It is fair comment to say that I made this statement in general terms deliberately. It is backed up by a number of documents. I know that hon. Members will want to read those documents, and I apologise for their absence. However, I do not believe that their availability now would have helped hon. Members enormously in making an immediate response to my statement. Those documents deal with a huge amount of detail, because we are talking about the locations of more than 600 different units around the United Kingdom. That involves the exact location of individual drill halls in towns and cities across the country, the catchment areas and the way in which different units operate their pattern of recruitment and service, which is special to the TA.

The fact that I have been able to make the statement now means that, during the recess, hon. Members will have an opportunity to hear the views of those who will be affected. They will also have an input, because from now on it will be for the local TAVRAs and TA associations to become involved in determining the most suitable pattern for the future in their areas.

The hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) spoke about the job protection legislation. I am sure that he would want me to pay tribute to a distinguished Scot, Mr. Tommy MacPherson, who plays an outstanding part as chairman of the National Employer Liaison Committee, and to all the members of that body for the work they do in encouraging employers to be ready to assist their employees and give them support for playing their part, and giving up their time, in support of the volunteer reserve. I take note of the point that the hon. Gentleman made.

He asked for details and numbers of pilots. I will check on that and let him have the information. I will also answer his question about our NATO contribution.

The hon. Gentleman questioned me about the cost. Our best estimate, for manpower and equipment, is that the cost of the TA will be about £250 million a year. It is difficult to make a more precise estimate, but I would see the savings as being approximately proportionate to the reductions in numbers, which are about 17 per cent. So, whether it is £40 million or £45 million a year, it is a significant figure.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. In relation to points of order that have been raised with me, it may help the House if I say that this might provide an admirable subject for a debate on the Consolidated Fund Bill, subjects for which should be submitted to my office by the rising of the House this evening. I hope that some hon. Members may take that opportunity.

Mr. Neil Thorne (Ilford, South): On behalf of a large number of territorial soldiers who have asked me to make representations to my right hon. Friend, may I thank him for listening so carefully to the representations that have been made, and for undertaking to listen in future to representations?

Can my right hon. Friend confirm that, when units are allowed to recruit extra personnel above establishment, they may do so in all ranks and not just in the junior ranks? He will appreciate how important it is in the TA to have sergeants, warrant officers and more senior officers—captains and majors—in post and ready for an emergency. That is much more important than just allowing them to recruit extra riflemen.

Mr. King: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his opening remarks. In general, I can respond positively to his question, although he will understand what I mean when I say that it should not be abused. We are seeking to overcome the difficulty of having an establishment and, because of the scale of the turnover in the TA, there is a great gap between what we think the number is—the number for which we have provided—and the number actually recruited.

The figure that I have given—of 63,500 as the number we think we can recruit—is genuinely the strength we want to achieve and is not so far below the present level; in the future, with the demographic trends we face, it may prove to be quite a challenging target. In general, I seek to respond positively to my hon. Friend, because he understands the purposes for which I have agreed that units can keep a higher strength than their paper establishments, but it should not be abused.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (Fife, North-East): The Minister will appreciate that there will be great sadness at the apparent demise of 15 Para, not least in the battalion but also among those who have an interest in airborne forces. However, I welcome the apparently discriminatory approach which the statement reveals—not least, for example, in the enhanced role which is to be given to the Royal Engineers. If there is, in general, to be an enhanced role for reserve forces, does that not, however, create a continuing obligation to see that they have the best equipment and best training opportunities? Can the right hon. Gentleman guarantee that, so far as it lies within his power, that training and those opportunities will be available?

Mr. King: I understand the hon. and learned Gentleman's concern about 15 Para, and we sought to respond constructively by making an announcement. Incidentally, Scotland will have a new yeomanry regiment, which we have based on the Ayrshire Yeomanry, and a

new engineer regiment, which will work on airfield damage repair not far from the hon. and learned Gentleman's constituency, so developments have been made. As the right hon. and learned Gentleman said, the measure seeks to complement effectively the structure of our regular forces, so it discriminates in that there is some reduction in infantry, a significant increase in the Royal Signals—an increasingly important part of modern warfare and communications—in the Royal Engineers and in the Army Air Corps. That shows how we have sought to approach the matter.

One of my concerns was to maintain a substantial range of regular forces but to give them support and backing in terms of spares, equipment and training capability. My slogan, "smaller but better", is directed precisely to that point. If we expect people to volunteer and to give up their own time to serve, it is our duty to see that they have the support, equipment and training that they deserve.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that those members of 15 Para who wish to pursue their activities can do so through the company based in the other units throughout Scotland? Will they be given an opportunity to serve in, for instance, other specialist units like the Royal Marine Reserves? Will my right hon. Friend also confirm that his comments about the Royal Auxiliary Air Force show that the Scottish component of that reserve activity is enhanced and increased, and is thus seen as more important, in keeping with the increased assets of the Royal Air Force deployed in Scotland?

Mr. King: I can confirm that the Royal Auxiliary Air Force and the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve will be increased in absolute terms for the whole country. There are opportunities, for members of 15 Para who wish to pursue their activities either within the company in Glasgow or in the other detachments that form part of that company. There are also opportunities in 15 Para—there is a commando detachment in Greenock and there are TA SAS units in Glasgow. Scotland suffers no amalgamations in terms of infantry regiments, so opportunities exist. I do not want any willing volunteers to be turned away.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): May I congratulate the Secretary of State on the wisdom of his decision to retain all 16 squadrons of the Royal Air Force Regiment? With regard to the TA, the Secretary of State will remember that he and I had an exchange on 14 October about the lack of proportionality. At that time, the TA in Northern Ireland was to be cut by 40 per cent. but by only 19 per cent. in Great Britain. Does the Secretary of State's statement redress that imbalance?

Mr. King: It is slightly better than that, but there will be greater reductions in Northern Ireland. In reality, however, Northern Ireland will still have a higher percentage of volunteers per head of population than in all but two other TAVRA areas in Great Britain, and all cap badges now represented in the Province will be retained. However, there will be reductions because of the much higher percentage of volunteers in the TA in Northern Ireland in the past.

Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith (Wealden): We all have a great respect for and pride in our TA, and I should like to join my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne) in thanking my right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces for listening to our representations so patiently and for dealing with a difficult problem with such sensitivity and understanding.

Will my right hon. Friend take advantage of his proposals by making them known to a wider audience through an intensive recruitment campaign, which would be of much value? On a more parochial note, will he reassure me that the Surrey and Sussex Yeomanry has a future?

Mr. King: I think that "re-roled" is the answer to my hon. Friend's latter point. I think that it does have a future. I am grateful for my hon. Friend's initial comments. I can confirm the importance of continuing recruitment. We shall be looking to recruit 20,000 to the TA this year in recognition of the substantial turnover —30 per cent.—in the TA every year. Although hon. Members may hear about what appear to be reductions, we shall be launching a significant recruitment advertising campaign immediately to ensure that the TA is kept at the necessary strength.

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): Tomorrow I shall receive a 25,000-signature petition in support of the 4th battalion the Royal Regiment of Wales, based at Swansea. Is the Secretary of State aware that his objective of finding alternatives within the vicinity will not apply if that battalion is closed, as the alternative is Cardiff, which is itself due for a 25 per cent. contraction? There will be considerable resentment in Wales if the contractions are imposed on us when the south-west, to which we lost our district headquarters, is to receive 5,000 full-time civilian defence posts.

Mr. King: As the right hon. Gentleman says, it is proposed that the 3rd and 4th battalions the Royal Regiment of Wales TA will amalgamate and adopt a three-company organisation. The local TAVRA has been considering plans that involve detachments in different locations, which will help those who serve in the regiment. We do not want to turn aside any willing volunteers—as the right hon. Gentleman may know, there are significant differences between the recruiting abilities of those two regiments. We hope that the new arrangements and the local agreements on the locations and drill halls of the new regiments will be helpful.

Mr. John Farr (Harborough): Will my right hon. Friend say something about the Royal Navy? In his sensible restructuring of the reserves, he rightly said that the Army and Air Force would have opportunities to modernise the equipment that reservists use, but the Navy is in a difficult position because the old purpose of the NATO exercise—to provide an opportunity for reservists in the Royal Naval Reserve to go to sea—is out of date. Will my right hon. Friend say something about the future role of the Royal Naval Reserve?

Mr. King: I referred to the statement made in July on the overall structure. We are reconsidering the regular-reserve mix of the Royal Navy. I cannot go further today, but I can say that we are keen to ensure that both the Royal Naval Reserve and the Royal Fleet Reserve are used as effectively as possible, as well as the Royal Naval Auxiliary Reserve, which also plays an important part.

Mr. John Cartwright (Woolwich): Does the Secretary of State accept that the new roles and responsibilities to be

[Mr. John Cartwright]

given to our reserve forces mean that high-quality training becomes even more important? Will he give an assurance that adequate resources will be invested in training, and guaranteed for training? Will he assure us that, whenever money runs short, training will not be the first activity to be cut?

Mr. King: As the hon. Gentleman has a close interest in the matter, he will know that, while introducing the changes, one of my objectives has been to ensure that those changes were fully funded. I think that it is generally accepted that the public expenditure announcements recognise that the resources allocated to defence enable us fully to fund our programme. That applies both to the Regular Army and to the reserve forces.

I stress what I said earlier: there has been a tendency to keep too big a structure which is too widely spread. We have been keeping an infrastructure—a capability—way beyond that used, which is a waste of money. I would much rather that the money was used for proper training and facilities for the people who serve and are able to train, than wasted on buildings which are not used.

Sir David Price (Eastleigh): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his declared intention to integrate our reserve forces more closely with the regular forces will be widely welcomed? With that in mind, will he assure the House that he will try to integrate training between reserve forces and regulars far more than in the past?

Mr. King: That is very much one of our purposes. Integration and complementary roles are necessary for effectiveness in the new strategic dispositions of our forces, not least for the Rapid Reaction Corps. In training, twinning the work of the regulars, the TA and the volunteer regiments is also the way to use them most effectively. It is important to ensure that the reserve forces reach the highest possible standards, and I shall certainly concentrate on that.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): The Secretary of State has told us once again that the whole package, including the Scottish element, is based on the assumption that there will be longer warning times of any conflict—up to a year instead of a matter of weeks or a month. Will the right hon. Gentleman remind the House how much warning time he had of the conflict in the Gulf, how much warning he expects to have from the IRA before any outrage and how much warning he expects of the consequences of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the activities of extremists like Mr. Le Pen in France?

Mr. King: Warning time is a NATO concept to do with the situation on the central front and the threat of aggression from the east. It has nothing to do with warning time for the invasion of Kuwait, which has no relevance to my statement. We do not envisage using the TA to respond immediately to outrages in Northern Ireland or to make it the first wave of our assault for the repossession of Kuwait.

Mr. Robert Boscawen (Somerton and Frome): Does my right hon. Friend accept that there is much to be commended in general in his decision to reduce the infantry battalions by only 12, 13 or 14 per cent., which is a great deal better than what he did for the Regular Army? Will he ensure that these infantry battalions are more swiftly available in future? Will he give us an idea of the future role of the Royal Corps of Transport? Will it, like other forces, merge with the Regular Army?

Mr. King: The role of the Royal Corps of Transport will take account of the lower overall force levels and hence its new scale of responsibility. It will also take account of the successful introduction of DROPS—the demountable rack offloading and pickup system—which has made a significant contribution to the capability of the Royal Corps of Transport, given the quantity of stores that can be shifted with the available resources.

When hon. Members read the fact sheet attached to my statement, they will see that it is difficult to compare like with like. Many of the units are not fully manned units, and hon. Members will see that the number of regiments, squadrons or batteries that we propose to keep in future show the truth of this. We will, for instance, keep the same number of signals regiments, but that will involve a 20 per cent. increase in manpower—a reflection of the fact that many of the present units are not fully manned.

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): I was pleased to hear the right hon. Gentleman's remarks about the Army Cadet Force. Over the years, many children from underprivileged families have been able to join youth clubs from which they were able to go away on camps during the Glasgow fair fortnight and at Easter and in September. I am encouraged to learn that TA companies will be expected to offer support, because I know that, when cadet units have been based with TA units that supported the Army Cadet Force, the boys got more training and help.

Finally——

Mr. Speaker: Briefly, though, please.

Mr. Martin: Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

If the force is to be linked with the Regular Army, legislation must come before the House to make employers give leave of absence. It was ridiculous that highly trained personnel were prevented from going to the Gulf because of their jobs.

Mr. King: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he says about the Army Cadet Force, with which many hon. Members will agree. I have referred to the complicated question of administration, which will require careful drafting, but we want to try to ensure that those who serve in the voluntary reserve forces are available when they are needed and that their position is properly protected.

Dr. Charles Goodson-Wickes (Wimbledon): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his enlightened proposals for a revised and enhanced role for the TA in these uncertain times. I particularly welcome the close relationship between the TA and the regulars. Will my right hon. Friend add a new dimension to the debate by commenting on whether any studies have been carried out on how the TA could provide relief in the event of natural disasters, which would have the agreeable effect of combining military efficiency with humanitarian benefits?

Mr. King: As my hon. Friend knows, the TA already does do that on occasion, and I am interested in the ways in which it could be developed. I do not wish to comment further now, but I am sympathetic to his point.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): The Secretary of State has clarified the position on savings, but will he give us some idea of the savings which will result from a reduction of effectiveness in Scotland? Can he clarify the position in relation to 15 Para and talk in terms of numbers rather than amalgamations? What will be involved in the reduction from a battalion to one company in Scotland? Are we to take it that the company headquarters, not the battalion headquarters, will be in Glasgow? What will be the cost-effectiveness of having four subdivisions of a company? How can that possibly be cost-effective in terms of the operation of a paratroop battalion?

Mr. King: I am not sure that I can give the hon. Gentleman the first information that he requested. The picture is complicated because there are a number of changes—pluses and minuses—in the situation in Scotland. Until the further consultation to which I referred in my statement takes place, it is difficult to know which drill halls will continue and where the detachments will be based. When the hon. Gentleman sees the full details for the range of different places involved, he will realise that there are some complicated plans for north of Inverness —for example, at Dingwall, Kirkwall, Stornoway, Thurso and Wick—and it is not yet possible to determine how they will work out. Fifteen Para will be a company with a company headquarters, with the option, if it wishes, to have detachments in places where the paras are presently located.

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): Does my right hon. Friend recall that, at one time, considerable concern was expressed that the Marches, including Herefordshire, would not have the opportunity to contribute fully towards the defence of the realm in terms of reserve activities? Can he confirm that 5 Light Infantry will continue its activities in that part of the world, which, if so, will be welcome? Will he confirm that the disposition of companies is not yet set in tablets of stone, and that circumstances relating to premises and recruitment records will have a distinct bearing on where those will be finally located?

Mr. King: On the first point, I can confirm that 5LI will continue and will include a company from the 4th battalion the Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment. I can also confirm that it is for the TAVRAs and for the local people to determine the most appropriate location for the individual company headquarters.

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): Fifteen Para, which has its headquarters in my constituency, was being marched to oblivion until public opinion brought itself to bear on the Ministry, and I am grateful that it has taken a step backwards, but we still do not know what size that step is. For the fourth time of asking, what will be the impact on 15 Para of the change from battalion to company status, where will the battallion headquarters be, why is it being taken out of Scotland, and, at a time when the Secretary of State says that flexibility and mobility are the key attributes of Britain's Army, why are we making major reductions in a force which is the most flexible and mobile in the British Army?

Mr. King: I think that the hon. Gentleman knows that the TA parachute regiments are not charged with a parachute role, but serve mainly in an infantry and national defence role—as do ordinary infantry regiments. Unfortunately, 15 Para was significantly not as well recruited as the other two parachute regiments. It had four companies with only a 67 per cent. level of recruitment. Although the hon. Gentleman accepts that my announcement represents an improvement over the previous situation, I am anxious to see that those who want to serve have an opportunity to do so. I believe that the arrangements that we have announced give the best chance of ensuring that that will be the case. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas) sought to undermine that, but he will see how far we have gone.

Sir Charles Morrison (Devizes): My right hon. Friend reminded the House that the Territorial Army is currently under-recruited in comparison with establishment. Is he aware that the Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry Squadron at the Royal Yeomanry Regiment, based in Swindon, is notably, if not extravagantly, over-recruited? Will he confirm that that squadron will continue to enjoy old and new opportunities?

Mr. King: I should like to check on that before replying specifically to my hon. Friend, but I will certainly write to him. I know of his close interest in that matter.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): As a demob-happy Member of the House, may I ask the Secretary of State whether he realises the absolute shambles that he has made of Territorial Army recruitment? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware, for example, that when my wife and I were strolling along Blackpool promenade during the recent summer, I was accosted by a Territorial Army recruiting sergeant and put under enormous pressure to join the TA? Is the Secretary of State's announcement of a reduction in the age, health and fitness qualifications for membership of the Territorial Army meant as a calculated insult to me, or to the TA?

Mr. King: The hon. Gentleman will know—although the House may not—that, if there is one person who greets the news of his demobilisation with a particular sense of grief, it is his old pair. I cannot accept it with any great tranquillity. However, I am not sure that even any relaxation of more flexible age and medical standards could quite accommodate the hon. Gentleman in his present seniority.

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): Does my right hon. Friend envisage the creation of a Territorial Army element in the Household Division, which would go some way to alleviating the greatly increased overstretch that the 40 per cent. cuts in the regular Household Division have caused? That would maintain the dual role that is vital to recruiting to the Household Division itself.

Mr. King: That suggestion has not been made to me.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Secretary of State will remember my exchanges with the Prime Minister in respect of volunteering, so he will understand my regret at the reduction in opportunities for those who want to volunteer for the TAVR in Northern Ireland. It seems rather strange that, if one does one's job well, one's opportunities are reduced.

Having said that, I welcome the retention of the Ulster Air Defence Regiment. However, is it to be reduced to two batteries—one in Coleraine and the other in Belfast—as originally planned, bearing in mind the tremendous

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

tradition that regiment has? When may we expect a statement on the medical services aspects which are so important to the Northern Ireland situation? Will there be protection for those who have served in the Territorial Army for some 10 years, so that they may be allowed to complete their service and receive their TA decorations?

Mr. King: I will need to consider the hon. Gentleman's latter point, and I cannot comment on it now. I appreciate the disappointment felt in Northern Ireland, because I know the willingness to serve that exists there. It is striking how many more people proportionally have served in the TA in Northern Ireland than in other parts of the United Kingdom. I make that point with proper sensitivity. Those who wish to continue to serve can volunteer to do so on a part-time basis in the Ulster Defence Regiment. We are maintaining a significant presence in Northern Ireland: there will still be a higher percentage of volunteers per head of population there than in all but two of the other TAVRA areas.

We are moving on with the medical services. All the services are involved—the regular medical services of the RAF, the Navy and the Army. The question then arises of the most suitable arrangements to be made for the Territorial Army. In the past, the TA has been responsible for massive field hospitals; the current approach is to make such hospitals much smaller and more flexible, and to increase their number. Work is now in progress, although I cannot give an exact date for its completion. I have noted the hon. Gentleman's interest in the matter.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I must protect our subsequent business, on which there is considerable pressure. I will allow questions to the Secretary of State to continue for 10 minutes; if hon. Members ask brief questions, they will all be called.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend particularly on the formation of a second Territorial Army Air Corps squadron? Is it not a little perverse that, while the Army seems to recognise the value of flying reserves, the Royal Air Force is not yet convinced—unlike the air forces of the United States, Switzerland and Israel?

Would it not be more cost-effective to use auxiliary jet pilots who have come out of the service under "Options for Change" than to train women as fast jet pilots, however keen they may be? Most of them will probably go off and get married.

Mr. King: In that interesting contribution, my hon. Friend has probably managed to offend two distinct groups. He has expressed some fairly pungent criticisms, but his point is interesting, and I take note of it.

Mr. David Marshall (Glasgow, Shettleston): Is it not astonishing that the Secretary of State, having made a decision on 15 Para, cannot or will not answer the pertinent points put to him by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Hillhead (Mr. Galloway) and the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars)?

Cannot the right hon. Gentleman accept that the Para battalions should have been the last to be cut, and that, if cuts must be made, they should be made on the basis of operational effectiveness, not political expediency? Is not this the worst possible decision for both 4 and 15 Para? For how long can the right hon. Gentleman guarantee the existence of a 15 Para based in Glasgow? Why did he not decide to reduce the three para battalions to the new standard size?

Mr. King: I am interested to hear what the hon. Gentleman has to say. I am sure that that announcement will be greeted with great interest by the 1st and 2nd battalions the 52nd Lowland Volunteers and the 1st, 2nd and 3rd battalions of the Highland Volunteers. They happen to believe that they, too, make a pretty pertinent and effective contribution to the Territorial Army from Scotland.

Of course the paras make a valuable contribution. That is why we have sought to respond to representations, and to continue to give people in Scotland who wish to serve in the parachute regiments the opportunity to do so. There will be a number of such opportunities, whether they be among the commandos or the Marine commandos, or in the SAS, the new Royal Engineers Regiment—whose headquarters will be in Scotland—or the new Scottish Yeomanry Regiment which is to be set up. Certainly, it is no secret that, in proportional terms, Scotland has done rather well out of the arrangements.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): Is there any message of consolation that I can take to the very bruised people in Staffordshire, who watched with pride as the 3rd battalion received its new colours in September? Will that battalion be allowed to survive?

Mr. King: I am not sure which battalion my hon. Friend means, but I shall look into the matter and reply later.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): The Secretary of State's catchphrase "smaller is better" has now given way to "so small that it is almost non-existent" in regard to 15 Para. With only one company left in Glasgow, is it not a fact that numbers will fall from over 600 to 150? That will do nothing for morale and recruitment in Glasgow.

Does not the Secretary of State agree with one of my constituents, Brigadier Alastair Pearson, who was the regiment's honorary colonel until 1989? In a letter to me, the brigadier said, "It is nothing but political. It is Treasury-led. It is not based on military criteria, and it will do nothing whatever for Scotland."

Mr. King: Sadly, that comment is completely uninformed. I do not know when it was made, but it is incorrect. The hon. Gentleman serves on the Select Committee on Defence, and he knows that a settlement has been made. The Select Committee has taken an interest and has recognised that we have fully funded the programme that we set out. Far from being Treasury-led, it is defence-strategy-led, and the Treasury has now agreed to fund the programme, so the comment was uninformed. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman cannot see the broader picture of what is happening to the other units and that it is not an unfair arrangement.

I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) for not responding to him. I confirm that the 3rd battalion will continue.

Mr. Ian Grist (Cardiff, Central): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the dismay that his proposals have caused in Wales? Why have the cuts been so disproportionately heavy there?

Mr. King: When my hon. Friend has a chance to read the full details, he will see that, although there is an amalgamation of regiments, other units will be moving into Wales and there will be new opportunities for serving in Wales. Proportionately, the reduction in Wales is less than the average for the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): Has the Secretary of State made any advance in redressing the ridiculous situation of the Scottish soldiers in the territorial units who served in the Gulf for 51 days and who were constantly under attack by Scud missiles? They have been informed that they do not qualify for their bounty because they have spent insufficient days at summer camp, despite serving 51 days in the Gulf. Are not 51 days in the Gulf more of a training exercise than running around the sand dunes at Barry with thunderflashes?

Mr. King: I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces is considering the issue, having given an undertaking to the House to do so. I shall ensure that the hon. Gentleman's interest is drawn to his attention.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): As to the background, does my right hon. Friend agree that, such is the high level of unit loyalty, any change will be greeted with apprehension by the Territorial Army community and the reserve community? However, does he agree that the news that he has announced today is good news for the reserve forces, because the units will be well equipped and will have an important role, and there will be full support for good recruiting areas such as Hampshire?

Mr. King: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He has summed up the issue much better than I could. That is precisely the point—the new reserve forces that we have announced will have important roles, will be relevant to our new defence strategy and will be well supported and equipped. That is our absolute intention. It is also our intention—this differs from what has been the case for a long time—that they will be fully manned units.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): Is it likely that the changes and related developments will lead the Ministry of Defence to release land in Scotland which it presently owns and leases for training purposes?

On a more parochial basis——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Only one question, please.

Dr. Godman: The Secretary of State mentioned "Grennock"—was he referring to a detachment in Greenock?

Mr. King: That pronunciation is a mistake that I made all the time that I worked in Scotland and I know the sensitivities which it aroused. I apologise.

There will be some rationalisation of the estate, but not in terms of training areas, of which there is, if anything, a shortage. Following the changes under "Options for Change" and the withdrawal of our units from Germany, there will be considerable pressure on our training areas. However, there may well be some rationalisation in terms of drill halls and buildings, and some buildings may become available.

Mr. Patrick Thompson (Norwich, North): Although I welcome the way in which my right hon. Friend has responded to pressure from those of us who are concerned about the future of the volunteers in the Territorial army and elsewhere, and I especially welcome his statement about the future of the Army Cadet Force and the support it receives from the reserves, what are his particular plans for the three reserve battalions of the Royal Anglians? I understand that the changes are fairly limited, and I should be grateful if he could give me any further information.

Mr. King: I think that there was concern that, under the previous proposal, one further Royal Anglian Regiment battalion would be disbanded. I can confirm that the 5th, 6th and 7th volunteer battalions of the Royal Anglian Regiment will continue. That should deal with some of the problems about which my hon. Friend is concerned.

Mr. Robert Banks (Harrogate): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the structure and military role that he has announced today? Will he consider the historical importance of many units, especially in Yorkshire, which have provided reservists for emergencies? Will the 8th (Yorkshire) battalion the Light Infantry Regiment be maintained?

Mr. King: I am grateful for what my hon. Friend says. I give him that assurance.

Mr. Conal Gregory (York): Will my right hon. Friend take the opportunity of the review of the Territorial Army to commend to the Confederation of British Industry, to the Institute of Directors and to others the training that is given by the TA so that greater public recognition can be given to it? For the TA's members in Yorkshire, can my right hon. friend give any reassurance to the House in connection with the Yorkshire Volunteers, which will next year celebrate its silver jubilee? Are there any plans to re-badge the Yorkshire Volunteers?

Mr. King: The 1st and 2nd battalions of the Yorkshire Volunteers continue, and the 3rd and 4th will be amalgamated. My hon. Friend also has an interest in the Light Infantry, which is relevant to Yorkshire.

In respect of the role of the CBI and of employers, I pay tribute to the work done by employers and by the National Employers Liaison Committee. What my hon. Friend said is profoundly appreciated by those who have employees who serve in the TA. The quality, calibre, extra capability and extra commitment that they give are well worth any time that may be given up to volunteer reserve service.

Mr. David Marshall: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. When I put my question to the Secretary of State for Defence, I referred to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars). I should have referred to the hon. Member for Dunfermline, West (Mr. Douglas), who comes from Govan. I apologise for the error.

Points of Order

4.31 pm

Mr. Robert G. Hughes (Harrow, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that, over a week ago, I raised with you the fact that an hon. Member had clearly used the free post improperly on behalf of Islington, North Labour party. I have been sent another example, which is rather more serious.

The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) is specifically identifiable on this occasion. It seems that he has been using the free post to send out quantities—I do not know how many—of his so-called "Annual Report". It has been sent back with a frosty message from one of his constituents, who is unidentified. There is plainly an abuse.

I seek your guidance on two further matters, Mr. Speaker. The royal crest is used on the front of the annual report, which I should have thought was improper. I know that the hon. Member for Leicester, East thinks that he is important, but he is not that important. The crest of Parliament is used on the inside of the report. I thought that that could not be used, so I seek your guidance, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I asked the hon. Member before to bring the matter to my office. I will look into it. From what he says, there appears to have been an abuse.

BILLS PRESENTED

Amusement Machines (Protection of Children)

Mr. Patrick Thompson presented a Bill to empower local authorities to prohibit in their areas the use by children of amusement machines:

And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 7 February 1992 and to be printed. [Bill 39.]

Established Church

Mr. Michael Latham presented a Bill to abolish the General Synod of the Church of England, on a date to be appointed; to provide for the creation of a Church of England Assembly, consisting of a house of all diocesan, suffragan and assistant bishops, and a joint house of clergy and laity, to be directly elected by all Church of England clergy and lay persons on parochial electoral rolls; to make provision for the Diocese of Sodor and Man; to empower the Assembly to decide on all appropriate matters, except those within the legal responsibilities of the Church Commissioners, without further reference to Parliament; to provide for the election of new bishops by members of the house of bishops, saving the right of final approval of the chosen candidate by the Crown; to abolish the Ecclesiastical Committee; to abolish the automatic places of bishops in the House of Lords; to permit ordained clergy of the Church of England, with the consent of a diocesan bishop, to seek election to the House of Commons; and for connected purposes:

And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 7 February 1992 and to be printed. [Bill 40.]

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.),

Representation of the People

Ordered,

That the draft European Parliamentary Constituencies (England) (Miscellaneous Changes) Order 1991 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

Question agreed to.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am not sure what you referred to just now as "an abuse". You have not yet seen the document out of which the tell-tale hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) is making a career day in and day out. Before you consider the document, may I remind you of a letter that you received from the convenor of Stirling district council? The hon. Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth)—I am not complaining about him, so I do not apologise for not having given him notice that I should raise the point—uses the crest of the House of Commons on his parliamentary report. He also uses the crest of the House of Commons on his advertisements for his constituency advice bureau.

I honestly do not see anything wrong with that, and I am not complaining about it. However, with respect, Mr. Speaker, I have seen your reply in which you said that using the crest of the House of Commons on such material was not an offence, so I hope that you are not referring to that aspect of the issue that the tell-tale Member has just raised with you.

Mr. Speaker: I think the hon. Gentleman is quite right. I am constantly enjoined not to give my reasons, but I did. When I said that I must look into the matter, I was referring to the franked envelope, not its contents.

ESTIMATES DAY

[1ST ALLOTTED DAY]

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES 1991-92

CLASS XIV, VOTE 1

[Relevant documents: The fourth report from the Social Security Committee of Session 1990-91 on the Financing of Private Residential and Nursing Home Fees (House of Commons Paper No. 421) and the first report from the Health Committee of Session 1991-92 on the above report (House of Commons Paper No. 28).]

Residential Homes

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That a further sum not exceeding £1,680,076,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1992 for expenditure by the Department of Social Security on non-contributory retirement pensions, Christmas bonus payments to pensioners, pensions etc., for disablement or death arising out of war or service in the armed forces after 2nd September 1939 and on sundry other services, on attendance allowances, invalid care allowance, severe disablement allowance, mobility allowance; on pensions gratuities and sundry allowances for disablement and specified deaths arising from industrial causes; on income support, transitional payment, child benefit, one parent benefit, family credit, and on the vaccine damage payment scheme.—*[Miss Widdecombe.]*

4.35 pm

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): It is my privilege to open the debate on the report of the Select Committee on Social Services into the financing of private residential and nursing home fees. It gives me the opportunity not only of placing on the official record the Committee's thanks to its staff for their work, not only of drawing to the attention of the House what I think is the first debate on community care to be initiated in the Chamber which is not part of a debate on another measure, but also of drawing attention to the number of firsts that we score with this report and debate.

This is the first joint report to be submitted to the House by the Select Committees on Social Security and on Health. This is the first time, speaking in this capacity, that I have welcomed my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) to the Opposition Front Bench. Anyone who knows my hon. Friend's track record before he became a Member of the House will know how well deserved that promotion is.

This is also the first time that the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), has been allowed out to speak from the Treasury Bench in the Chamber. We heard from the hon. Lady several times in Committee, but the Secretary of State for Social Services has kept her firmly muzzled on other occasions. Hon. Members can draw an important lesson from the hon. Lady's rise to office as a junior Minister in the Department. She got the post because she proved such a thorn in the Government's side on this very issue. Those hon. Members who are told by the Whips that their loyalty, obedience and voting record will all be taken into account may rest assured that those things are, indeed, taken into account, but in a totally different way from what one is led to believe if one wants to speak in the House from either Front Bench.

With those introductory remarks, I hope that I have drawn attention to the firsts that we celebrate in this debate, but although those matters are important, matters of far greater importance form the substance of our debate. I refer to what has been, is and will be happening to the financing of some of the most frail and vulnerable members of our community who live in residential or nursing homes.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) wishes to contribute to the debate if he is able to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker. From the many written questions that my hon. Friend has tabled on this matter, I note not only that the numbers of people in residential and nursing care have increased substantially, as we all know, but also the surprising fact that there has been only a modest fall in the numbers of people in local authority care. I had thought that there had been a really massive shift from what one might call the public sector into the private sector. Although there has been a slight fall in the numbers of people in local authority care in the past 10 years, there has been a remarkable increase in the numbers of people cared for in what is described as the private sector—in the homes run as nursing or residential care homes.

I know that criticisms will be made as a proper part of our deliberations today about whether that is the best use of the money. My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield raised such criticisms in Committee and may well do so again later. However, on behalf of many of my constituents—I am sure that this is true for many other people around the country—I should like to stress that, although none of us thought in 1979 that we would be discussing this situation today, as a result of it many of our constituents have received a quality of life far superior to that which they might otherwise have had.

I certainly recall visiting residential and nursing homes in my constituency of which one could genuinely say that one would be pleased to be a member of that community. We are called upon to make such statements in all sorts of circumstances in our constituencies and sometimes we do it slightly with tongue in cheek, but I can genuinely make such a statement about many homes. I do not want any criticisms that we may have of some home owners or some trends to detract from that important fact.

We all agree, however, that there are some real problems with the current provision. Many of us share some deeply felt worries about what will happen under the current procedures until the changeover takes place in 1993. While our minds may boggle at the difficulties which exist now, goodness knows what the scene will be after 1993. We welcome to our debate the Minister for Health, who is in her place on the Treasury Bench.

First and foremost, there has been a remarkable and outstanding growth in the social security budget for residential care. This is one of the few occasions in the House when I can say that many hon. Members on both sides of the House told the Government that that would happen if the Government allowed the policy to develop in the way it has. Hon. Members made a plea in the early stages of the 1979 Parliament that the Government should allow local authorities to appoint gatekeepers who would judge whether people qualified on not only income grounds but more general medical needs grounds for the care that they sought.

Every time hon. Members put that point to the Treasury Bench, the Government knocked it aside. One of

[Mr. Frank Field]

the consequences of that is a high level of provision, from which many of our constituents benefit. But if some of our constituents had been offered other options, they would not have chosen residential or nursing care.

It is because the Government would not allow local authorities to appoint a couple of gatekeepers that we face a bill probably in the region of £1·9 billion. Undoubtedly, the Under-Secretary of State will bring us up to date on that. I think that it is fair to say that, if hon. Members on either side of the House had realised 10 years ago that we would be debating a sum of almost £2 billion, none of us would have recommended the one-track community care solution that has been adopted. To some extent, that is water under the bridge.

I do not say that to score a cheap point. It is not a party point but a House of Commons point against the Treasury Bench. I make the point because, in the report that we are debating, we make several recommendations and we wish the Government to take them more seriously than those that we made in the past. The fact that the Government disregarded our recommendations largely accounts for the debate that we are having today.

The next problem that the Government face is the fear of evictions. If I were the Secretary of State for Social Security, which I am not, my nightmare would be the early morning phone call from the Department's press office saying that an eviction is taking place that day, that the media and particularly the television cameras will be there and asking whether I would be there and what were the Government's comments. It is because that fear exists that some home owners know perfectly well that they have the Government over a barrel. When they want to see fees generally jacked up, we get talk of impending evictions.

The Under-Secretary of State said in her discussions with the Select Committee that she did not have any examples of evictions, yet the Association of Metropolitan Authorities told us that 24 per cent. of its members had reported evictions to it. It added a phrase so extraordinary that I quote it directly:

"although these were felt to be isolated incidents."

All that I can say is, thank God that they were isolated incidents. Even so, a quarter of the authorities reported to their central body that such incidents had taken place. It is a real worry that evictions might take place.

It is because we wish to strengthen the Government's hand against a fairly well organised industry which seeks universal general increases that we make a series of recommendations in the report, to which I shall come in a moment. The Government are vulnerable at any time, but especially in the run-up to a general election, to the prospect of evictions of people who are no longer able to pay the full fees for which the home owner calls.

The Committee has highlighted two other problems. When the policy was first implemented, there was no question but that those who were then on supplementary benefit and are now on income support gained a first-class service from the homes. Indeed, many of the homes said that the fees from supplementary benefit were so adequate that the people who came in on that ticket were given some of the best accommodation in the establishment. That is not so now. There is not only a form of filtering within homes of the rooms offered to those on income support, but homes sometimes put up a bar against those whose only contribution is up to the ceiling laid down by the Government. Within homes, a two-tier system is developing.

More importantly, a different tier system is developing in different parts of the country. I see the hon. Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) in his place and I know that he hopes to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. He is a member of the Select Committee on Health and played an enormously valuable part in our proceedings. We were given evidence by Age Concern England. It quoted a Health Advisory Service report on Bromley, which said:

"Frail, elderly people face exile in private residential homes far from Bromley".

In other words, the rates that the Government lay down are such that one must be extraordinarily lucky in Bromley and many other places to obtain a place near one's home. It gives a new and cruel twist to community care that people may have to be shipped perhaps as far as Birkenhead to find a community home. That provision will cut a person off from all that he or she most values—family and friends. That is the background to some of the problems that the report has highlighted.

I come quickly to our recommendations. I stress that we have made them in the most constructive vein possible. I sought to score points earlier on the cavalier way in which previous Ministers dismissed the suggestions from the then Select Committee, by which we sought to limit the rate of increase in the residential care part of the Government's budget. We did so not because we did not want money spent on community care, but because we did not necessarily believe that a one-track policy was the best way to ensure the ideal form of care. We want the Government to think carefully and respond positively to our recommendations, because we are anxious that the rate of increase in the Budget from now on should not be jacked up by the powerful lobby of the industry and the influence that it can exert on the Government.

Therefore, our recommendations were tailored to some selective targeted measures which the Government could implement to avoid conceding increases across the board. We emphasise in our report that we do not see those measures as a way of dealing with the shortfall. We are interested in how to make good that shortfall. That is what our recommendations are about, but we also aim to help the Government to limit the rate of increase in the budget.

I wish to touch on three proposals. First, the Secretary of State told the Committee and the House that the new form of community care, which will be run by local authorities, would have the extraordinary advantage that people in the locality who knew the scene would make the decisions. Why cannot that proposal be brought forward, so that the local offices of the Department of Social Security could make the decision about topping-up arrangements?

Secondly, as new residents in homes will be able to claim housing benefit under the new proposals, why cannot housing benefit be claimed as a way of helping to make good the shortfall? Thirdly, as the Government are turning a blind eye to many of the disregards being allowed for people on income support and in residential and nursing care, could that be codified and made safe for all forms of disregard?

We hope that the Government will respond to other priorities and suggestions in the report, which I shall list as headings because I know that other hon. Members wish to speak and will doubtless develop many of those

arguments. We are worried about the date on which local authorities will know the size of their budget. Will the Government issue clear guidance on which responsibilities will fall to health authorities and which to social services? How far down towards the locality will the decision on housing benefit be made?

One more issue, which I often return to from these Benches, although I hope that before long I shall be able to support those on the Treasury Bench from the other side of the House——

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Is the hon. Gentleman crossing the Floor?

Mr. Field: When I am ready for residential care, I may totter over to that side of the House, but until then I am happy to stay on this side.

Finally, on the proposals in our report about extending freedom, many of us fear that, after the changeover, people's freedom will be limited under the Government's proposal, although so much of their rhetoric suggests the opposite. We have three proposals. First, as we wish to encourage carers and strengthen families—even the extended family—if a person who is caring for someone loses them to a home, the person's home should not have to go on the market to meet the cost of fees.

We are not saying that taxpayers should not be able to claw back some of the costs at a later stage, but the carer's position should be protected. Under the new system, we want people to have rights to choose the sort of care that they receive, rather than be directed to it. We all have too much experience of what it is like for council tenants trying to exercise their supposed freedom for us to lie easily with the Government's assurances on that matter.

The most important issue regarding freedom is that we fear that, far from more people being given control over their lives, when the new system comes into play, fewer people will have control. Our plea to the Government is that they take a leaf out of their own book on the independent living fund, which was set up in haste and has played a role that it was never meant to play. It has been a noble role, as it has allowed people grants and cash to fix the level of care that they want. They have been in control. Under the new system, we want an increasing proportion of the budget to go into a pot of cash, which local authorities will be able to give out. That cannot happen in year one, but as the years went by, it would enable people to build their own packages of care rather than having to take care designed by others for them off the shelf, as in a supermarket.

As I have emphasised three times, the previous Select Committee on Health and Social Services made a number of pleas to the Government not to get us into the position that we are in now. I am being polite about the way in which the Government have behaved when I say that they have dealt with our recommendations in a cavalier fashion. When the Under-Secretary of State responds, I hope that we will know that the joint recommendations from the Select Committee on Health and the Select Committee on Social Services will be taken more seriously than previous recommendations.

4.54 pm

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): My contribution will be brief. I support everything said by the Chairman of the Select Committee on Social Services, the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). I am sure that all those who participated in the report—in his Committee or in my Select Committee on Health—endorse the responsibile recommendations and conclusions in the report.

The hon. Gentleman presented the case for the Committee and introduced the debate in a measured and responsible way. Like him, I welcome my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security to the Front Bench to respond to this important debate. As the hon. Gentleman said, she made a substantial reputation for herself by the stand that she took in seeking to represent the best interests of the elderly and others who would be looked after in private residential or nursing homes.

Having endorsed—on behalf of the Health Committee—all the recommendations made by the Social Services Committee, I wondered precisely what my contribution to the debate could be. I need not have worried. Following the appearance that I made with the hon. Member for Birkenhead on a Channel 4 programme, which generated quite a volume of correspondence, I received a letter from the proprietor of a private nursing home in Chesterfield. The letter precisely sums up the remarks that I would have wished to make in this debate.

The gentleman concerned—the proprietor—decided to establish the home after he had cared for his father-in-law in his own home until he died. He described that as a traumatic and difficult experience, following which he and his wife pledged to find a better way to look after the elderly and people who need residential or nursing care.

In his compassionate letter, he advised me that, after 12 years research and work, they opened their present nursing home. He told me that they have about 50 residents, cared for in a purpose-built home by about 100 staff. That is a measure of the cost of looking after the elderly and those who need residential and nursing care properly. The 100 staff include 25 state registered nurses.

Like the hon. Member for Birkenhead, I have taken considerable time during the years that I have represented Macclesfield in the House to visit private residential and nursing homes and part III county homes in my constituency. I have not given notification but have dropped in.

The proprietor says in the letter that the facilities that he is able to provide are a better way to look after people who are among the most vulnerable in our society. The kernel of the argument is that, because of the costs he incurs by running a highly staffed, well-motivated and caring establishment, he has to limit the number of income-supported residents that he can accommodate. The fees that he can get back from the Department of Social Security are inadequate to cover the costs that he incurs.

In his letter, he gives one or two examples:

"May I give Margaret as an example of costs. This lovely lady has suffered extreme arthritis for many years, and her skeleton is crumbling away. Three of my staff take 1 hour to wash and dress her, morning and night—cost £210·00 per week.

Treatment, laundry, food, room and other overheads raise the true cost of her care to £400·00 per week. Income support for this lady is £255·00 per week, or £1·55 per hour."

The cost of £210 is the fee that he currently charges the lady.

He asks me to consider another case whose Christian name is Jennie:

[Mr. Nicholas Winterton]

"This delightful lady is frail and confused, requiring a lot of care and attention. At night her bed linen is changed 6 times to keep her warm, dry and comfortable. her bedroom carpet has been shampooed daily for the past 2 years. Yet Jennie is charming, retaining dignity and pride, and is loved by all of us.

Not one of our residents could live on their own now. Many have spent years in their own homes, coping with frailty, loneliness, poor diets, falls, fear, burns and hypothermia."

Perhaps the most serious of those is loneliness. Sadly today, the extended family is not as caring and is perhaps too extended to enable them to take care of their elderly relatives.

The gentleman who runs the home advises me that the only alternative environment for the residents would be a hospital. Of course, that would not be so homely or comfortable and it would go entirely against the policy of successive Governments, which is to have these people looked after in a much more caring way, hopefully within the community. In addition, the cost of a hospital bed is extremely high.

The proprietor of the home in Chesterfield says that they cannot reduce costs. He thinks that the Government's regulations are reasonable, but says that they demand only minimum standards, while he seeks to establish standards which are higher than the minimum. He says that his charges are well below those of local hotels which

"do not offer skills to reduce the pain, or reassurance and a cuddle when you are afraid."

He continues:

"Recently I spoke to a chairman of a health authority, who confirmed that substantial economies are being made by closing 'Grannie beds' and transferring patients to private nursing homes."

We all know that that is happening. I am making no announcement that is not well known to the Government. If the Minister of State and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary are determined that community care should work and that the more vulnerable groups within society should have a better life in their declining years, they will ensure that the level of income support for those who need to rely upon it is as high as is necessary to enable them to be looked after in a private residential or nursing home which can provide the proper quality of care that the House would wish them to receive.

Those examples are not untypical of what is happening throughout the country. I have not mentioned Southfield Manor, just outside my constituency, which I brought up during our deliberations in Committee, where Mr. McCabe looks after 94 infirm, confused, mentally ill and mentally handicapped patients with serious behavioural problems. That nursing home requires a high level of qualified staffing. He may have to close at the end of the year unless many of the patients, most of whom rely upon income support, have an increase in their benefit.

I take the examples of top-up and housing benefit recommended in the report by the hon. Member for Birkenhead. If something like that is done, we can stagger through to 1 April 1993, but a very serious position will develop then. I hope that the Government of the day—my own Government, I trust—will pay serious attention to the matter and make better plans.

5.4 pm

Mr. Clifford Forsythe (Antrim, South): In 1982, as mayor of Newtownabbey, I took the opportunity to visit all the residential and nursing homes, in addition to the hospitals, in the borough. Since then, I have visited many homes in the rest of my constituency. But it was the visits that I made as mayor in 1982 that gave me my first insight into the running of such establishments. I saw at first hand the facilities which were being offered to the disabled and elderly residents.

I should explain to the House that most of the homes were under the control of the Department of Health and Social Services, because in Northern Ireland the local government set-up means that district councils have no function in the delivery of social services to their ratepayers. The position remains the same today for the public provision of care, and many private residential and nursing homes now exist in the Province.

Returning to 1982, I was generally pleased with the lay-out and surroundings of most of the homes; unfortunately, some fell far short of the standards of comfort and homeliness that many people, including the residents, would have liked. What impressed me greatly in all the homes was the dedication, hard work and helpfulness of all the staff, each working to overcome, in a minority of homes, adverse conditions of overcrowding and unsuitable, ancient buildings, in order to ensure that the residents were kept comfortable and contented.

I was made aware by those in charge of the homes that, because of better health provision and the demographic trend, a large rise in demand for places in residential and nursing homes was inevitable and that major changes would occur as a result. I am sure that those staff members, like me, have been startled by the huge increase, not only in the number of residents in the homes but in the vastly increased number of homes, particularly private homes.

It is revealing to compare the figures for 1982 and 1990. In 1982, residential homes in Northern Ireland totalled 246; in 1990, the number was 337, a rise of 37 per cent. In 1982, there were 12 nursing homes; in 1990, the number was 164, a rise of 1,250 per cent. Recently, I asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to supply me with up-to-date figures for residents. The total number of residents in all homes in 1987 was 2,382; in 1990, it had grown to 4,489, a rise of 85 per cent. in just three years.

The figures for different categories are interesting. Residential homes had 85 mentally ill and 1,321 other residents over 60 years of age; 41 mentally ill and 203 other residents were under 60. The nursing homes had 80 mentally ill residents and 2,533 other residents over the age of 60, seven mentally ill residents and 219 other residents under the age of 60.

All those residents received income support. That means that, according to the 1991 benefit rates, approximately £1 million per week is paid in Northern Ireland for those in residential homes and nursing homes. That figure does not reveal how many of those residents are supported by their relatives, who cover the real cost of the residential care in many homes.

The principal demographic change in the 1990s will be a rapid expansion in the number of pensioners over the age of 85. By 2001, the proportion of elderly folk living alone in the United Kingdom will have increased by 600,000 over the number living alone in 1986. We are already

aware that living alone is the second greatest demographic risk factor, other than age, that necessitates admission to hospital or to residential or nursing care homes.

Those figures put into context the conclusions and recommendations contained in the report of the Select Committee on Social Security. They reinforce the vital importance of agreeing on an effective policy for such specialist care.

I support the report, and commend it to the House. I am not a member of either major political party, and I was impressed by all my Committee colleagues, under the excellent chairmanship of the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). I have been impressed by their industry and obvious concern when investigating this important subject. I was also impressed by the manner in which they laid aside party preferences—except on one occasion—to arrive at conclusions aimed to be beneficial to residents and fair to people who have taken on the task of caring for those who are no longer able to manage in their own homes. We must not forget those who undertake that work.

I welcome the extra finance that will be provided by the Secretary of State for Social Security next April. However, I wonder whether various hidden expenses in running a home have been taken into account. In Northern Ireland, it appears that the Rates Amendment (Northern Ireland) Order could lead to some residential and nursing homes being rated by the valuation department. It also appears that, as a result of the new council tax, some of those homes will have to pay that tax. I do not believe that that hidden expense has been taken into account when deciding on the finance to be provided next April.

I sympathise with, and understand, the argument of those asking for a general uprating. However, I also sincerely believe that that would create a situation in which fees could be raised to absorb that extra cash. I am also concerned that, on occasions, a resident's personal allowance is used to top up their care home fees. The personal allowance belongs to the individual, and it must remain his property.

Recommendation (x) in the report asks that residents' homes should be exempt

"from consideration as capital assets in connection with Income Support claims in those cases where a carer remains living in the home or where there may be a reasonable possibility of the resident returning to live at home."

It also states that, should the resident's spouse sell the home to raise extra money, that money should be excluded from the calculations of income support entitlement.

I should like that concession extended to family smallholdings or farms where a similar problem can arise, with the result that land that has been in a family's hands for centuries is sold to pay for the former owner's residential or nursing home fees. That deprives his spouse not only of her home, but her livelihood. Such a sale places the land and the house in the hands of speculators who care nothing for history, tradition, or, indeed, farming.

In the future, we face the prospect of more and more pensioners taking on the responsibility of looking after their even older parents, as well as themselves, on a fixed and, in many cases, inadequate income. Therefore, it is obvious that we have a short time only in which to resolve the problem. It is up to us to ensure that those who created the wealth of the nation in the past are properly looked after without the pressures, tensions and worry to which many are unfortunately subject now.

5.16 pm

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): The House is indebted, not for the first time, to the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) for the manner in which he chairs the Select Committee on Social Security and for the way in which he introduced the debate today. The report from the Select Committee is a valuable one on an important subject. As the hon. Member for Birkenhead mentioned, the report also creates a precedent by being as near as possible a joint report of two Committees, the Select Committee on Social Security and the Select Committee on Health, of which I am a member.

Government is divided into different Departments, but life is not. There are bound to be overlaps in the work of different Departments, and therefore of different Select Committees. There are circumstances in which it is useful to conduct joint inquiries. I hope that it will be possible to amend the Standing Orders to produce joint reports, instead of having to follow the rather odd procedures which we did.

People are expected, not unreasonably, to try to make some provision for their old age, but some are better able to do so than others. Some are able to live in their own homes and look after themselves, with or without help from relatives, literally until their dying day. Others—none of us know what the future holds—need to go into residential homes or nursing homes to receive care. In both cases, the costs can be substantial, but they are especially great in the case of nursing homes. Where such costs can be met from a person's resources, it is right that that should be done. When that is difficult or impossible, the state, through the payment of social security benefits, should step in.

I recall a case in my constituency of a lady who had to go into a home. Her son wrote to me from an address that suggested that he was not too badly placed. He protested that his mother's application for income support had been refused because she owned a home. He said that that meant that he would have to sell that home and therefore deprive himself of his inheritance. I am afraid that he got a rather dusty answer from me, because I did not see why the taxpayer should pay to support his mother when there was such a property in the family.

Any benefit system involves rules and regulations which are almost bound to produce anomalies. Some people will be covered, others not. Some will get benefit who perhaps should not have it. We must try to build in some flexibility and consider cases on their merits. That, without going into a detailed argument, is a feature of the social fund.

Income support for people in homes is not flexible. The rules specify the circumstances in which it shall be allowed, and the sums are fixed. On the Minister's admission, income support is not intended to meet the full cost of fees of residential and nursing homes. So how is the gap to be filled between the fees charged and the income support provided? Sometimes it is met by relatives, and that is not unreasonable if they are people of means. Sometimes charities are asked for assistance to fill the gap. But some people do not have relatives, while others have relatives who do not have the means to help.

Many examples were quoted to the Committee and are recorded in the evidence. They include a letter which I received about a 102-year-old lady in a modest residential home in my constituency for whom the difference between income support and fees is met by her son, aged 80, from

[Mr. Roger Sims]

his pension. That cannot be right. Similarly, there is the case of a lady in a nursing home in my constituency who receives retirement pension, war widow's pension, attendance allowance and a grant from the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's Families Association, her husband having fought in two world wars, plus income support. But that is still not sufficient to pay the nursing home fees. The difference must be paid by her son, an ex-POW pensioner turned 70.

I urge the Minister seriously to consider the recommendations in our report, which would enable local offices to top up in individual cases, thus providing the flexibility that I have advocated. The arguments against a general increase in income support levels are rehearsed in the report, but I suggest that the alternative, of individual top-ups, would be less costly and a far more effective use of resources.

Reference has been made to carers. I cite the case of a lady in my constituency who, since her father died in 1975, has lived with her mother, sharing household costs and maintenance, and latterly has combined a full-time job with looking after the mother in failing health. The mother is now 82, her Alzheimer's disease has reached the stage where she needs 24-hour care, and she has moved into a nursing home. The daughter's entire net salary, plus the mother's pension, are insufficient to meet the nursing home fees, so an application has been made for income support. That benefit will be issued for six months, but not for longer, because the house was in the names of the father and mother and since the death of the father has been in the name of the mother only. So she is not eligible for income support after six months, the period which is given to enable her to dispose of the house.

That means that the daughter, now aged 52—she does not fall within the bracket of being either disabled or over 60—will be obliged to sell the roof over her own head. She is, in effect, being penalised for spending those years caring for her mother by having to sell her home of 20 years, on the proceeds of which she will apparently have no claim. The irony is that if, on the father's death, the home had been transferred not to the mother but to the daughter, there would have been no problem for the mother or daughter.

I urge the Minister sympathetically to consider our recommendation that in those circumstances the Government should exempt homes from consideration as a capital asset. I invite the Minister to look at the practicability of the ingenious solution mentioned by the Chairman of the Committee, by which social security might have a claim at a subsequent date on the estate or on the estate of the carer.

Some of those problems will cease to arise when the new community care schemes are introduced in 1993, and I emphasise the importance of the Government transferring sufficient funds to local authorities to enable needs to be met in full. We recommend that some research be undertaken to ascertain what the figure is likely to be. I suspect that, when assessment gets under way, we shall find much of what might be described as hidden need.

While, as I say, the problems should cease to arise, the existing problems will remain, because those at present on income support, and on support in April 1993, will continue under that system and at the rates then applying. We could therefore find after 1993 that in the same home will be people receiving income support because they were there before April and others who were put in the home at a later date by the local authority having their costs met in full.

The impact on residential and nursing homes of the new council tax is causing concern. It seems clear from the Local Government Finance Bill that a person will be exempt from the council tax if

"his/her sole or main residence is in a residential care home, nursing home, mental nursing home in England and Wales, and is receiving care or treatment in the home."

Miss Sheila Scott, secretary of the National Care Homes Association, sought clarification from the Department of the Environment, which said in a recent letter to her:

"The Government proposes that the landlord or the owner of a residential care home should be liable to pay the council tax. It will be for that person to decide whether to seek a contribution from residents through fees and charges as he would with any other overhead".

Rather confusingly, the letter went on

"Occupants of residential care homes will give rise to a discount. A maximum of two discounts will apply if there are no liable adults resident in the home."

While people on income support will not be liable, in any event, to the council tax, there is concern about what the implications will be for owners of residential and nursing homes, for if those charges are substantial—and in the past the rates did not apply—and if now a substantial, council tax is to be imposed, the tax will have to be passed on to the residents and will increase fees even more.

I hope that the Minister, either when replying to the debate or by letter, will clarify the misunderstanding, if it is a misunderstanding, because it would be unfortunate if life were made unnecessarily more difficult for people in residential and nursing homes whose position our report endeavours to assist.

5.29 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): Having served on the Select Committee on Health and been involved in the joint inquiry, I endorse the report's conclusions and recommendations. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) for his role in engineering the joint working of the Social Security Select Committee and the Health Select Committee, and to the Chairman of the Health Select Committee, the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), for his role in the process. It was a useful exercise and we all have a right to feel proud of the end result—the content of the report.

There has been a broad consensus in the debate so far, but I hope that I can break it as I take a different view from some of those that have been expressed. Some would say that my view is more politically partisan. I apologise for the fact that my argument may be familiar to most hon. Members present. The two Ministers present have certainly heard me take this line before, and my hon. Friends and most Back Benchers have heard it on a number of occasions. Furthermore, any similarity between the speech that I made to the Doncaster trades and Labour club a couple of weeks ago, when you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, were in the Chair, and the speech that I shall make tonight, is purely coincidental.

We have heard comments about the Government's community care programme and have debated the matter in the House on numerous occasions. None of us would

argue with the broad political consensus that community care is desirable, and we all support the processes in which successive Governments have been engaged in the past 20 or more years. We all support the break-up of the large old lunatic asylums and the movement of people from geriatric wards into the community, but we may raise questions about how those changes were handled. The number of children who have been introduced into institutional care has also been reduced, and community schools have been broken up. Anyone who knows people who have lived in such institutions will support such measures. Alongside that process, however, there has been an alarming growth in the movement towards private institutional care. We have now reached a stage where community care is in a horrific mess and we have to unravel it. The report that we are discussing tonight is one contribution toward unravelling the mess that—let there be no mistake—has arisen because of the Government's policies alone.

The hon. Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) spoke of the huge explosion in the number of care homes in his part of the world. The official figures provided by the Library show that, in the past decade or so, the number of places in local authority care homes have been reduced by some 4 per cent., while the number of private residential care beds has been increased by 316 per cent. It is not possible to obtain reliable estimates of the number of private nursing home beds, but I am reliably informed that, in my area of Yorkshire, the increase in the past decade has been some 1,000 per cent. That is a massive increase in the number of people in private nursing home care.

It may be argued that the reason for that is the explosion in the number of elderly people, but the figures provided by the Library show that that simply does not justify the explosion in the number of people in private nursing home care. The increase in the number of elderly in the same period is 9·5 per cent., and the increase in the number of very elderly who might be expected to end up in care is only some 20 per cent. Therefore, the actual increase in the number of elderly people in society in no way justifies the increase in the number of private care beds in the nursing home and residential care sectors.

The Government's policies have pushed into residential care people who do not need to be in such care. I say that not just because of what I see when I visit care homes in the public and private sectors in my constituency, as I frequently do. The Audit Commission said recently that 25 per cent. of the people whom it saw in care homes could have been cared for in the community and had no need to be in institutional care. That point was picked up by the previous Social Services Select Committee.

The Health Select Committee recently took evidence from directors of social services who said that their registered care homes officers reported that 50 per cent. of the people whom they saw in private care homes in their areas need not have been in those homes but could have been accommodated in the community. That is an indictment of the Government's policy in the past decade, and we must do something about it. Because of the Government's policy, people who do not need to be in institutional care are being placed in it. Whatever Government are in power, that is wrong, and I hope that the report will be a starting point for a change in direction.

The reasons for a revival in the institutional model of care are clear. The Government have pursued policies that have directly led to people being forced into accepting—they have no doubt had a resigned attitude—the need to enter care because the preventive services have sometimes been pulled from under their feet.

We can argue all day whether the Government have funded the national health service properly. There is plenty of objective evidence that there has been large-scale cumulative underfunding since the Government have been in power. However, I have seen cases in my area—I have mentioned them in the Chamber before—of people who have had basic services such as bath nurses withdrawn, resulting in their having to be forced to leave their homes, to give up the ghost, and to enter care. If the Minister wants details, I can name cases in my area where that has happened.

The Government are committed to a reduction in public spending, which has affected the availability of preventive, caring services—alternatives to institutional care. It is ironic that, although the Government are committed to reducing public spending, huge amounts of money—some £1·7 billion in the current financial year—have been thrown willy-nilly at the private care sector. If one looks at that in detail, one finds that it is a gross and highly irresponsible misuse of huge amounts of public money, which could be used far more effectively elsewhere.

My local authority has experienced major difficulties in attempting to provide the basic services that are required by people who did not want to enter care but wanted to remain independent and who had carers prepared to support them, with a little help from outside and from local authorities. Yesterday, I received a note from the deputy director of my local authority about its present financial position. I asked about the position of the local authority with regard to its standard spending assessment in the next financial year. He said that the local authority had experienced problems in the past few years and added:

"For 1992-93 the Standard Spending Assessment for Wakefield District Social Services excluding specific grants is £26·3m.

Current expenditure plus inflation, if carried forward into 1992-93, will be £28·6m. The SSA is therefore £2·3m less than we need to maintain current expenditure plus inflation.

However, the letter from the Department of Health dated 26.11.91 giving details of the Standard Spending Assessments for the personal Social Services states that 'In setting the 1992-93 figure the Government has taken account of demography and inflation and has allowed for the implications of Community Care and the Children Act 1989. Also included are the revenue consequences of the specific grants'."

Mr. Cullinan, the deputy director, then said:

"In round terms I would estimate that we need an extra £2m to allow for the minimum implications of the Community Care Act, Children Act and the revenue consequences of the specific grants.

This means a shortfall of £4·3m between the Standard Spending Assessment and what we need as an absolute minimum in 1992-93 to meet legislative requirements."

This is the reality for my constituents who want assistance with home care and the variety of levels of provision such as day care and respite support, which enable people to remain independent or semi-independent.

In the period since the Government came to power, the pattern of expenditure on personal social services has been changed. By virtue of the Government having reduced the rate support grant, they have taken some £6 billion out of the budget of personal social services. That money should have been spent on preventing people from having to enter the hugely costly care programmes that we are discussing today. I do not want to expand that point, but it is

[Mr. David Hinchliffe]

important for the Government to accept that their local government policies have greatly damaged the prospects of people who genuinely wanted to remain, and could have remained, in the community. It will cost the Government more to adopt those policies than if they had allowed people to remain independent or semi-independent if they wished.

The role of housing in relation to community care is absolutely vital. Last year was the first year since the 1920s when no new council houses were built in my district. No one is making the sort of provision we need to enable people to remain semi-independent by moving into sheltered housing when they can no longer remain in their own homes. The voluntary sector and housing associations have simply been unable to expand the provision in the way needed during a period when there has been an increase in the number of elderly.

Alongside those policies, we have seen a clear effort by the Government to make it easier for people to enter private institutional care. There was a change in 1981 in the supplementary benefit system. People have told me that they have struggled to try to get telephones, day and home care facilities, but their local authorities have genuinely not been in a position to assist them because they did not have the resources. However, as soon as the decision was made for those people to give up the ghost and go into institutional care, the money flowed.

The money is available, but not where it is actually needed. It is not used to allow people to remain independent or semi-independent. It is not used on basic services such as home care and facilities that would allow people to remain in their own homes, which is tragic. I have met many people who have been affected by those policies, and I believe that the Government have made regrettable decisions.

It is also important to mention the way in which a market experiment in the private care sector has, with substantial public support and money, had a bearing on the type and range of services now available. Provision in the private sector is unplanned. If it is planned, it is done purely and simply by entrepreneurs who realise that they can make money by providing establishments in a particular district.

Perhaps because there are not many large Victorian mansions in Wakefield, vast numbers of people who have lived all their lives in that district have had to move away to live—often for the rest of their lives—many miles from where they were brought up. Provision for people in need has not been available where those people live, and they have had to move to the facilities. If there were proper planning of community care provision, those people would have been granted the necessary facilities in their homes.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman is making such a strong argument. In my short speech, I spoke of a private proprietor who had built a purpose-built nursing home for the infirm and those who could not operate within the community from their own flats or houses. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be prepared to admit that, if special accommodation is not provided by the county council social services or through the old geriatric hospital wards, it must come from another source. The private sector can fill and is filling an important vacuum.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. I certainly do not disagree that, where provision is specialised and limited—as it might be for young disabled people—it might be necessary for the person requiring that care to travel some distance from where he or she lives. However, I am not talking about people with specific needs, but about elderly people who simply need elements of care that are not provided in their communities.

I know of a number of examples where individuals have been discharged from NHS geriatric care and have been told that they must move into private care as there is nowhere else for them. As private care is not available in their local authority district, those people have had to travel to find accommodation outside their local authority area. They have ended up in the private care of another local authority. After some time, they have applied to that local authority for funds to return to their own local authority district where they have lived all their lives. They are then told that the authority is not prepared to support them because they are ordinary residents.

They have to live out the rest of their lives in a district many miles from their own homes where they have lived all their lives. I know of a number of such deplorable cases. As private care is largely unplanned, it is often not in the interests of the many residents who have to move from the district where they have lived all their lives and where they have their friends—*[Interruption.]*

Having been given a nod by the Whips, I shall come to my central theme, although I should have liked to go on for at least another half an hour. Private sector provision comes primarily in one form: institutional provision, which is the easiest way to make money. I do not believe that institutional provision should be the only facility available to the elderly or disabled. There are other forms of provision which could be available to people in their own homes.

People keep plugging the fact that the new legislation will introduce assessments. Hopefully, the assessment scheme will be introduced in the 1993 legislation, but assessment alone will not cure the problem. A social worker can assess a person, but only on the basis of the services available at any one time. If there are no alternatives to institutional care, assessment is nonsense. It would be wrong to assume that assessment will cure the problem.

I shall briefly summarise the points that should come out of the debate, and I hope that the Government will take note. The Government have engineered a deliberate redirection of public resources away from preventive domiciliary supportive services in the community towards institutional care in the private sector. It is ironic that, up to the last financial year, the amount of money spent on institutional care in the private sector through income support provisions—previously, supplementary benefit—was about £6 billion. That sum was provided to people entering private care since 1981. The amount of money taken out of local authority preventive services budget was about the same—£6 billion. That is what the Government have achieved during their period in office.

The incoming Labour Government will have a huge challenge: to engineer a complete transformation of residential care. No one has referred during the debate to the quality of care available in homes. The Government have commissioned various reports; the report analysing the costs of care did not mention quality. I agree with Lady Wagner who said that local authority homes should be

"progressively adapted to provide fewer residents with better accommodation on the model of very sheltered housing." That is the policy that we should adopt for residential care. We should not simply put people into Victorian houses miles away from where they have lived and forget about them, as happens at present.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) agrees that, when we are in government, we must urgently implement a substantial redirection of public resources away from residential care towards supportive services in the community, whether in the voluntary or local authority sectors or elsewhere. We shall thus enable people who choose to live independently to remain in the community with the support facilities which they require and which, in many cases, have been removed by the Government.

5.49 pm

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Although the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) may have thought he was introducing a contentious note, only in the closing seconds of his speech did I find much to disagree with. It was the second time that I have heard that speech, but it was well worth a second airing and there was a great deal in it with which I would agree.

The hon. Member for Wakefield fairly pointed out that the amount of money spent on residential care is massive. Our report notes that since 1979 the amount spent on income support for people in residential care and nursing homes has risen by about 160 times—a massive increase. Without wishing to spoil the atmosphere of consensus, I must point out that, although the hon. Gentleman said that the money could have been spent in better ways, I have a strong suspicion that, had it not been increased by this amount, he might have said that it should have been increased by more. That sums up the nature of the dilemma that he identified.

It is common ground between us that residential care of the standard that we expect for our fellow citizens is not a cheap option. Whatever else divides us, that statement cannot. It is an expensive option, and so it should be. The chances are that it is the most expensive option of all, so on social, pragmatic and financial grounds, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman was right to draw our attention to the fact that there may be better ways of spending this much money.

I do not, however, see the spending of money in this way as inhibiting our reaching a more attractive regime. It is a necessary step on the way there. We are getting away from the institutionalised Victorian establishment to something which approximates more closely to the sort of conditions that people enjoyed or wanted to enjoy when they were still independent enough to live in their own homes. The type of home with which all hon. Members will be familiar, operating at its best, is a step in the direction of the right sort of care.

We owe the hon. Member for Wakefield a debt. The last recommendation in our report is that the Government should undertake a study into the types of service that should be made available as alternatives to residential or nursing home care. That recommendation was included to satisfy the point made by the hon. Member, and it makes the report all the better.

In a sense, however, we need the evidence to back up the hon. Gentleman's suspicions. I am sure that he is right to say that we could be more creative, that we could keep certain people in their own homes either for ever, or at least for longer. That is only common sense. I must sound a note of caution to the effect that the evidence does not yet exist. I share the hon. Gentleman's strong suspicions, but quantifying them will depend on the evidence. If the recommendation in the report is taken up, we may well gain the evidence that would carry the hon. Gentleman's suggestion further ahead.

The recommendations in the report would not have been made without the highly skilled chairmanship provided by the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who shows us where consensus lies and who makes it clear that the easiest options of all are not available. Many people who take an interest in these matters might say that all that is necessary is to spend more money. This above all others must be an example of a problem on which expenditure of money would do the trick. As the hon. Member for Wakefield and I would agree, however, there is more to it than that. Our acknowledgement of that lends our report credibility and makes it harder for the Minister not to follow at least some of our recommendations.

The first recommendation contains the following statement:

"We do not recommend a general uprating of the Income Support level, other than the normal annual uprating. We welcome the increases to be made in the 1992 uprating, particularly the additional £15 a week rise . . . We understand and sympathise with those who have asked for a general uprating, but we believe that in all probability it would simply push fees up further and actually exacerbate the problem." That says it all. The hon. Member for Birkenhead, with his customary fairness which makes it so difficult to attack the parts of his presentation with which one does not agree, said that a general uprating would merely put the Government, the Treasury, the taxpayer and the system over a barrel. So the message should not go forth that this is just a question of spending more money and then the problem will be solved.

The recommendations can be divided into three categories. Recommendation (xvi), which I have already mentioned, falls into the first. It is valuable and free-standing. The next category discusses specific ways in which money might be spent to deal with a problem that was always bound to exist before community care was finally implemented—but it does so in a targeted way that would not amount to a general uprating. The third category I will refer to in a moment.

The difficulty with which the Government have to wrestle—I can say this in a debate in which there has been far more agreement than disagreement—is that, although we have pointed out the dangers of a general uprating and done our level best to come up with a package of recommendations that do not amount to a general uprating, it may be hard to implement the recommendations in their entirety in such a way that they would not amount to a general uprating, thus having the precise effect that the Committee did not want.

We Back Benchers do not have to wrestle with these problems; we have done our part by pointing out responsibly how to deal with the problem. But we would do our own credibility no good and we would not serve those with an interest in this debate if we did not acknowledge that, unless we are careful about our solutions, we shall bring about precisely what we do not want to achieve.

Finally, I arrive at the third category of recommendations, which includes action that can be taken that will not

[Mr. Patrick Nicholls]

require expenditure. Recommendations (vii) and (viii) amount to much the same thing. The Committee was given clear evidence that some health authorities indulge in what can only be described as sharp practice, either by passing on to the social security budget or by passing on to relatives obligations that the authority is supposed by law to fulfil. The recommendations try to rectify that; the practice must be stopped.

Health authorities may reply that they want more money, but then they would, wouldn't they? Times do not change; that is a respectable pressure to bring to bear on the Government of the day. But first things first: if authorities have an obligation in law, they must discharge it. Whatever else may cause the Minister difficulty when she sums up, I cannot imagine that she will not be able willingly to clasp to herself those two recommendations. She can do that without embarrassment or fear of comparison with past speeches.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) alluded to recommendation (x)—the consideration of capital assets in connection with income support cases when one carer is present and one is not. This recommendation combines compassion, common sense and—although we do not have the evidence to assess this—good solid fiscal sense. For that reason, if for no other, it should be adopted.

The report does not underestimate the problems; it tries to deal constructively with them, and it responsibly points up the fact that we must be careful lest, by implementing the recommendations in their entirety, we bring about what we do not want to achieve. Mercifully, we Back Benchers do not have to wrestle with that.

5.59 pm

Mr. David Bellotti (Eastbourne): First, I thank the Chairman, the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), and all the Members of the Select Committee who worked hard to produce the report and the excellent recommendations which are contained therein.

The report is simply a look at the current situation which will grow more serious as time goes on. The United Kingdom has 10 million retired people, about 18 per cent. of the population, but that figure will increase considerably in the decade to come. By the year 2030, although the overall population will rise by about 7 per cent., the rise in the 60 to 74-year-old age range will be about 36 per cent. and the rise in the over-75 age range will be more than 44 per cent. Those figures show that we must consider the report's recommendations seriously, because, unless we act properly on them, the situation will be more difficult to deal with as time goes on.

First, we must determine our principles for care in the community. There should be a mixed economy of care. It is for the House to ensure that all three sectors, public, private and voluntary, have the opportunity to develop and grow during the challenging years ahead. We should try to maintain high standards in all three sectors because that will lead to an element of choice for the client or the customer, help us to ensure that we obtain value for money and, to some extent, maintain standards, because only by rigorous inspection and comparison between the three sectors can standards be maintained.

In the real world, however, local authority public sector provision for residential care is in difficulty. Sussex is no different from many other areas of the country. There, the local authority is having to reduce the number of places available and to close existing residential homes in order to find the money to bring the remaining homes up to the standard which should exist across the three sectors to which I have referred. Therefore, the number of places in the public sector is being reduced.

The voluntary homes are also in difficulty because of recent changes in the financing of many of those which are registered as housing associations. Many of them are finding it difficult to balance their books, and relatively few are looking forward to developing new projects in the next 10 years. Their development plans are few and far between.

The third sector, the private residential and nursing home sector, has suffered because of the gap which has been created between income support and the real cost of delivering care. I was extremely pleased to see that one of the report's major recommendations was that the Government should immediately commission research to provide information about the shortfall between income support and fees paid, so that the funds to be transferred from the Department of Social Security to local authorities in 1993 can be accurately determined, because, if a problem exists now, it will be much worse then. That is important because, if funds are not there, standards of care will decline.

Slightly less important, but nevertheless important to homes that I visit, is recommendation (ix), which has not yet been referred to, requesting the Department of Social Security to ensure that high priority is given to assessing and paying claims for income support in care homes. I have visited many residential homes in Eastbourne where the proprietors are concerned about the time that it takes for those receiving income support to obtain it. That causes initial problems at the very moment when confidence in the system is needed.

The 7·7 per cent. increase in social services spending in the recently announced standard spending assessment has been referred to by the Association of Metropolitan Authorities as "absolutely devastating". The Association of County Councils has also expressed strong concern. The problem with that figure which gives local authorities cause for concern in the public sector is that it is not a 7·7 per cent. increase above their spending last year but above the SSA, which is what the Government thought that they should have spent. Therefore, the real increase in the funds available to social services departments next year will not be at the level above inflation which would meet the existing problems. Many social services departments throughout Britain are already spending well above their SSAs.

An example of where that is not only occurring but is leading to delay is in the provision of a much needed facility by the Key housing association in Kilmarnock. Because Strathclyde region cannot be sure about next year's funding, it is unable to give the sort of encouragement that such a proposal has so far received, and there could well be a delay in the provision of residential accommodation as a result of those delays and uncertainties. It is important that not only the right figure is arrived at through the SSA, but a figure that will give people confidence to move forward.

In evidence to the Committee, widespread concern was expressed about the gap which is emerging. The Royal National Institute for the Blind, which I quote not least because one of its residential homes is in my constituency, said that, from April 1991, its fees were £262 per week, whereas its real average costs were about £300 per week. It concluded that there was an urgent need for the weekly limits to be raised so as to ensure that visually impaired people received the care they needed.

I am sure that the Minister is aware that that concern is shared by other voluntary providers and by the private sector providers. In addition, private providers tell hon. Members that, unless the gap can be reduced or some other solution arrived at, they are particularly worried about the future. The British Federation of Care Home Proprietors says:

"As the gap between income support and real costs continues to widen, choice, a major concern of the Government"—

something to which, as I said at the beginning, I too am committed—

"will be restricted and a two-tier system of residential care may be the inevitable and regrettable consequence."

I think that all hon. Members will accept that we do not want to support anything that would lead to the evolution of a two-tier system of care. The report contains many examples of concern expressed on that front. Given the comparison of the fees, of which we had much evidence, it is not surprising that concern has been expressed from so many quarters.

Another report dated 7 May 1991 comparing the income support for 1991-92 with two surveys one from Price Waterhouse and one from Laing, it is easy to see why that concern is so widespread. For residential care running costs, income support for the present financial year was £160. The Price Waterhouse survey concluded that the real cost was £187 and Laing concluded that it was £204. In nursing homes, the comparative figure for income support was £255. Price Waterhouse concluded that the real cost was £293 and Laing, £287.

Those figures will be well known to the Minister, but they illustrate and add to the views being expressed from so many quarters. One way of providing residential care is often for individuals to sell their properties when they retire and to use the capital to purchase their care. Unfortunately, it is becoming more difficult to do that. Apart from the problems of selling property at this time, the average house realises only £66,000. Even if the whole of that sum is invested, the income thus produced is unlikely to be sufficient to support someone living to a very old age. An extremely helpful booklet produced by Pearl Assurance states:

"Many people use the proceeds from the sale of a house to help finance the fees. Even large amounts of capital do not last forever, so it is a good idea to get professional advice well in advance of the time you anticipate moving into a home."

Given the large number of people who are likely to enjoy a quality of life into old age, consideration must be given to how they can be financially supported, because that cannot be done only by the sale of their property. Price Waterhouse points out that average residential care and nursing home costs in London and the south-east are 15 per cent. higher than in the rest of the country.

Current uncertainty means that developments such as that in Kilmarnock which I mentioned are not proceeding as we would wish, and it is affecting individuals who are receiving care but who are not properly funded. I know that the director of nursing at one Sussex establishment has written to the Secretary of State and to a number of other right hon. and hon. Members, pointing out that his home has provided places to ex-hospital patients, but that they have not been awarded the income support to which they are entitled.

On 24 September, the National Association of Mental Health legal director successfully represented 12 of the ex-hospital patients in that home before a social security tribunal, which awarded them income support. However, the Benefits Agency decided to appeal against that decision to the social security commissioner. While that process continues, those individuals are left without any income. The Minister should give consideration to such cases, which place enormous pressures on the establishments concerned, and which could arise even after "Care in the Community" has been implemented.

In all this, we want also to protect the carers. At some stage, they could become the very people who need financial help for residential care. If we mortgage their future on behalf of those for whom they care, we shall not be providing for their own care in due course. Clearly, income support levels are not high enough, and the Government must address the alternative solutions available to them. Funding must also be reassessed—and I am sure that if we put our minds to that task, we could all do better.

6.13 pm

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): I pay tribute to the Chairmen of the Social Security Select Committee and of the Health Select Committee, who have found a way around the difficulties of operating together and have produced a more interesting report as a result. Having been through that process once, the Social Security Committee is clearly interested in other areas. When problems such as those created by the Maxwell affair, for example, come to light, that Committee and the Department of Trade and Industry could operate together.

The report therefore establishes an important precedent: it means that Government policy will not always be departmentalised but will be seen in the round. The problem with Select Committees is that they are sometimes compelled to take a narrow view, rather than the broader view that is reflected by the report.

The report gives further evidence that residential and nursing homes are an enormously important and valuable source of care for the elderly. The Government have made significant improvements in that regard. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State must be delighted that she will be summing up in a debate that concerns an area of activity in which expenditure has increased 160 times under this Government. Even given the expenditure that the Government have devoted to the public sector, there cannot be many Ministers who find themselves in such a favourable position.

The number of claimants has increased from 12,000 in 1979 to 220,000. There were 9·5 million old age pensioners in 1979, but there are now some 10·5 million. Those extra 1 million pensioners must account for many of the additional claimants. The frail or very elderly account for an increasing number of pensioners, and that emphasises the importance of nursing home and residential care.

The evidence to the Select Committee suggests that the private sector has not only expanded well in terms of

[Mr. David Shaw]

growing numbers and additional services, but of maintaining its assets. There was, however, evidence that public sector homes have been poorly maintained and that councils had spent their money elsewhere. Councils have had an enormous amount of money through their hands, and have spent it in an equally enormous number of areas over the past 12 years.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): A recent report named my local authority of Calderdale as the second most efficient metropolitan council in the country. Because of the threat of poll tax capping this year, it was compelled to cut £5 million from its budget. I do not think that even the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) could accuse that authority of being profligate, but those cuts will affect the care of the elderly in Calderdale.

Mr. Shaw: The hon. Lady ought to examine local authority budgets. I was on a local council for some years that thought it was well run, but we still found it possible to get rid of a tier of management. It is always possible to do that, and to use elsewhere the money saved. Many councils have employed too many staff over the years, have been too inefficient, and have not maintained their homes for the elderly and residential care homes as well as they should have done.

The Committee was told of a backlog of maintenance. That is because councils do not keep proper accounts or records. One of the problems in the public sector is that no one keeps a balance sheet, so there is no proper record of maintenance costs and of depreciating assets—whereas the business man or woman who manages a private care home is alive to the importance of maintenance, and of protecting the value of that asset.

The Government made a good move in calling in Price Waterhouse, because clearly there was concern among residential care home owners about their funding through the income support mechanism. We welcome the Government's commitment to keeping finance and income support levels under review; the Committee will examine the position from time to time, and ensure that the levels remain reasonable.

As the Committee's Chairman pointed out, the Government must maintain a fine balance. They must be careful not to make income support too generous, thus causing the taxpayer to lose out and causing funds to be taken from other provision for the elderly and disabled. The Government must exercise the wisdom of Solomon: although they must not put too much money into that sector, if they put in too little, the owners of care homes will tend to withdraw the little extra facilities that are so enjoyed by the elderly people.

As the report points out, resources must be made available to those who enter residential care with no resources of their own for those "little extras". Their spouses may not have been able to save much during their lives; they may have had low-paid jobs. Thank goodness, the current pensions policy is improving the position: many more people will retire with second pensions. Many others, however, will have retired some time ago, and will not have sufficient resources. The Government should consider setting up a scheme to provide top-up money when residents' families cannot provide it themselves.

The question of evictions is open to misconception. The evidence of such evictions is very weak; I felt that the evidence presented to the Committee was based more on political considerations than on hard numbers. One organisation suggested, however, that—although no actual evictions had taken place—some people had been discouraged from going into homes because of the cost involved. We recognise that some homes are more expensive than others, and that some provide more facilities than others; we must ensure, however, that no one falls through the net because basic income support is not available.

The report makes a recommendation about the assessment of claims for income support, and the payment of such support. We are led to believe that there are administrative problems. As we know, all Government Departments have such problems, but a review of administration might be helpful.

In my constituency, a care home owner admitted an elderly person over a weekend after that person had suffered a fall in her own home. The home owner had not waited for the bureaucratic processes to be completed; she had acted out of the goodness of her heart. Rather than being rewarded by the social security system, that home owner suffered a disadvantage. Payment of income support is related to pension payment days, and she was not remunerated for the first five days of the elderly person's occupation. The home owner had to pay herself. It is clear that legitimate and reasonable owners of residential care homes are suffering. The less money is given to such homes, the less is available for the "little extras" to which I have referred.

The hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) mentioned alternatives to residential or nursing home care. Although I disagreed with some of what he said, I agree that we should consider whether more people can stay in their own homes. As I have said, there has been a substantial increase in the number of pensioners, but surely new technology and the availability of volunteers could enable more people to stay at home for longer. We should take a radical approach to the position of elderly people beyond the year 2000, and consider whether technology can allow them to enjoy a better standard of living and to rely less on residential and nursing homes. Surely, in the early years after retirement, fewer people will need to go into such homes.

I commend the report. I believe that many of its recommendations deserve wider and deeper consideration, and I hope that the Government will take them on board.

6.25 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) on his excellent chairmanship of the Committee; I also congratulate the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), who played an important role. I welcome the recommendations in the report.

The report addresses itself very well to a specific "client group", the elderly and sick. Over the past decade, the care of that group has been privatised: the hon. Member for Macclesfield illustrated the process very clearly when he referred to an excellent nursing home in his constituency, a fairly large institution containing trained nurses. The

taxpayer financed the training of those nurses: there is a hidden bonus for the owner of that home, and for the owners of many others.

In the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), who is not in the Chamber now, moved to amend paragraph 88 of the report. I am sad about that. The paragraph clearly spelled out the story of supplementary benefits and income support payments to fund care in residential and nursing homes, saying that it was a telling example of what could happen if change was made in an ad hoc way.

The section that was deleted struck me as very important. It pointed out:

"no overt decision had been made to phase out geriatric wards; the practice grew as health authorities saw the opportunity to transfer costs to the budget of another Government Department by transferring one aspect of care to the voluntary and private sector. That practice has now brought about a major change in the NHS. A service free at the point of delivery is being changed, for some, to one in which they or their relatives are asked to make what is often a considerable weekly contribution."

When Opposition Members talk of creeping privatisation, that is exactly what we mean. I am sorry that an excellent paragraph was amended, effectively to blame carers—or their neighbours or female relatives—for neglecting to do their unpaid duty.

Paragraph 94 expresses dismay that the funding of nursing home care should be private, and that health authority managers should draw a distinction between the elderly and others who need care. I hope that the Minister will take note of that important paragraph. I have argued with my district health authority for many years I know that many hon. Members have done the same with theirs—because it has for various reasons shifted the problem of elderly sick people to the private sector. It is increasingly difficult for the relatives of the elderly sick to obtain even respite care in many hospitals when they themselves need a rest. The crisis has occurred because of the Government's policy—which, whether or not it was deliberate, has been disastrous, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) said. We have ended up in a mess.

The hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) attacked local authorities, but that will not wash. It is no good knocking local authorities—we have only to consider the figures to see the massive amount that has been removed from rate support grant while the number of elderly people has increased. If the local authorities had been given the money that has been poured into the private sector to be spent on domiciliary packages, more home helps, special care attendance and occupational budgets to provide aids and adaptations for people in their own homes, we could have saved the Government and the country millions of pounds. My local authority of Calderdale spent responsibly, and a Government Department patted it on the back, saying that it was the second most efficient metropolitan authority in the country.

I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield said that £1·7 billion has gone into the private sector in the current year. With that money, we could have provided what the people wanted and real choice. I imagine that, for 90 per cent. of the elderly sick, the choice would be to receive nursing home treatment under the national health service or the care packages which would enable them to stay in their own homes. If local authorities and councillors had wasted the money in the way that many of us believe the Government have done, they would have been surcharged and hounded out of office. It is a disgrace that Government Departments are not subjected to the same scrutiny and punishments.

I do not want to criticise those who provide private care, because I recognise that there is as much good care in the private sector as there is bad. However, I criticise the trend towards not having highly paid and experienced staff. Many of the private homes are pretty, Laura Ashley, chintzy places, but do they have rehabilitation programmes or free therapy for their residents? Do they have the orientation programmes which I have seen in many of the local authority homes that I have visited in my constituency?

The crux of the report is funding, and the growing gap between income support and what it now costs to keep people in either nursing homes or elderly residential homes. The growing gap now means that the elderly people or their relatives must find that difference. When the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe), was in a less exalted position, I remember listening to her make a clear and, I thought, slightly emotional but honest contribution to a debate in the House. She talked about Florence Smith, an elderly constituent of hers, and how she was caught in such a gap.

Since she became Under-Secretary, I have written to the hon. Lady about such gaps experienced by many of my constituents. I am afraid that her reply was not as sympathetic as the contribution that she made as a Back Bencher when talking about Florence Smith. She also told me that there had been no evidence of evictions, but, however hon. Members interpret it, the evidence given to the Select Committee by Mr. Harris of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities was clear. He said:

"about 24 per cent. of our member authorities are saying to us that they have recorded instances of eviction."

Mr. David Shaw *rose*——

Mrs. Mahon: I shall finish this point, and then I shall give way.

A constituent of mine was on the verge of being evicted. Fortunately, her relatives were able to move her to another home which was cheaper: that is an increasingly common practice. Elderly residents are being downgraded and sometimes have to share rooms, and that situation will get worse. I am concerned that that will happen long before the community care changes come into force.

I want to draw the House's attention to recommendations (vii) and (viii), which are important. They deal with hospital discharge procedures and state that district health authorities should obey circulars. We need to know how the recommendations will apply in the new internal market for health care. We know that circulars that go to trusts are sent for the purpose of information, not action. If the recommendations are shortly to be accepted by the House, we want to know specifically whether the opted-out hospitals will be excused from obeying that recommendation. If so, there is not much point in us debating the issue. The report is excellent, and I hope that its recommendations will be carried out.

I finish where I started, by saying that the report confirms absolutely that there has been a wholesale privatisation of care for the sick and elderly. That is unfair, and it is also slightly sinister to say that, when somebody reaches a certain age, he can no longer receive care under

[Mrs. Mahon]

the NHS. I welcome the fact that that has been exposed and, despite the amended paragraph 88, I welcome the recommendations as a whole.

6.36 pm

Mr. Michael J. Martin (Glasgow, Springburn): I shall be brief, as I understand that the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman and the Minister want to reply to the debate. I also wish to put on record my congratulations to the Select Committee and its Chairman for their hard work.

I hope that we never reach the position that I have sometimes, although not often, met in my constituency, when I have received a phone call from a private home to the effect that it could no longer keep a patient who had perhaps become doubly incontinent. If the relatives could not pick the patient up, he would be lodged in the casualty department of the local hospital. It is scandalous that elderly patients should be treated in that way.

I repeat what the hon. Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) said about patients' private needs payments. It has been brought to my attention that that money, which patients regard as pocket money, is sometimes taken from them by private residential homes to be used as payment.

I take issue with some Conservative Members who spoke of second pensions solving the problems of the elderly in our communities. I ask them to visit some of the communities that I represent, from which industry has disappeared and in which it is not only the person approaching pensionable age who is unemployed and in receipt of social security benefit, but the caring young people in the family who want to do the best for their relatives. I do not see how those people can accrue a second pension. To get a second pension, a person needs a job, and the jobs are just not there.

I have no objection to private residential care for those who can afford it, but the Minister must admit that local authorities do an excellent job in terms of residential care and that there should be more local authority residential care places. The Minister must know that, when Conservative Members attack local authorities, they are attacking—sometimes unconsciously—dedicated men and women who have fought for years to get first-class old folk's homes.

If we mean business in looking after our elderly—and not just the elderly, as young and middle-aged people may be stroke victims or have other problems which mean that they need residential care—local authorities should be encouraged to build more places. I hope that the Minister will encourage local authorities which do an excellent job in terms of residential care.

6.40 pm

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): It gives me great pleasure to commend to the House the fourth report by the Select Committee on Social Security. It is a model of detail and clarity in reporting on private residential and nursing homes. It is of great credit to the Committee that it describes the situation so clearly and that it points out many of the problems that have come about as a result of Government policy towards private residential care over the past few years.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) for his kind comments in his introduction to the debate. No one has more expertise or knowledge of these matters, and it is to the credit of the House that he brings those qualities to bear in our debates. He has always been a source of inspiration to me and I hope that he will take it as a compliment when I say that, from the days when I was a student, he has been an inspiration to me.

I intend to reinforce and highlight some of the recommendations that have been mentioned in many thoughtful contributions this afternoon and I will pose a series of questions to the Minister, whom I welcome to her first estimates debate. I hope that, in the short time available, she will be able to answer those questions.

I support my hon. Friends the Members for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) and for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) in their general comments on the broad area of policy on residential and community care. Many people who care or who are cared for find it difficult to understand why they cannot get the resources for that care when such vast amounts go towards people who are in residential care. Such people have been disappointed, to say the least, that the Government postponed the community care programme by two years because they saw it as an opportunity for the balance of resources between residential care and community care to be readdressed. They also saw it as an opportunity to get the packages of care that they sought implemented as early as possible.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax made the point that the rundown of long-stay care for the elderly in our health service and the move towards the elderly having the opportunity to go only into private nursing care is to be deprecated. I am not in favour of long-term institutional care in hospitals, but the balance between the opportunity for decent health care for the elderly in our hospital services and the opportunity for other care has gone much too far. In my local hospital in Withington, the number of beds for the elderly has decreased in the past few years from 140 beds to barely 20.

I was informed today that elderly people who are trying to get into hospital are being put on to wards in which the nursing staff have not been designated specifically for the care of the elderly. They are put into such wards because there are not sufficient resources in the health service to open up other wards that have been closed because of the general lack of resources in the health service. We must consider clearly the balance between health care provision in the national health service and health care provision in private nursing homes.

We must also examine the way in which the run-down of resources through personal social services and housing, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield pointed out, has led to local authorities having to suspend many innovations. Cities such as Sheffield and Manchester have been at the forefront of examining alternatives to residential health care to ensure that people can live happily in the community. I commend the programme of the development of elderly persons' resource centres in those cities.

In Withington, we have such a centre, which provides domiciliary care, meals, laundry services, recreation services, shopping facilities and companionship. The people who attend those centres can still live in their own homes because of the support staff who work from those resource centres. The number of people in the catchment area of the resource centre who now seek residential care has dropped dramatically. Few now seek residential care because of that support in the community.

I hope that the Government willl re-examine the funding of such developments in local authorities in conjunction with their community care programme so that local authorities and others can again consider a flexible response to ensure that we do not only seek residential care, but that we look forward to proper community care and support in the home.

My hon. Friends have highlighted some of the report's recommendations. The report is clear that there is substantial evidence from many organisations such as the citizen's advice bureaux, the Association of Metropolitan Authorities, Mencap and MIND—the National Association for Mental Health—that the level of income support does not match the costs in private residential care and that there is a threat, although Conservative Members may doubt it. People in such homes are anxious that, because of the gap between income support and charges, there is a threat of eviction. Indeed, there are cases of eviction. They may be few and far between, but they cause worry to elderly people who fear that the gap may lead to them being put in the same position.

An AMA survey in September 1990 showed that 24 per cent. of local authorities gave evidence of evictions. It is a particular problem in the south-east, where there are escalating costs. There have been examples in local councils in the south-east—Hertfordshire springs to mind—of evictions taking place. We must study the gap closely and we must realise that, in many of the homes that have come on to the market, on which there has been significant capital outlay by people moving into the private sector, the costs have escalated because of the massive increase in interest rates. Those costs have been passed on to the residents, so the gap has widened.

We have heard today that the gap has had to be filled by resources from relatives, from charitable organisations and, most appalling, from the meagre personal allowance available to people in residential homes. They cannot then use that small amount for the few personal items that they may want to buy when they are in residential homes. We must ensure that the gap does not lead to anxiety about possible eviction. We must also ensure that the escalation of costs does not lead to elderly people having to move from a single-bedded room to shared accommodation, which would be a lowering of standards in their residential home—and it is their home. We must ensure that those problems in the south-east are addressed.

I support the recommendation—I hope that the Under-Secretary will do likewise—that the extra allowance that is given in the Greater London area should be extended to out-of-area boroughs that have similar high charges. Her Department should act on the recommendation that local officers should be able to top up that gap for claimants if no other resources are available. There should be local flexibility through income support benefits to meet the different charges around the country.

I also support the suggestion that has been made by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux about housing benefit continuing to be paid until the new system commences in 1993. I am pleased to see the Secretary of State for Social Security in his place, because he has said that the decision in January 1991 to stop such payments was taken because

"It has never been the intention, nor is it sensible, that in the generality of cases Housing Benefit should be available as an alternative to income support".

After 1993, the finance to meet the charges will come from income support, housing benefit and local authority community care budgets. Therefore, would it not be sensible to reintroduce the housing benefit element now to ensure that that gap can be met?

I strongly urge the Under-Secretary to look closely at the recommendation that the personal allowance should not be used as a contribution to bridge the gap between the charges and the benefits. The personal allowance must be ring-fenced to ensure that people in residential care can have a small amount of money for their personal needs.

Several hon. Members have highlighted the position of carers who may be disadvantaged because of the capital rules on income support. Their position was well summed up by the Carers National Association, which has stated that the current rules could have "disastrous consequences" for the family and friends of the claimant who may have moved into the home to take on the caring responsibilities. We must not do anything to discourage people from taking on that caring role. People often give up their own home to move into the home of the person for whom they will be caring but may lose that home as a result of the income support capital rules.

Although a spouse may be protected if he or she stays in the home, if the partner goes into permanent residential care, the spouse may want to move into smaller and more appropriate accommodation. In that case, the spouse must forgo 50 per cent. of the proceeds of the sale of the property, which means that his or her opportunity to purchase something more appropriate is diminished. I urge the Minister to comment on that and to look at the way in which capital is treated for income support purposes to ensure that such disadvantages do not continue.

Perhaps the most crucial recommendation is that relating to the funding that will be available for community care after April 1993. The report highlights three issues: the amount of money to be transferred from the budget of the Department of Social Security; the way in which housing benefit will be calculated after 1993; and the division of responsibility between the health authorities and the local social service departments.

The first issue is the amount of money that will be transferred in income support from the social security budget into the community care budget. The Association of Metropolitan Authorities estimated in its evidence to the Committee that there would be a £300 million shortfall in that provision. Although the Secretary of State questioned that figure in his evidence, he did not say what he believed the shortfall would be. However, there is irrefutable evidence that there will be a shortfall, and if we do not ensure that that gap is identified and ascertain where the resources to meet that gap will come from, not only will the people who are currently seeking community care be disadvantaged, but, more importantly, future generations who might seek care in the community will not receive the resources that at present they believe that they will get.

I should be grateful if the Under-Secretary could comment on the way in which housing benefit is calculated. I hope that the Government do not intend to set a national figure that will apply throughout the country. Without regional and local variations, a further gap will be created. We must ensure that there is local

[Mr. Keith Bradley]

flexibility when assessing housing benefit so that it is sufficient to meet the charges that are imposed locally and to ensure that the gap does not widen.

We must also ensure that the Department of Social Security and of Health reach a clear understanding about the way in which the community care system will operate in future. From my reading of the evidence, it appears that there is a certain amount of buck-passing between the Ministers in the two Departments about who will identify the gap, where the resources will come from and who will come clean about the budget that will be set for community care provision. The local authorities need to know now how the standard spending assessments will be calculated so that they can make definite financial plans. Such planning is crucial if our hopes for community care are to be realised after 1993. The local authorities need to know where the resources will come from and how they will be allocated between the different areas of the country.

I end with some final thoughts for the Under-Secretary. Many questions have been posed and many recommendations highlighted in this debate. The Opposition commend them all, and I hope that the Minister will say that she will implement them. More crucially, however, will she tell the House how the Government will meet the identified shortfall in community care funding? If they do not meet that shortfall, there will be a sorry start to the future system of community care.

6.56 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Miss Ann Widdecombe): I begin by joining in the congratulations paid by hon. Members of all parties to the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) on the production of an excellent report, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) who chaired the Select Committee on Health, which was also involved.

I welcome the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) to the Opposition Front Bench and look forward to many a debate with him. I look forward especially to a future opportunity to develop his views on the desirability of keeping national insurance contributions as low as possible and of working out exactly how that fits in with the policies of some of his right hon. and hon. Friends, but that is for another occasion, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Before turning to the detail of the debate, my hon. Friend the Minister of State for Health, who has been present for most of the debate, has asked me to apologise to the House on her behalf for the fact that she could not stay throughout.

The hon. Members for Birkenhead and for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) and my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield referred to my part in the events of 1990. It could scarcely be more vivid in their memories than it is in mine, but what is also vivid in my memory is the aftermath of those events, which was the Government's sensible accommodation of the fears and anxieties that had been expressed.

I refer not only to the substantial amount of money that was made available, resulting in a £45 per week rise for nursing homes, which cost us a total of £225 million, but to the amendment that allowed the Secretary of State, after community care had been in place for some time, to take account of the local authorities' assessments of reasonable rates and of their experiences in general. I will not say that much of this debate has been irrelevant, because that sounds as if I am dismissing what has been said, which I am not, but it is irrelevant in the context of 1993, because the advent of the new system will answer many of the problems that have been identified.

The fact that we can examine what local authorities are doing has been comprehensively ignored, yet it could have an effect on many of the points that were raise.

The hon. Members for Birkenhead and for Withington raised the problem of evictions. They seemed to be selective in the evidence that they quoted. I was particularly surprised to hear the hon. Member for Withington home in on Hertfordshire, because, among those giving evidence to the Select Committee was a Mr. Herbert Laming, the director of social services in Hertfordshire. He said:

"there is no statistical evidence that is known to me at the present time . . . of people who are actually being discharged from the private sector . . . We do not have evidence . . . to bring to you . . . of a substantial number of people who have been discharged against their will from the private sector."

We must take into account that evidence, as well as the other evidence, which seems to point the other way but has not been statistically upheld and has never been put before us in any form that we could check or examine.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Will the Minister accept that I have an example? A private care home in my constituency accepted an elderly lady for respite care. Her son and daughter who cared for her were going abroad for a fortnight's holiday. After a period, the home evicted the woman, put her in a taxi and sent her to the local police station. Is that an eviction? Is that responsible behaviour by the private sector? Does the Minister accept such behaviour? It is happening elsewhere to my knowledge. It is not merely anecdotal evidence. There is clear evidence.

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Gentleman said that it was happening elsewhere to his knowledge. Perhaps he could produce chapter and verse evidence of such incidents.

Mr. Hinchliffe *rose*——

Miss Widdecombe: May I finish, please?

If the hon. Gentleman sends the evidence, we will examine it to see what happened in that case, and whether it is evidence of a larger problem. There will always be homes, local authority as well as private sector, which do not always behave as well as they should within the rules. That is not evidence of a general trend. The hon. Gentleman has not produced evidence of a general trend.

The problem of carers was sensibly raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) and by several other hon. Members, including the hon. Members for Withington and for Birkenhead. We already make exceptions to the capital rule where homes are occupied by a spouse, a relative over the age of 60 or a relative who is incapacitated. We have considered whether any further easement is possible. Although I cannot give the House any good news on that score tonight, I can say that we are considering the matter.

We have to consider factors other than merely resources. Opposition Members seemed to suggest that the hold-up was resources, but there are other factors, not least the fact, that, if we needed primary legislation, it would come on stream in about 1993, when the

responsibility for assessment and the decision about what to pay passes to local authorities. No new cases would come on stream for us to deal with. There seems to be a slight practical difficulty there.

Furthermore, we would have to devise fairly tight rules. Yes, the cases quoted are clear ones, in which carers have been in the home for a long time, but obviously we would wish to avoid a position in which the carer was in the home for a short time in the expectation that he or she would then be allowed to stay there. All those factors are being taken on board.

The hon. Member for Antrim, South (Mr. Forsythe) raised the problem of the personal allowance, as did several hon. Members. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State alluded to the problem when he was giving evidence to the Select Committee. It is my understanding that, after 1993, the personal allowances will have to be given to the individual, but we have a problem. The personal allowance belongs to the individual. It is for the individual to do what he or she likes with it. We cannot forbid individuals to use that allowance in whole or in part to pay fees for their care. So that is another problem. Opposition Members want us to forbid the use of that personal allowance, if only in part, for a particular purpose.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst said that, on Ministers' own admission, we no longer paid the full rate of fees. That is not true. We have said that we have never been committed—it is not something new—to paying the full fees, however high. In many instances, the income support rates cover the fees.

Mr. Frank Field: The Minister asked my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) to give her more evidence of evictions. May we ask her for evidence? History seems to be being rewritten. Could she give us just a handful of examples of people who were moved from geriatric beds into the private sector in the early stages of the development of the policy and were given the assurance that she says was publicly given that the Government had no intention of meeting fees, however high? Is not the truth that practically everyone was told, "Don't worry—social security is picking up the bill."

Miss Widdecombe: Social security has always been committed to meeting a reasonable rate. The hon. Gentleman has acknowledged, indeed it is in his report, that, by simply increasing the income support rate, all that we do is cause the fees to rise behind it. That point has been made consistently. That is the point that we have addressed in saying that we will not meet fees, however high. I do not believe that we ever said to anyone in geriatric care or anyone who entered a home for any other reason, "Don't worry—social security will pick up the bill, however reasonable or however high." The hon. Gentleman challenged me, but I challenge the hon. Gentleman to provide the examples of where we said that.

The hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) made an interesting speech. He seemed to suggest that the problems with the policy had largely been caused by the Government withdrawing funding from local government for domiciliary and other services, thus forcing people into residential care. I do not know how he reconciles that with the 59 per cent. increase in spending on local authority care services since 1979.

The hon. Member for Wakefield said that he did not like private institutional care. May I draw his attention to comments in the recent issue of "Community Care" by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) The hon. Member for Perry Barr is not an apologist for the Government, but he said that the Labour party was committed to a mixed economy. I welcome his commitment. That also means a commitment to private residential care as much as to local authority residential care.

Mr. Hinchliffe *rose*——

Miss Widdecombe: I would like to make progress, because the hon. Member for Birkenhead wishes to reply to the debate.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Will the Minister give way?

Miss Widdecombe: For the last time.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I said that I did not like institutional care, whether private or public. We have more of it in Britain than in any other country in Europe, and it is wrong.

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Gentleman said that private residential care was effectively institutional care, and went on to say that he did not like institutional care. By the application of simple logic, anyone can work out that that means that he does not like private residential care.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) was the only hon. Member to refer to recommendation (ix). I shall turn to the other recommendations in a moment. Recommendation (ix) calls upon local offices and the Department of Social Security to give higher priority to those entering residential care to to make sure that their claims for income support are processed in good time so that people do not have weeks of worry or possibly weeks in a home without paying.

I was grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that, because it is not often realised that such claims can be made up to three months before the person enters care, although I am aware that the circumstances do not always allow that. Few people enter care on the spur of the moment as a result of a catastrophe. For most people, it is a planned exercise. Therefore, I welcome the opportunity to exhort people who are considering the option of residential care to make inquiries as early as possible with the social security department.

Of course, there are national targets for all categories of claim. The target for income support is five days. Obviously, there will be difficult cases, especially where there is perhaps a house or capital to be considered. However, we will take on board the recommendation and try to ensure that people are not kept waiting on any appreciable scale. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Eastbourne for raising the matter.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne also quoted a Price Waterhouse survey at some length, and referred to shortfall between what we pay and the fees charged. If I heard him correctly, and I thought so, judging by the figures that he was quoting it must have been a more recent Price Waterhouse survey, not the original. The more recent survey was based on an example of 85 homes. We based ours on an example of more than 700. Therefore,

[Miss Widdecombe]

statistically, one should take the results of the first survey, and we based our rates of income support on its median rates.

I shall now deal with the rest of the recommendations which have attracted debate in turn. The comments on recommendations which relate to the responsibilities of my hon. Friend the Minister for Health will be passed to her for examination.

Two major recommendations in the report have attracted most publicity. The first is top-up payments, which the hon. Member for Birkenhead recommends should be made by local offices; the second is the reintroduction of housing benefit. I shall deal with the second recommendation first, because it is based upon a complete misunderstanding.

Housing benefit was never payable in addition to income support, but was used in place of it by people who would not have qualified for income support, such as people living in a room run by a close relative, the long-term disabled and various other categories of people under pensionable age who were not eligible. They were protected when the change was made. However, we were not keen for housing benefit to be used in place of housing support for care, which is properly the provision of income support.

The hon. Member for Birkenhead also misunderstood what will happen after 1993. Yes, housing benefit will be an element of the total package, but will not be for the whole cost of care and will not be wholly additional to current rates of care. It will be the rental element of the home, but there will still be a package. Housing benefit will not come in on top of the rates.

Mr. Frank Field: That is what we advocated.

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Gentleman says that that is what he is advocating, and says that we should reintroduce it now for those who face a shortfall in fees, but it would not make up the shortfall, because it would be part of the reasonable rate of fees.

Mr. Field: It would be additional.

Miss Widdecombe: It would not be additional, I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman has not understood the working of housing benefit.

The remarks about top-up by local offices was also based on a misunderstanding. In his opening speech, the hon. Member for Birkenhead said that we should "bring forward" the arrangements which will prevail after 1993, but it will not be down to the local adjudication officer to assess people to decide the appropriate care and to assess the reasonable rate. The hon. Gentleman is proposing something entirely different, which would certainly be without the law, which is not an advance on 1993 and which is probably impossible. Local adjudication offices could not assess individuals and it would be difficult to decide why Mrs. Y should get a top-up but Mrs. X should not. That is simply meeting the fees, no matter how high, in a more disguised and reasonable form. It would work in exactly the same way as a general rise in rates.

The hon. Member for Halifax asked whether national health service trusts would be subject to the same guidance rules and discharge procedures. She is a victim of her own propaganda. NHS trusts are NHS trusts, so they are subject to NHS guidance after 1993.

Mrs. Mahon: We know that when NHS circulars are sent to trusts they are sent "for information", but that they are sent "for action" to directly managed units. I was asking about that.

Miss Widdecombe: On discharge procedures and the trusts having to take care—in exactly the same way as health authorities now have to take care—of those for whom they believe that care is appropriate, the same rules should apply.

In the last minutes of the debate—the hon. Member for Birkenhead need not worry; I am leaving him time within the advice that I have been given—I must mention the generality of the issues raised. Time and again we have heard tonight—especially from the hon. Member for Withington—about shortfall and about the measures that we should take to meet it. Throughout the debate, shortfall has been defined as the gap between fees charged by some homes and the maximum level of income support which we will pay for different categories of persons in those homes.

The crucial thing is that we are talking about fees charged by the homes, not about reasonable costs. We are talking not about reasonable fees, which have been independently assessed, but about a fee levied by a home. That is vastly different from saying that we should consider the shortfall between the fees and the costs incurred by the homes. The answer is that we do not intend to meet all that shortfall. We have never committed ourselves to meeting it, no matter how high the rate.

In the light of all the sedentary interruptions from the Opposition, I would be interested to hear whether those hon. Gentlemen intend—in the unlikely event that they ever change places with us—to meet that shortfall, no matter how high the fees.

The hon. Member for Wakefield said that under an incoming Labour Government local authorities would receive much more support. We cannot wait for a Labour Government. We have to act in 1993, and we shall do so. Unless Opposition Members are prepared to stand up and pledge that they will meet the costs of every private home, no matter how high and heavy, our proposals for 1993 will overtake most of their objections, and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to respond to the debate.

7.16 pm

Mr. Frank Field: I am grateful to have the opportunity to respond to the debate.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. The hon. Gentleman requires the leave of the House. Is that agreed?

Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. Field: With the leave of the House, it remains for me only to thank the Select Committee on Energy for allowing us to hear the Government's reply. Even if the election is postponed until July, the Government will not be able to maintain the line that we have heard from the Dispatch Box.

The debate was concluded, and the Question necessary to dispose of the proceedings was deferred, pursuant to paragraph (4) of Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of estimates).

Coal Industry

[Relevant documents: Fifth report from the Energy Committee of Session 1990-91 on Clean Coal Technology and the Coal Market after 1993 (House of Commons Paper No. 208) and the Government reply contained in the first special report from the Energy Committee of Session 1991-92 (House of Commons Paper No. 67).]

CLASS V, VOTE 9

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That a further sum not exceeding £4,000,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1992 for expenditure by the Department of Energy in connection with the privatisation of the coal industry.—*[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory.]*

7.17 pm

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): The Select Committee on Energy believes that we all want to get the best that we can from one of our big national resources—coal—and for that reason we have carried out an inquiry into clean coal technology and the future of coal after 1993. We are grateful for the opportunity of this Estimates Day debate to bring our report to the attention of the House.

Coal was the foundation of our industrial revolution and coal remained the lowest cost source of energy in this country until the long period of low oil prices in the 1960s. Then the coal industry, faced with tough competition for the first time, slimmed down, modernised, introduced new equipment and new working methods in a way that should be applauded because it did so at a time when the rest of British industry was resisting change. Coal, however, faced the challenge.

The coal industry certainly coped with contraction admirably on the first occasion. As a result, at the end of the 1960s it was in a much healthier and stronger condition, which would have been ideal to take advantage of the fivefold increase in oil prices in 1973. However, the industry then had the misfortune to suffer two of the most disruptive and damaging strikes in our history. The result was that, as a business, the coal industry did not progress, despite further major technical improvements and large investments. Its markets were sheltered by the high oil price in the heyday of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries cartel and to some extent the industry was cosseted by those high oil prices. Then there was the collapse of oil prices, followed consequentially by the collapse of world coal prices.

Since then, the industry has had to manage a second period of change much steeper than the first. That decline has again been managed remarkably well—indeed, better than any of us might have believed. For the second time in 25 years, something smaller but in every other way better has emerged. There may have been a vast reduction in employment but with the Government providing generous and substantial help, those who have gone from the industry have been properly provided for, while those who remained are better off, with high earnings, a safer environment and better equipment. The days lost by disputes are at a record low, and productivity is twice what it was five years ago. Of course, one has to commend the so-called super-pits for the way in which they can set European records, with outputs of some 30 tonnes per man shift.

Most politicians of all parties believe that, despite the many problems that the industry faces, British Coal can and should make a valuable long-term contribution to our energy economy, especially now that we face some decline in North sea oil and later some decline in gas. If it continues to perform as it has done over the past five years, British Coal has a major part to play for the benefit of us all.

The problems that we have to deal with come in part from coal's position right at the end of a series of privatisations. The commercial freedom given to British Coal's principal customers—the electricity generators—has had a negative knock-on effect on the coal industry, which has to compete with other fuels and with imported coal for its share of the market.

We must make a clear distinction between three different challenges. First, there are the challenges arising directly from the structure which has emerged from the privatisation of the energy industries to date, with the consequent changes in the marketplace which have produced greater competition for British Coal. Secondly, there are challenges and problems which come from the perceived need to clean up coal-fired generation. Thirdly, there is the greater availability of competitive fuels, such as gas which is used in high-efficiency combined cycle generators, and imported coal.

Let us consider price competition and market forces. There may be a case for easing the pain for British Coal by having to compete against world coal prices for a short while, but there is no case for the long-term ring fence accorded to the German and Spanish coal industries. Perhaps we need a European coal policy to get equality throughout the Community. To see the high cost coal elements preserved artificially in other countries within the Community, while at the same time our low-cost coal industry contracts, is economic folly—and no more so than when looking forward with all idealism to the spirit of 1992. If, as I am told, British Coal's anti-dumping case is technically sound, it should be investigated and not pushed aside simply because the Germans totally protect their coal industry.

Of course we are not immune to similar problems. We have to address our internal inefficiencies, the most striking of which is the protection of the nuclear industry and the way it benefits from subsidy. If we have to get rid of protection subsidies on coal, we should not perpetuate subsidies on any competing fuel.

Nuclear power must receive its proper credit for not contributing to greenhouse gases and acid rain emissions. It must be given the opportunity to develop as a future source of fuel for the next century, perhaps as an insurance policy. If we neglect coal and lose our coal resources and our ability to mine coal, we are more likely to need an insurance policy.

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): I do not want to interrupt the flow of the hon. Gentleman's speech, but he has made pointed remarks about nuclear power. He was at the Nuclear Forum this year, and he probably heard the chairman of Scottish Nuclear say that he thought that there was a case for subsidising nuclear power in the interests of defence and strategic needs. Does the hon. Gentleman agree with that statement?

Dr. Clark: My view—I am not speaking for the Select Committee here—is that nuclear power is a power source

[Dr. Clark]

which cannot be ignored and which should be developed, even if there is a cost. We need the insurance policy, but we shall need it more if we allow coal to run down. If we allow coal to take its natural course and if we develop more coal-fired power stations with clean coal technology, the need for the insurance policy will be less obvious. Perhaps then we could run down our nuclear industry.

If we continue saying that we shall become dependent on oil, most of which will be imported in 40 or 50 years, and on coal which may be imported because we have no indigenous source of supply, the only indigenous source of supply left will be nuclear. In those circumstances, perhaps we should subsidise it. There are ways around that. One is to let coal come back naturally into the marketplace. Then we would not need to do so much for nuclear power. I did not mind the interruption; it may have helped to put my argument across.

If we are to get rid of subsidies on nuclear generation, we must do so fairly quickly, because we need to know where the nuclear industry stands by 1994 when the Government review its future. If we can get a proper review of the nuclear industry clearly before the country, we shall know better where the coal industry will stand after 1994.

Clean coal technology was dealt with in the first part of the report. The need to clean up coal-fired generation is a problem, in that massive expenditure is required to retrofit existing power stations to take out sulphur dioxide and stop acid rain emissions. Massive expenditure will be required on all existing coal-fired power stations, but the wise and economically sound solution is to build new clean burn coal-fired power stations which, due to their high thermal efficiency, create an opportunity for coal to compete more effectively with the gas-fired combined cycle generators which seem to be so much in vogue.

Clean coal technology cannot reduce the price of indigenous coal, but it can increase thermal efficiency so that coal in general, from wherever it comes, can better compete with gas. Clean coal technology can make a major contribution to solving the problem of carbon dioxide and sulphur dioxide emissions, because there will be less emission per megawatt of electricity generated. Clean coal technology can also help to increase demand for coal, even imported coal, thus helping our indigenous coal industry to expand in an energy market which accepts that coal is clean and economical.

In July 1991, the Select Committee that I have the honour to chair concluded that it attached great importance to clean coal technology, both in terms of providing an energy source and an electricity source for the country, and also in terms of the future of the coal industry. The Department of Energy said in evidence that it recognised the United Kingdom

"as an acknowledged leader in development of some aspects"

of clean coal technology which has a research and development objective

"to support work which would not otherwise be undertaken on an appropriate timescale".

The Department of Energy still refuses to give even modest help to demonstration projects. However, the Secretary of States has said that it is

"self-evident that there is a very big demand for clean coal technology."

In the Select Committee report, we recommended that a credible long-term strategy should include certain elements. First, there should be a new sense of urgency, which recognises that the United Kingdom's competitors are making progress with clean coal technologies in the expectation of obtaining significant export markets. If we do not go ahead urgently and make some progress with such technology, in due course we shall have to import it.

Secondly, we should recognise that the United Kingdom is unlikely to succeed with clean coal technologies unless the Government are as supportive towards such technologies as are our competitors' Governments. In fairness, I acknowledge that the Department of Energy has given encouragement and funding to the project at Grimethorpe. However, that funding falls short of what is needed by that project. It also falls short of the funding that has been given to similar pilot plant processes in other countries. I hope that the Minister will address that when he replies.

Thirdly, new emphasis should be placed on demonstration projects, which go one stage further than pilot plants. That would require a significant increase in Government funding to ensure that the necessary resources are available to push the development of such technology forward towards commercial use.

There have been plans for a demonstration project at Bilsthorpe, but those plans are now on the back burner and the project may never materialise. However, I heard just a few days ago that a demonstration project is to go ahead at Gardanne in France. Well done, Gardanne, but it would be nice if we could have a demonstration project as well, so that, in due course, we do not have to import such technology from the other side of the Channel.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): They are discussing that at Maastricht right now.

Dr. Clark: Perhaps, but I suspect that it will be low on that agenda.

Fourthly, there should be a realistic appraisal of the extent to which each stage of research, development and demonstration projects can expect to attract industry funding. The Government are rightly keen to get industry to fund such projects, particularly demonstration projects. Certainly, industry funding would be the most admirable way in which to make those projects work as well as a commitment to build those projects and to recoup the investment. The Government should encourage industry to make such investment, and perhaps they should also match some of the funding for the research, development and demonstration projects.

It is not yet known when the Government will reveal their strategy in response to our report or in response to the report from their own coal task force. That strategy may not be announced until after the election or until the plans for privatisation of the coal industry are announced, but the impact and importance of that strategy, when it is known, cannot be underestimated. That strategy will ultimately determine the final size of the British coal industry, it will influence electricity prices and it will have a significant effect on environmental protection.

In conclusion, the United Kingdom of the 1990s and beyond will be very different from that of the 1980s, which was overflowing with energy riches. Let no one think that it does not matter if we let British coal resources remain unexploited. It would be most ironic if the country's

largest fuel reserves disappeared at the very moment when the combined cycle might be readily available for coal-fired generation.

It would be ironic if we lost the ability to produce coal in this country at a time when the world was turning towards it and when, at the beginning of the next century, there might be a revitalisation of the coal industry. If that happened, our coal industry would be in danger of being unable to follow the rest of the world because we had allowed it to become too small and to decline too far. That would be to the detriment of us all.

7.34 pm

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): It is extremely kind of you, Madam Deputy Speaker, to call me so early in this debate. That does not usually happen to me.

I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark), who made a remarkable speech. He examined many aspects of the coal industry, and some of his findings were forthright and honest. In particular, he identified the fact that the Government have shifted their energy policy away from the coal industry. Unless something is done about that, the nation will lose an important asset.

It is important to consider what has caused the Government to shift their support from the coal industry. Therefore, it is important to consider recent events in the coal industry. If one considers the past 12, or should I say unlucky 13, years of Conservative Administration, it is clear that there has been a policy shift away from the coal industry. That industry is having to pay for that today.

The conclusion of the Select Committee on Energy report calls for measures to ensure the future security of the coal mining industry. I must remind the House that those who work in that industry have always faced insecurity. Rumours abound about possible Government action after the next election. Hon. Members are aware that the Government never have tried to hide the fact that, if elected, they will introduce a Bill to privatise the coal industry. That Bill would hardly make those in the industry feel secure.

Recent leaked reports—they have been disowned, in common with others—reveal what will happen to the coal industry. Those reports have been commissioned at a great price by the Government. One such report recently predicted the devastation of the coal mining industry and predicted a further massive reduction in the number of coal mines. That is hardly designed to make miners feel secure. The Rothschild report predicted that, at best, there would be 14 pits left in Britain and, at worst, only 12. That was devastating news for the coal industry, and it has caused immense insecurity.

It is important to consider what has happened to the coal mining industry in recent years—an industry that formed the backbone of British industrial production for decades. That industry has suffered the loss of 180,000 direct jobs, together with the loss of hundreds of thousands of associated jobs from our coalfield communities.

We in Nottinghamshire have suffered the loss of 25,000 jobs in coal mining, with the loss of 4,000 ancillary jobs. In other words, we have lost about 29,000 jobs in eight or nine years. In that area, the capital of the coal mining industry, 80,000 further jobs have been lost in service and other industries that supported or were reliant on coal. Well in excess of 100,000 jobs, representing absolute devastation, have gone from Nottinghamshire.

The action and planning that have resulted in that degree of loss have not helped to create security in coal mining. Not only do those still working in the industry feel insecure, but the threat of Rothschilds or something similar hanging over their future makes them feel terrified.

I know that the hon. Member for Rochford appreciates the plight of those in the industry, because his home is in the area and he has connections with the county of Nottinghamshire. I am anxious to remind hon. Members who are not familiar with coal mining about the situation in Nottinghamshire, because it is not dissimilar to what is happening in other coalfield communities.

Nottingham is a new coalfield compared with many others. People working there originated in Scotland, the north-east, Lancashire, Yorkshire, Wales and Kent. Many of them arrived in Nottinghamshire as their second or third move from other coal-mining areas. Some had moved from Scotland to the north-east, on to Yorkshire, on to Nottinghamshire or Derbyshire and then even further afield. It is incredible to think that that has happened within a few short years. Many families in my constituency have had to move more than once or twice in that way.

Many of my constituents who are anxious to live and work in the area are being denied the opportunity to do so by the insecurity that is being forced on them. I know many men who are working in their fourth or fifth pit in the Nottinghamshire coalfield because of the rate of close-down elsewhere in the country.

With the demise of 25,000 jobs in Nottinghamshire, we are left with only 14,000 miners—in a part of the industry that was described only a few years ago as the king, the capital of the British coal mining industry. The Government should put an end to policies which create that degree of uncertainty, and I am grateful for the recommendations of the Select Committee on that score.

We cannot consider the future of British coal mining without taking account of the Government's attitude to imported coal. In the past, some Conservative Members have argued that imported coal is important for the continuation of deep-mined coal in the British coalfield. That is absolute nonsense: it is a smokescreen for Conservative policies towards the industry.

I remind the House of the long battles that took place against the imposition of private ports designed to cater for imported coal from, for example, Australia, Poland, China and Colombia. Much of it was blood coal, extracted at low labour cost, shipped to Europe, mixed with other coals elsewhere in Europe and then imported into Britain. We fought long battles in this Chamber over Immingham and Killingholme to try to stop the building of ports, the main activity of which was the importation of cheap foreign coal. Indeed, I recall a chairman of the then CEGB admitting, on being questioned, that up to 8 million tonnes of cheap foreign coal would be imported via those ports.

Conservative Members also argue that we cannot have a European coal policy. They go so far as to say that such a policy would be illegal. That, too, is absolute nonsense. We could get our act together for the benefit of the British coalfields, because we produce the cheapest deep-mined coal in Europe. We shall soon have a Labour Government,

[Mr. Alan Meale]

but whatever the complexion of the British Government, hon. Members in all parts of the House should get them to get our act together and achieve a Europewide policy.

Conservative Members argue that GATT prevents us from restricting imports from areas outside the European Community into Britain. They claim that such action would be illegal. We should tell the other Governments in Brussels that we welcome aspects of the social charter and want them applied to trade agreements with countries outside the European Community. Then, the miners in those countries, including children—in Colombia, South Africa, China and so on—would work under a law approved by the EC. That would enable them to benefit from that social charter when digging coal in their countries. On that basis, coal could be landed in Europe only if it had been mined in accordance with that law.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): My hon. Friend will know that we have been in the Common Market for 18 years and that for all that time the member countries have not bought our coal. We hear lots of talk about our colleagues in the EC and about how we are all working together. We buy their goods, manufactured and otherwise, and although we have the cheapest deep-mined coal in Europe, our so-called colleagues never buy our coal. One would think that, after 18 years, they would be buying some by now. That prevents me from going down the EC road which my hon. Friend seems to be taking. Is he suggesting that we get deeper into the EC web, when the countries of Europe are not delivering——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. I suggest that we return to the subject of the report that is before the House.

Mr. Meale: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention, because he and I have been, and remain, close on European matters. My argument is that, as we are in the EC, like it or not, we should try to establish with our European partners a common policy for coal, including cheap international imported coal.

I appreciate the point that my hon. Friend makes. He too spent many long hours in the Chamber campaigning against private ports being used to import cheap coal. For example, South Africa coal was shipped to some of our partners, notably Holland and Belgium, mixed with cheap coal there and then sold on to Britain as European coal. That cannot be a common European coal policy. Instead, we must try to get our act together to ensure that the coal industry is supported.

I thank the hon. Member for Rochford for some of his comments. I welcome the report, which starts to put some of the arguments together. I hope that it will make hon. Members, wherever they stand, realise that coal is one of this country's major assets for the future. I hope to God that we shall not throw it away.

7.49 pm

Mr. Peter Rost (Erewash): I entirely agree with the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) that the coal industry and its future should have a European dimension. We should recognise that, in so far as we have a European Community energy policy, the European Community as a whole should take a view on how far we can allow our major indigenous energy source to run down.

May I offer an additional solution to this major problem? In their reply to the report of the Energy Select Committee, the Government said that a strong market will develop for key coal technology at the end of the decade. I am sure that that is right, but I am concerned about whether we shall still have much of a coal industry left at the end of the decade if we wait until then. That is why I shall consider the problem from a shorter-term perspective. My solution could help to get the coal industry out of its present dilemma and allow it to survive long enough to meet demands for energy at the turn of the century.

We all know that British Coal is fighting to retain its market. It is threatened by cheaper imported coal and, above all, by gas, which is the flavour of the month for combined cycle gas turbines. Furthermore, environmental pressures to develop cleaner energy are imposed on us by the European Community and the Toronto protocol.

Against that background, it is not surprising that we are now undertaking a huge investment in gas turbine power generation. I have just been involved in a working party with a number of experts, including representatives from the National Union of Mineworkers, British Coal, the power generators and industry. We are producing a report trying to assess what the market for coal will be—a second guess to the Rothschild report. Our best estimate is that we have at present 6·5 GW of combined cycle plant under construction or firmly committed, with probably another 10 GW likely to go ahead, which in total will almost certainly replace some 30 million tonnes of coal. That is the dilemma.

Although new combined cycle gas turbines offer cheaper electricity than new coal-fired plant, they do not compete with existing coal capacity. Electricity from existing coal-fired power stations underprices electricity from the new combined cycle gas turbines. There is plenty of evidence of that, for those who want to find it. The evidence comes from PowerGen and National Power, which have admitted that they are pushing up the price of electricity in the pool to justify the cost of new investment in combined cycle gas turbines. We know that environmental considerations are an additional reason. The power generation industry has rightly been told that it must reduce emissions over a period of years.

Those are not the only reasons why we are developing so many combined cycle gas turbines. Such development is not justified on economic grounds, because it is leading to the premature closure of coal-fired power stations that could still compete in the electricity market. National Power has admitted that it has already closed down 3 GW —3,000 MW—of coal-fired plant in the past two years, PowerGen has closed down about seven of its coal-fired power stations, and both companies propose to close more. I challenge the suggestion that all those power stations are uneconomic, as both generators maintain.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I have heard those arguments directly from one of the big generators that he mentioned. Does that not run contrary to the ideology behind the privatisation of the electricity supply industry—that new competition would force down prices?

Mr. Rost: I shall come to the question of competition. I do not accept the manner in which the hon. Gentleman puts his case. I shall argue that we do not have proper

competition. If we had, we would not be closing down so many coal-fired power stations. They are being closed down because there is a duopoly rather than a series of competitive producers. The duopoly is more than anxious to get rid of excess capacity, some of which could compete in the marketplace.

In order to get rid of excess capacity, an artificial scarcity in electricity is being created, so that the duopoly can justify its huge investment in new combined cycle gas turbines. Some of the existing coal-fired plant that is being closed produces electricity at the marginal cost of some 2p per kilowatt hour. New combined cycle gas turbine plants cannot produce electricity at that price—it costs 2·5p to 3p, depending on the gas contract. Some of the new gas turbine plant that is about to be ordered has yet to obtain a long-term gas contract. I should be surprised if the cost of that were not at least 3p per kilowatt hour. Much of our existing coal fired plant underprices that.

If I am wrong, let us put it to the test. The coal-fired plants which the duopoly is closing down, has already closed down or proposes to close down because they are supposedly uneconomic, should be offered for sale to others who think that the duopoly may have got it wrong. They should be offered to a wider range of independents, or perhaps to the regional electricity companies or British Coal.

I presume that, if they are of no interest to National Power of PowerGen, their only value is the site or scrap value, so it would not cost much if anyone else wished to prove that they could still bid into the electricity market at a competitive price. I suspect that many of them could. Some of them could be and would be refurbished as clean coal-burning fluidised bed combustion plants, as is already happening at the Slough estates and as some of the regional electricity companies wish to do. That would also meet the emission standards, and produce a higher thermal efficiency.

If that competitive opportunity is denied by the duopoly, and the market for British coal is thus restricted and contracted, British Coal will be unfairly penalised in the market. I go further, and suggest that British Coal should be allowed to compete fairly in the new, privatised energy market. British Coal should have the same opportunity to invest in power generation as its main competitior, British Gas, which is using its fuel to compete in power generation. Why should not British Coal use its coal for the same reason?

British Coal should now—before privatisation, or it may be too late—be given sanction to raise money that it requires for commercial decision taking by its shareholder the Government. If not, it should be free to raise funds in the financial markets, as do privatised industry and its competitors in the energy market. That would enable it to make viable decisions to enter the power generation business, perhaps in a joint venture. After all, British Coal has competent directors and management to make such decisions.

Given such a level playing field of opportunity to compete, I suspect that British Coal would look for joint ventures with independent power generators or regional electricity companies in order to prove that some of the coal-fired plants that PowerGen and National Power claim are uneconomic could compete in the electricity market. If British Coal were privatised, I believe that it would now be doing just that. I have no doubt that British Coal would have taken a more active commercial step to protect its market, as any industry does if it sees its market collapsing around it.

However, we know that British Coal has been restrained by its shareholder and the Treasury from investing or diversifying in power generation. I believe that British Coal, under privatised management—which should have happened many years ago—would be taking on the duopoly power generators. I believe that it would be saying to them, "All right, you do not want to buy our coal, so we will use it ourselves and show that we can compete with you." My theory should be put to the test in order to prove whether existing British Coal and British power stations fuelled by coal can compete with the new combined cycle gas turbine power stations. I believe that they could.

British Gas and the oil industry are already entering the power generation market. Industry is also doing so, through combined heat and power. In addition, regional electricity companies are competing in power generation. Why should not the nation's leading producer of fuel for generation also have the freedom to do so, especially when its future is being undermined by its competitors and it is unable to compete fairly because its hands are tied behind its back?

If the Government want a successful privatised British coal industry, which I am sure they do, would it not be a great deal easier to privatise British Coal as a stronger commercial asset, which would make it more attractive to potential buyers, if it were involved in some profitable power generation and had thus secured some of its own coal markets? British Coal's freedom to move into power generation by taking over power stations that National Power and PowerGen had rejected and by using its own coal would also help to build up competition in the electricity market which does not currently exist. That point relates to the issue raised by the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron).

The competition does not presently exist, because the duopoly is, to some extent, abusing the system. It has all the power plants at present, although, in due course, independent plants will come in at the margins. At present, the duopoly is getting rid of excess capacity, even though some of it could still be competing, which is restricting competition.

If the Government want to help the competitive power market, they have an opportunity to allow a new player into the power generation market: British Coal. That would not only provide competition but would make British Coal a more attractive proposition for privatisation and, above all, would give British Coal a life saver in the transition period between now and the turn of the century, when, hopefully, the new clean coal technologies will come to its rescue.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will at least consider my argument reasonable and worth some consideration. I hope that he thinks that my proposals go some way to finding a solution to the difficult transition period now facing British Coal.

I believe that the energy balance—the economics of energy—will change in years to come as gas prices begin to rise because of the extreme pressure of demand throughout Europe. I believe that the balance will begin to change back in favour of coal, which will make the clean coal

[Mr. Rost]

technologies the investment choice by the turn of the century. I hope that, by that time, our coal industry is still able to participate.

8.7 pm

Mr. Terry Patchett (Barnsley, East): I am grateful to have caught your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I shall be brief, as I know many of my colleagues who wish to speak have a genuine interest in the coal industry. I am fortunate in that my constituency still contains the semblance of a coal industry, albeit its manpower is less than a third of what it was in 1985.

I find it difficult to speak in this debate, given that its subject is the future of the coal industry. I believe that both parties in any debate should have a genuine interest in the subject, and be open and honest. The Government, on their past record, do not meet any of those criteria. They have always stated that British Coal should take its chance in a fair and free market, but they suported private Bills —for example, the one that is now the Associated British Ports Act 1990—which helped British Coal's rivals. They have used the British coal industry to pursue Tory dogma. They initiated an unnecessary year-long strike which cost the taxpayer £5 billion. They did so just to make the trade unions look bad, ably assisted by their friends in the press. That did no good and had nothing to do with the industry.

The Government's friends in the press vilified, and attempted a character assassination of, a trade union leader whose heart and soul was genuinely in the industry —Arthur Scargill. His only crime was to speak the truth about the Government's pit closure programme. In this very Chamber, he was called a scaremonger and a liar. Ministers, including the then Prime Minister, told the House that they had no such programme, but history proved who was telling the truth.

If the Government are really interested in British Coal, they should take an interest in the health and safety of its workers, yet they have proceeded to deregulate health and safety. I refer to certain types of support systems and the number of hours worked in a shift. I have been involved, and I know the inherent dangers. This dangerous move displays a callous indifference to the work force, but it fits in well with the former Prime Minister's love of Victorian values. Hers was an era that cared little for the life and limb of the work force.

If the Government really care about free and fair market forces with no Government interference, why have they allowed more private mines? Why have they assisted opencast mining by relaxing planning controls and allowing the rape of our countryside unnecessarily? We can well do without opencast coal, yet the Government have interfered and helped rivals of British Coal.

I am satisfied that only the Opposition have adopted an open and honest approach to the industry. I know that the Rothschild report will be mentioned often in this debate, so I will not dwell on it, but I am worried about one or two of its aspects. For instance, why was there a need to commission the report when the way in which the generating industry is moving shows that the Government are implementing Rothschild's recommendations in advance? The Government have been moving in that direction for many years, so why spend taxpayers' money on a report that changes nothing and merely supports the Government's political ideology?

The report does not mention any effect on our balance of payments. It is typical of the Government to pursue the dogma of privatising coal without a thought for the economic consequences of that decision. Social consequences are never mentioned in the report, yet we all know of the traumatic problems brought about by the lack of tax revenue and the increases in unemployment payouts—these are the social costs. We are talking about social costs and human problems, not exclusively about profits.

The Government have clearly shown their interest in the coal industry by the amount of money that they have poured in to supplement redundancy terms. That is a sign of the way in which the Government want the industry to go.

I was pleased to hear the Chairman of the Energy Select Committee refer to clean coal and especially to the fluidised bed experiment at Grimethorpe in my constituency. The privatised energy industry has shown a distinct lack of interest in that experiment and has put little money into it, but if it is proved a successful and profitable venture, the privatised industry will be in there with its sticky hands to cream off any profits that may be had.

I should like to take this opportunity to ask the Minister to assure the House that the fluidised bed experiment will be allowed to be completed. If the Government have a genuine interest in British coal, let them show it by some real action.

8.14 pm

Mr. Andy Stewart (Sherwood): This debate on the coal industry is not only opportune but imperative in view of the report by the Energy Select Committee, and I congratulate the Committee and my colleagues who have already spoken in this debate.

In the past 100 years, the House has heard much more about the coal industry than about any other, and rightly so, because coal was the parent of our industrial revolution, and until 1950 our only indigenous source of energy. The industry controlled our economy, and 2 million families associated with it.

With each and every debate—the last being on 14 November—we get an historic resumé, political criticism, and emotional speeches from Members who have been miners and speak from experience, which is understandable. Nevertheless, I hope that they accept that Conservative Members who represent coalfield constituencies care about the industry no less than they do.

My speech on the Coal Industry Bill on 14 November at column 1262 touched on the past and present and questioned the industry's future role and size. While it would be in everyone's interests to repeat that speech in full, time is limited, so I will concentrate my remarks on the essential parameters of renewed contracts with the power generating companies post-1993, and the opportunity for British Coal to secure every tonne of commercially viable business. This, of course, will depend on the total demand for electricity and the share given to coal in generating that energy.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy has often said that British Coal must face the challenges to its markets head on. It has done that—only to find half the power stations' fuel market in England and Wales entirely

removed from that marketplace. That is not free and open competition, but rigged protectionism, denying consumers the benefits which would accrue from the unique offer made by British Coal—to supply coal at lower costs and steady prices.

What my constituency miners want to know is why an annual productivity-induced unit cost reduction of £150 million is not passed on to the consumers, as it would be in a truly free market. In addition, they have to subsidise Nuclear Electric, allowing it 20 per cent. of the electricity market share, costing three times the unit price of coal. That is not the market working, but political intervention. Some would like to call it a diversity of supply. That may be so, but it is a feeble excuse to use to our miners who have done so much in the past five years, increasing productivity by 108 per cent. and reducing prices by 40 per cent. in real terms.

Further commercial mismanagement is about to surface from gas also being given favoured status. From their new-found cash resources, National Power and PowerGen have signed continuous gas generating contracts coming on stream up to 1995, equivalent to 25 million tonnes of coal. Having done so, the companies now discover that 40 per cent. of this market share is hopelessly uneconomic compared with their present coal-contracted generation.

Unlike Nuclear Electric, the companies are not asking British Coal for a subsidy to fund this mistake; their means are more subtle—to remove the competition by closing 12 GW of modern coal-fired generating stations, and to demolish the plants. To the lay person, that may seem an insignificant figure, but it is equal to all the power plants in the Trent valley, which currently produce a third of England's electricity requirements. If that was all, it would be bad enough, but a further 17 million tonnes of coal-equivalent gas contracts are waiting for the signature of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy, all at unit prices 30 per cent. above those of British Coal. In view of those indisputable facts, my right hon. Friend will have no difficulty in returning those contracts to sender unsigned.

Having 50 per cent. of the energy market protected by intervention, British Coal looks to a potential market after April 1993 of between 50 to 55 million tonnes, most of which it could meet at economically sustainable prices. To get there would require a degree of predictability and orderly progression which only the Government can sponsor. That process must be undertaken soon. Miners are despondent because they continually hear vague promises that, if they keep going, success will come, while at the same time seeing their market decrease and ever-increasing investment in port capacity to handle large quantities of foreign coal.

I make no apology in returning today not only to the question of the wisdom of importing coal on spurious economic grounds but to the extent to which our strategic requirements could be put in jeopardy by allowing such a policy.

Winston Churchill, our great leader and a man of vision, secured in 1914 a 51 per cent. stake in the Anglo-Persian oil company, now British Petroleum, for no other reason than to secure oil supplies. History has proved him right, and nothing has changed to remove that need except that we have now abdicated our responsibilities to two commercial companies, National Power and PowerGen, whose only claim to fame so far is their record-breaking dash for gas.

My constituency miners also demand an economic audit on the importation of coal. It costs £1·80 to produce a gigajoule of domestic electricity worth £20 from British coal compared with £1·50 from imported coal. Eliminate the former, and the cost of the latter will rise through the roof, leaving industrial and domestic consumers at the mercy of foreign Governments.

The United Kingdom already has the lowest domestic electricity prices in Europe and, given the opportunity, British Coal can offer long-term guarantees to keep that price advantage at or below the United Kingdom retail prices index. The starting price could well be reasonable —say 160p per gigajoule or 10 per cent. below present prices—but the contracts are unlikely to be firm, with reopeners at regular intervals. With action as described, British Coal could secure 50 to 55 million tonnes per year, most of all on a firm five-year basis and at much the same price as would be achievable from the lower volumes should any of that market share go to imported coal.

Therefore, we need the Government's support not to dictate on future coal contract prices, but to ensure that the dominant position of the generators is properly regulated rather than abused and that the contract negotiations are decided on genuine, not make-believe economic grounds. Otherwise, instead of the desired increase in competition, there would be an inevitable and dangerous decline in the diversity of energy supplies available to the consumer. The Rothschild report was just one of several options in the privatisation of British coal, but in the end it could be the only one. To abandon the United Kingdom coal industry in that fashion would be a decision which was not only historic but irreversible.

8.23 pm

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I am grateful to the Select Committee on Energy for its report. It is particularly helpful that it has highlighted its concern about the potential decline in the extractable reserves of British Coal to a critical level. My only concern about that is it has left it a little late: it might have been helpful if that concern had been registered earlier. Some of the closures that have taken place are irreversible.

However, at least Conservative Members now recognise that the Government must do a bit of thinking about the coal industry's future in relation to the consequences of the privatisation of electricity, the opening up of the market for coal, which even the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) accepts may not be an entirely level playing field, and the future ownership of the coal industry.

I make no apology for being particularly concerned about the future of what little is left of the coal industry in Scotland. We have one operating pit and two mothballed pits. That is the Scottish coal industry. The consequences of the coal strike were more devastating for the Scottish coal industry than any other region. The industry was effectively decimated.

I spent some hours this morning in the company of members of the Monktonhall miners' consortium. As the Under-Secretary of State well knows, it has put in a bid to take over the licence for the Monktonhall colliery from

[Mr. Malcolm Bruce]

British Coal, and British Coal has said that a decision is likely to be made by the end of the year, which presumably will be announced early in the new year. It is my firm belief that that bid is being treated seriously by British Coal only because the consortium has persisted in its determination to try to take over its old pit.

It is a matter of some concern that a company that so far has shown no interest has suddenly popped up at the end of the day and said that it will put in a counter-bid. That is of particular concern when one knows that, in spite of the fact that the principal of that company may be from the Isle of Lewis, he has been as far away from Lewis as he could be for most of his life, and his interest has only materialised recently. Indeed, he has said that he was desperate to take over Monktonhall as soon as he learned that the licence might be available. He has not said when he learned that, but I am sure that it was nothing like as long ago as the Monktonhall miners, who have for three years been trying to take over the licence from British Coal.

It is perhaps also a matter of concern that, for the past two years, the company has made donations of £50,000 a year to the Conservative party. One wonders whether that may be why it has some expectation of results. It is my experience that companies give donations to the Conservative party not to promote and uphold free enterprise but in order to prevent the effective operation of free enterprise and to secure advantages within the marketplace from a Government who are willing to be deflected from their professed ideology in order to favour their friends and backers.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): The hon. Gentleman has just made a serious allegation to which I shall be responding in due course, but meanwhile, will he tell the House whether the consortium which seeks to take over Monktonhall, or the coal industry generally, will be helped by the Liberal Democrats' call for an immediate carbon tax, as set out in their recently published environmental policy document?

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Gentleman is wrong: we have not called for an immediate carbon tax. We have raised the question that the Government have also raised—how we should deal with the problems of carbon dioxide emissions and the operation of the market. The chairman of the Conservative party, a previous Secretary of State for the Environment, is on record as saying that energy taxes will have to rise if we are to deal with our environmental problems. Therefore, the Conservative party is in no position to cast such aspersions on how we deal with the problems of carbon dioxide. The Government's record on that is less than impressive.

The particular point about which we must now be concerned is whether the consortium that has put in the application for the licence for Monktonhall will be successful, and the Government's role in that.

I am glad that, on this occasion, the Under-Secretary of State is in his place. I am not criticising him for his absence when this matter was previously debated, because I know that his colleague the hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Mr. Moynihan), who is responsible for oil and gas, reported the debate to him and the concerns that I expressed at that time. As a result, I am pleased to note that he met the consortium and the Chairman of the Energy Select Committee, I think on the same day, and I know that the consortium welcomed that opportunity. That leaves the interesting question why those meetings took place, when the Secretary of State, the Under-Secretary of State, and the Minister at the Scottish Office responsible for industry refused persistent requests for meetings over the past three years—saying that it was a matter not for the Government but for British Coal.

I wonder whether it had to do with the fact that the request for a meeting came from a Conservative councillor in Edinburgh who had previously shown no interest in the consortium and is not directly connected with it. Is it not odd that there should be that sudden change of Government policy? I suppose that that is an indication of the way that things have changed in recent years. As a rule, Ministers did meet Members of Parliament wanting to make representations to them. It is interesting that Ministers are only prepared to do that now for outsiders who are members of their own party. That is a regrettable development.

More seriously, to what extent does that indicate a change of Government attitude? In the past, they said—the Minister knows my view, that this is the wrong position to take—that the licensing of coal pits was entirely a matter for British Coal, and there was no point in meetings, because they would interfere in the management of British Coal. The Minister knows that, when I have attempted to meet Ministers' requests to seek a meeting with British Coal directors, they have refused to do that, or to discuss matters in any way, shape or form.

Ministers who are supposedly accountable to the House refuse to accept their responsibility to be accountable to Members of Parliament, and then pass the buck to people for whom they are responsible, but who in turn refuse to meet right hon. and hon. Members. The business of the House is being frustrated and undermined by the inability of right hon. and hon. Members to make proper representations on the policy of a Government who have been in office too long, and who have grown too arrogant about the power they hold.

Who will make the decision on Monktonhall, and what impact will it have on wider proposals for the privatisation of British Coal? If the decision is to be made by British Coal, why did the Minister meet the consortium? If the Government told British Coal what they want the outcome to be, why did they not tell the House, and outline the priorities?

I have twice tried to put amending legislation through the House to transfer the ownership of British Coal and its licensing responsibilities to the Secretary of State. The Under-Secretary has shown that he is not unsympathetic to that suggestion. That ought to happen before British Coal's privatisation, particularly if coal is to be privatised in a different way from that adopted in respect of previous privatisations of single monopolies. Do the Government have any clear thoughts on privatising British Coal as a single entity or in a different way?

The Monktonhall miners consortium simply wants to take over the pit's licence as soon as possible, and certainly this side of a general election. They have waited long enough, and the signs are that a decision will be made shortly. Will the Minister make it clear that the Government believe that the licence should go to that consortium, unless there are commercial or other reasons

why that would be inappropriate—in which case, the Government should state what they are? The consortium has managed to persuade its financial backers of its viability, which suggests that its proposition is realistic.

British Coal should not put any charge on that licence. Monktonhall has been a liability to British Coal, and is costing it money. If anything, British Coal ought to put a little money in, to have the pit taken off its hands. However, the consortium does not seek that—only to take over the licence. Will the Government indicate that will be allowed to happen?

The consortium is frustrated because, over the past three years, it has received very little support from quarters from which it might have expected it. An expensive report commissioned by the National Union of Mineworkers, Lothian regional council, Midlothian district council, and East Lothian district council—the political complexion of which I do not need to point out to the Minister—is fundamentally an attempt to persuade British Coal to take over the running of the pit.

It is an interesting point that the miners consortium has no confidence in British Coal and does not believe that it could run the pit any more profitably than before. The miners believe that the consortium in which working people own the pit could be effective and profitable. It is only right to give them a chance to prove that. I thought that the Conservative party would also consider that something worthy of its support. The consortium should be given an opportunity to show that the commitment it has shown over the past three years can yield results. There is no public money at risk—only the opportunity for the local community to prove that it can deliver the goods.

The membership of the consortium totals 250—which is greater than the number of jobs that would be created in the first instance. The members have all said that they would put up £2,000 of share capital in the consortium, and there are more people to work in the pit, above and below ground, than could initially be provided with employment.

Critics have said that a constraint on the consortium is the limit of 250 underground workers for that pit. Initially, that limit would not be exceeded anyway, but eventually the consortium would be able to employ about 500 people. Will the Minister make it clear that there is no reason why that limit should present any obstacle? Every year, Bills on the coal industry go through the House. The Government have already upgraded and amended——

Mr. Barron *rose*——

Mr. Bruce: If the hon. Gentleman will just listen, he will understand that I am urging the Government to say that they would if necessary amend the legislation to allow the consortium to progress.

Mr. Barron: The limit would have to be changed by statute, as was the case with the Coal Industry Act 1987, which raised the limit to 150 persons. Why has not that same argument been advanced in respect of the current Coal Industry Bill by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), who was supposed to be the Liberal Democrats' spokesman on the industry?

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well what happened with the previous Bill. My amendment was defeated by 21 votes to one, because Labour Members voted with the Government to defeat it. I know exactly what is Labour's position in that regard.

The miners in the area in question are thoroughly and utterly disillusioned with Labour for its total lack of support. They say to me, "Isn't it extraordinary that here you have working people wanting to take over a pit that they care about, and putting up their own money to that end, and Labour is backing the bosses who closed the pit in the first place—to prevent those workers taking over their only means of a livelihood?" That is what Labour does for working people, and that is why working people in that part of the world will turn against Labour at the next general election.

I ask the Minister to recognise that he is in a position to ensure that those miners are given the opportunity to do what they have spent three years trying to do—to take over the pit they know and to show that they can make it profitable.

8.37 pm

Mr. Malcolm Moss (Cambridgeshire, North-East): The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) made a number of assertions, to which my hon. Friend the Minister will no doubt reply later. As to the case for Monktonhall, it seems that the hon. Gentleman is seeking privatisation before a Bill has passed through the House. That is an interesting line from the Liberal Democrats.

Few industries in this country or in the Community as a whole have seen such tremendous changes over the past decade as the coal industry. Those changes essentially relate to a slimming down in the industry itself, but also to significant structural changes.

On the debit side, over the past 10 years output reduced by 35 million tonnes or 28 per cent., but the parallel decrease in consumption is much less. It has fallen by only 11·6 million tonnes, or 9·6 per cent. On the plus side, there have been dramatic productivity increases, from 2·32 tonnes per man shift in 1980-81 to 4·70 tonnes in 1990-91 —a rise of 103 per cent. in 10 years. That was not achieved at the expense of health and safety, because over the same period fatal accidents fell by 72 per cent.

Over the same period also, British Coal cut colliery costs by 40 per cent. in real terms. Those are not the statistics of an industry in terminal decline. It is high time that some of the myths presented by Labour Members were buried once and for all. The first is that the British coal industry will be decimated in the near future; the second is that the present Conservative Government are actively working to achieve such a decline, together with the substantial job losses that accompany pit closures.

The Government's commitment to the coal industry has been clear over the past 10 years or more; they have also shown their commitment to a successful future for the industry. After all, who invested more than £25 billion over the past decade—some £2 million each working day? Who put British Coal on a solid financial footing by writing off its debts with a massive £5 billion capital reconstruction programme? Who introduced a Bill—long overdue—to deal with the coal mining subsidence problem? Who restructured British Coal so that it was able, last year, to make a profit of £78 million—the first bottom-line profit for 13 years?

Was it the Labour party, operating behind the scenes? Was it the National Union of Mineworkers, under its

[Mr. Malcolm Moss]

renowned leader? Were those achievements the result of efforts by Labour Members? Of course not; they are the tangible evidence of a Government's full commitment to one of the country's major industries.

Let us contrast those achievements with Labour's record in office. The Labour Government closed more pits in their two terms than the current Conservative Government have ever closed. Under Labour, between 1964 and 1970 and again between 1974 and 1979, a total of 295 pits were shut down; since 1979, there have been just under 140 closures. That is half the closure rate under Labour.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): Can the hon. Gentleman tell us what percentage of collieries have been closed under the present Government, and what percentage were closed under the last Labour Government?

Mr. Moss: I think that absolute figures are much more important than percentages. In the last analysis, they relate to the number of pits, and the number of jobs available at each pit.

Under Labour, productivity increased annually by an average of just 2·5 per cent. Since 1979, under the present Government, that figure has trebled to more than 6·5 per cent. The message is loud and clear; according to any measurement that we care to take, the Conservative Government's record on the coal industry is significantly better than that of Labour.

What of the future? Of course, the coal industry faces real challenges—environmentally, for instance. Stringent targets relating to carbon dioxide, sulphur dioxide and nox emissions make it difficult for coal to compete with other fuels, especially in power generation. Coal also suffers from competition from gas, which is more environmentally friendly, and—as we have heard this evening—is becoming far more important in terms of baseload electricity generation in the near future. The third challenge comes from the liberalisation of world energy markets, a trend that will undoubtedly continue through the GATT negotiations.

None the less, British Coal has achieved remarkable improvements in the past decade, which can and should continue. Tribute should be paid to both management and work force for those tremendous achievements: they deserve the highest praise. The same management and work force face the challenges of the current position, but there is nothing to suggest that they lack the collective will, expertise or enterprise to negotiate a very successful future for themselves and their industry.

Much has been made of the contracts coming up for renewal with the main power generators in the United Kingdom—National Power and PowerGen. Their generating capacity, however, still lies to a significant extent in coal-fired generation. Their new gas plants will not be on stream for several years; they need a secure, well-priced coal contract for a long time to come. As my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) pointed out, as negotiations are currently progressing, there is every chance that some 50 million to 55 million tonnes will form part of that contract negotiation. Coal-fired plants are mainly located inland, and very close to existing coalfields. That surely gives British Coal a distinct advantage over importers in negotiations.

The hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) raised another possibility for British Coal's immediate future. British Coal produces the cheapest deep-mined coal in Europe; the cost is substantially lower than that of coal from many other producers in the European Coal and Steel Communities. Surely there is tremendous scope for diversification of British Coal sales into European Community countries, particularly Germany. Here, national subsidies are under continual threat of elimination as discussions progress within the ECSC and under the treaty.

As we have stated clearly and repeatedly, the Government are pledged to achieve the largest economic coal industry that the market can support. To say anything less would invite protectionism, ring fencing and subsidy. With privatisation, after the next election, the industry will be more effectively structured to meet its challenges and build on its achievements.

What of Labour's plans for the future of the coal industry? Its pledge is to maintain the industry "at around about its current size". Let us ignore for the moment what Labour actually means by that; how will it deliver on its promise, bearing in mind the fact that the nuclear industry is already ring fenced, gas contracts have already been signed and committed to combined cycle gas turbine plant, and coal imports are perfectly legal under European law?

Labour's coal strategy simply does not stand up—first, on environmental grounds. Labour is pledged to freeze carbon dioxide emissions at 1990 levels by the year 2000; that is five years ahead of the Government's pledge. How will that be possible, given that Labour wishes to phase out nuclear, which could easily push up carbon dioxide emissions by at least 10 per cent. a year and prevent the development of combined cycle gas stations, which emit half as much carbon dioxide as coal-fired stations?

Sulphur dioxide emissions would also increase if that strategy were implemented. The only way in which to meet sulphur dioxide targets would be the adoption of a massive flue gas desulphurisation programme on existing coal-fired stations. Who would pay for that? If Government grant is given to the companies running the stations, it will come from taxpayers' money. Or will National Power and PowerGen be forced to do the retrofit? That would mean significant increases in the price of electricity for consumers. We have heard nothing this evening about where the money will come from.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): The hon. Gentleman said that Labour would need to implement an FGD programme, and asked who would pay for it. Surely the Conservative Government have already set out proposals for such a programme: they should be telling him where the money would come from.

Mr. Moss: The existing programme represents a commitment by National Power and PowerGen to retrofit about 8 GW. That is clearly contained within their financial programmes. Labour's plans involve an increase, or a stabilisation, of coal burn in our power stations, at the expense of gas or nuclear, at the same time as a reduction in both carbon dioxide and sulphur dioxide levels.

Without FGD retrofit across many more stations than are represented than those 8 GW, I do not think that that will be possible.

Mr. Barron: What does the hon. Gentleman think about the fact that National Power and PowerGen are currently importing orimulsion and getting permission to burn it? Orimulsion emits three or four times as much sulphur as coal.

Mr. Moss: The point at issue is whether National Power and PowerGen meet the carbon dioxide and sulphur dioxide targets that have been set for them.

The hon. Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark) raised the question of clean burn technology. I have no doubt that additional points will be raised about that aspect later because of the Select Committee's excellent report. I have little doubt that it represents a future for coal-fired power generation in the next decade. However, it seems that the technology is not right at the moment in economic terms to fill the gap and to play a part in the crucial current round of negotiations in which the future of the coal industry in the next three to four years is the most important issue.

Furthermore, Labour's policy of reducing or banning imports of coal and of reducing the development of gas-fired stations is, in many eyes, quite illegal. First, the banning of imports might land the Labour Government in the future in front of a European court and, secondly of course, if the Labour Government attempted to use their 40 per cent. stake in National Power or PowerGen to bring pressure to bear on those companies to reduce the development of gas-fired stations, they might end up in a United Kingdom court for breaking United Kingdom company law.

I believe that Labour's statement that it will maintain the coal industry at

"around about its current size"

is unworkable—especially in the light of the developments that are already in train—and also uncosted. British Coal has an excellent future. There are still sizeable markets within this country and in the European Community. We cannot consider the future of British coal with preconceived notions of output, size and number of pits because that would be unrealistic. Further improvements in productivity and price are, of course, necessary but the price gap between British coal and the generators is certainly not unbridgeable.

8.51 pm

Mr. Alexander Eadie (Midlothian): In considering this important subject, it would be churlish not to congratulate the Select Committee on Energy on the report that it has produced, which to some extent analyses the current position of the mining industry and its position in the future. However, I wonder whether the Government will pay a blind bit of notice to the report, which illustrates not only what will happen to the mining industry but what will happen if we allow it to contract.

When the Chairman was introducing the report, I intervened on the question of nuclear power. I do not say this in a malicious way or to score debating points, but I said that the chairman of Scottish Nuclear had argued at the Nuclear Forum that there might be a case, in the strategic interests of the nation, to subsidise nuclear power. We have argued for a long time that there is a peripheral argument that in the strategic interests of the nation we should be concerned about the coal industry.

To judge from the way things are going, there will be difficulties in respect of the size of the industry. The hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) wiped about £30 million or £40 million off the take from the coal industry. He said that his first speech in the previous coal debate made the headlines of *Coal News*, but I do not think that the chairman of British Coal will be grateful that the hon. Gentleman has halved the take and production of coal in his remarks.

If we see the demise of the coal industry, the nuclear power industry will be subsidised. That is, in essence, what I was told. Let me remember how unforgiving the nuclear power industry is. To think that we should destroy the coal industry and then say, "Well, if we have no coal industry, we shall have to have a nuclear power industry and what it costs does not really matter because it is in the nation's interest to do it," does not make sense.

When one reads and analyses the admirable report, one discovers a number of threats—the importation of foreign coal, the question of how the board will react to privatisation and the Government's Rothschild report which is not, in fact, a report but a slaughter of the coal industry. The estimates that we are debating propose that a further £4 million should be spent on preparing the future privatisation of the coal industry, but what is £1 million or £2 million between friends? If the taxpayer understood what the Government are planning with this privatisation and what they are doing to the coal industry, there would be no doubt what would happen at the next general election. It is absolutely disgraceful that this proposal should be put before us. Who is getting the millions of pounds? It is certainly not the miners.

The whole point of the admirable report is to point out what is the biggest threat to the coal industry. It is, of course, the gas industry—there is no doubt about that. It is a threat because the Government have sat back willingly and said that they do not care if another 30 million tonnes of coal is taken out of the take and if there are to be gas-fired power stations. One of the hon. Members who spoke earlier pointed out the dangers, and I wonder whether the Government are aware of the dangers of the policy that they are pursuing in relation to gas-fired power stations. It will affect not only the coal industry but the consumers who will have to pay an ever-increasing price for gas.

There is an assumption that gas is a green fuel. The Government are helping to support the idea that coal is a pollutant but that nuclear power is green friendly and that gas is green friendly. In addition, it is said that gas is cheaper, but that is not true on two counts.

Because of the lack of time I shall draw attention to a recently published report entitled "UK Energy Policy Post-Privatisation" which was written by Professor Fells. He meets head on the issue of the future of gas and its price. It is time that the Government examined the issue because as a result of the policy that they are actively backing—or at least not opposing—the consumer will face colossal electricity bills because of the escalation in gas-fired power stations.

The report to which I have just referred states:

"Reserve depletion, especially of oil and gas, must still be a concern for the long-term, but in the medium-term, constraints of supply security and the environment are more

[Mr. Alexander Eadie]

worrying than is depletion of the resource base itself. Probably now, and certainly after 1992, it is not certain that gas in the United Kingdom sector will be landed in the United Kingdom; it is likely to be sucked into mainland Europe, where prices are higher. Viewed in this perspective the privilege of the United Kingdom is temporary; the price and availability of natural gas in the United Kingdom depend" on many other factors into which I do not have time to go. I put that comment on record as the position is serious.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) said that he met the consortium today. He has not discussed the matter with me, although Monktonhall is in my constituency. I have never made any secret about the fact that my view on Monktonhall colliery is that British Coal should reopen the colliery. We have had many meetings on that, and the miners' parliamentary group has met the chairman of British Coal several times. We have had long meetings with the Secretary of State for Energy on the future of Monktonhall. There is no question that the issue of Monktonhall was not put forward, as the hon. Member for Gordon seemed to imply. I have never made any secret of the fact that I believe that the future of Monktonhall lies in British Coal working the pit and we have said that from the start.

It is a bit much for the hon. Member for Gordon to show a report and to say that it was compiled by Labour-controlled Lothian regional council. He obviously has not read the report——

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: I have.

Mr. Eadie: If he had, he would not have made the remarks he did. The report on Monktonhall was compiled by an independent consultant; it had nothing to do with political views. It was unanimously agreed by Lothian regional council, including Liberal Democrat councillors and Tory councillors, that there should be a report. The hon. Gentleman did not say that.

The report said that what was happening at Monktonhall should be costed. It went into great detail about how much it would take to start the colliery again and said that it would cost millions of pounds. It said that the capital's availability in the open market was doubtful and suspect. My view of the consortium has always been, "Good luck to it." However, I am concerned about where the money will come from and what the rates of interest will be. I want to ensure that my constituents do not lose the money that they are supposed to invest.

One does not have to look at the report which the hon. Member for Gordon has thrown away with such disdain. The Government with British Coal decided that they would get an independent consultant's report to study how the mine could be put up for licence—whether under the consortium or under private ownership. I have a copy of the consortium's report and the hon. Member for Gordon should have got a copy because it was identical to the Lothian report. The only difference was that the consortium's report said that it would cost another £250 million for subsidence damage.

The consortium has been advised by a mining engineer who was made redundant by British Coal. He proposes that the coal seams should be worked in the advance. It is good mining practice that if one is to work all the mine that has already been developed—and £60 billion has been spent in its development—one does not work it in the advance, but in the retreat. I have good reasons to be doubtful.

The hon. Member for Gordon says that the people of Midlothian are sick of the Labour party. The people of Midlothian are sick of the Liberal Democrats, because an argument is going on at present in Midlothian about who most wants to back the consortium and whether it is the Scottish National party or the Liberal Democrats. The Liberal Democrats write to *The Scotsman* and say that they were the first to back the consortium. They should not play about with people's livelihoods.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: We did not back the consortium.

Mr. Eadie: I did not interrupt the speech by the hon. Member for Gordon. If the hon. Gentleman wants to make a speech about the constituency of Midlothian, he will have to do a lot more homework than he did tonight. We have problems, and the hon. Gentleman is one of them. We have problems with the Liberal Democrats, who change their mind every five minutes and who have a different policy for every constituency. I want to try to be kind to the hon. Member for Gordon because he is out of his depth. He knows nothing about mining.

I do not know what will happen about Monktonhall. I want it to remain open, but I also want to understand the position. I do not want only Monktonhall, but the 100 years worth of coal which stretches to Musselburgh bay to be developed. Incidentally, I knocked down the girders that were to go to develop a new pit which would come from Monktonhall into those reserves.

I do not need the hon. Member for Gordon to lecture me about my affinity with the mining industry. I worked in that industry for 30 years. My record will stand alongside his in relation to the future of mining in Scotland or in relation to any miners in Midlothian. If the hon. Member for Gordon wants to make speeches criticising the Labour party, he should do more homework first.

Mr. John Home Robertson (East Lothian): I am grateful to my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour for giving way so that I can express the East Lothian interest in Monktonhall because Musselburgh bay lies under the east Lothian coast. My hon. Friend has long experience in the mining industry and is aware that the proposed privatised operation at Monktonhall would be restricted to an underground work force of only 150 people. Does my hon. Friend feel that justice could possibly be done to the coal reserves in that pit with such a small squad?

Mr. Eadie: I am obliged to my hon. Friend for his intervention. The hon. Member for Gordon treated this matter as a little joke, saying in the local press that everything could be changed in only five minutes. He has said that one only needs a dispensation from the mines inspectorate. That is a load of rubbish. One could not get a dispensation from the mines inspectorate to increase the manpower. I appeared on the Front Bench in the Committee Sitting in which the hon. Gentleman referred and received an assurance from the Minister that getting a dispensation would not be a problem. However, when I tabled a question to that effect, the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), answered by stating that, before the position could be changed, primary legislation would be required.

The hon. Member for Gordon does not seem to understand either that primary legislation would be required or that such primary legislation takes longer than five minutes to be put on the statute book.

I shall finish on this note——

Mr. Andy Stewart: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Eadie: If the hon. Gentleman does not mind, I will not——

Mr. Stewart: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, because I listened to what he said earlier and have since checked my speech. There is only one small difference between what I said on 14 November and what I have said today. I said on the 14th that the equivalent of 25 million tonnes of coal gas contracts had been given, with a further equivalent of 10 million tonnes lying on the table for the Secretary of State to sanction. I have since discovered that that figure is not 10 million tonnes but 17 million tonnes. That is the only difference.

Mr. Eadie: The hon. Gentleman should read his speech again.

I shall conclude now because I am taking up valuable time. When I first became a Member of the House, I learned that one should never speak about things that one does not know or does not understand. As that applies also to the subject of mining, I shall give that advice to the hon. Member for Gordon, who spoke on a subject about which he knows very little—and it showed.

9.6 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): I am sorry that the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) appears about to leave the Chamber, as I intend to refer to him. The Chairman of the Select Committee on Energy apologised to me earlier for the fact that he has had to leave the Chamber because he is due to make a speech on clean coal technology elsewhere in London.

I listened with interest to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) when he said that the Labour party did not have much interest in or seek to represent the Monktonhall miners. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Select Committee carefully considered the Monktonhall bid and that our discussions were forcefully led by my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion).

I do not mean to be offensive to the hon. Member for Sherwood when I say that he has entertained us with his prepared briefs in many of our coal debates, but that it is a bit rich of him continually to criticise the contraction of the coal industry when he has supported many of his Government's policies on the industry. I hope that the Nottinghamshire miners and *Coal News* will note that that is hypocritical. When I read *Coal News* after our last coal debate, it appeared as though the only people to speak on behalf of the mining industry were the hon. Member for Sherwood and his hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo). I hope also that British Coal has not helped to produce some of the briefs that we have heard in previous coal debates.

I am a long-standing member of the Select Committee on Energy and like, I am sure, many other members of that Committee, am beginning to feel like a parrot. We have produced reports year after year expressing anxiety at what was happening to the British coal industry. Over the years, we have had different witnesses, different Secretaries of State and different chairmen of British Coal. They have told us, "There are no figures at all. All you read in the newspapers about running down the mining industry has no truth in it."

However, the Select Committee report is based on clean coal technology, on which we have taken a great deal of evidence from expert witnesses. I am trying to cut my speech short because other people want to speak. I simply say that it is fairly obvious that Britain could have taken the lead in clean coal technology. Unfortunately, we have failed to do so. We have had leading opportunities in British Coal's topping cycle for coal-fired generation. We had the British Gas Lurgi coal gasification and coal liquefaction. We have failed miserably to support those experiments financially.

The Government contribution to the Grimethorpe project was much less than that of foreign Governments. We now find that, because we have failed in the past 10 or 12 years, to recognise the need for clean coal technology and support the schemes that were in operation, it will take eight to 10 years for plants to become operative and produce clean coal. In the meantime, foreign competitors are moving ahead of us.

The biggest problem is that when the clean coal technology plants are available, judging by present progress, the British coal industry will be run down to such an extent that it will not be able to meet the demand from the plants. Once again, we shall be in the hands of our foreign competitors.

It is rather ironic that we continue to run down our coal industry and sterilise billions of tonnes of coal. I shall refer to the Rothschild report later. I hope that the Government have read the latest British Coal press release from its chairman. I shall not read it out, because there is not time, but it makes the very point that, purely and simply for medium-term policies and commercial reasons, we shall sterilise billions of tonnes of coal.

Mr. Illsley: May I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the Government's response to the Select Committee report? Both he and I were members of the Committee when the report was produced. The Government's response was:

"it is not true to say that the reserves are lost forever if pits currently accessing them are closed."

On the following page, the British Coal memorandum says:

"The Committee is right to draw attention to the fact that, once a mine is closed, the capacity is effectively lost."

Does that not show how wrong the Government are?

Mr. Lofthouse: Now that my hon. Friend has brought me to the matter, it is right to put on record the comments of the chairman of British Coal in the press release.:

"Speaking in London almost a year after becoming Chairman of British Coal, Mr. Clarke said: 'What we are seeing is a sort of energy arms race, with attempts to justify it on the grounds of guaranteeing security, diversity and competition—but in reality, guaranteeing nothing but higher electricity prices, a rapid abandonment of other fuel reserves, and reliance on as yet unproven overseas resources.' . . . Coal's advantage still held good when account was taken of the cost of fitting flue gas desulphurisation equipment, said Mr. Clarke. The next supply contracts which British Coal will negotiate with the big electricity generators would offer electricity users an even better deal because of coal's success in reducing costs. . . . 'This is no exercise in abstract economics for British Coal,' Mr. Clarke stressed. 'The dash for gas affects us directly, and in a particularly perverse way.' The economics of gasfired stations meant that investors

[Mr. Lofthouse]

wanted long term supply and sale contracts to make them bankable. Typically, such contracts were for 15 years. 'Each new contract, each new gas station, eats into coal's share of the market—a share we could supply competitively. And we have to close down capacity as a result. Because we can't re-open mines, that capacity is lost for ever.'"

That is the case, and no expert would refute it.

The future of British Coal depends on the results of the next general election in a few months' time, and I do not think that any hon. Member or the Minister would refute that. That will decide whether we have a mining industry able to supply the demand for coal in the medium and long term, or whether we shall have the Rothschild recommendations. The Minister has an obligation to tell us whether the Government intend to implement Rothschild if they are returned to power. If that is the case, we may as well throw all our debates and the report out of the window.

The Minister has heard speeches from the chairman of the Energy Select Committee and all its members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) and the hon. Member for Erewash (Mr. Rost), who have been privileged to listen to expert witnesses. People without any political bias have given honest evidence and enabled the Select Committee to produce the report, which was a genuine effort to draw to the attention of the Government their folly in running down the coal industry to the extent that they are planning to do.

The Committee has done so in the past, but the Government have taken no notice. Even though they are hellbent on privatising the coal industry, I hope that at this late stage they will take notice of the Committee's report. It is a sincere and honest endeavour to try to inform the Government of exactly what is happening to the industry and what folly it would be if they allowed privatisation.

I hope that there will be no opportunity for the Government to introduce the Rothschild recommendations and that a Labour Government will be returned. They will treat the mining industry and the country in a responsible way and will maintain reserves of fuel which the country so badly needs in the medium and long term.

9.17 pm

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): I do not know whether the Minister would agree that, until now, we have heard explanations from both sides of the Chamber about the imperfect and expensive competition which has arisen as a result of the privatisation of the electricity supply industry. The House should ask what we are doing taking a decision on class V, vote 9, which will give the Government an extra £4 million from the Consolidated Fund

"to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1992 for expenditure by the Department of Energy in connection with the privatisation of the coal industry."

I do not know whether the Minister agrees with the evidence given by the hon. Member for Erewash (Mr. Rost) and by my hon. Friends about privatisation of the electricity supply industry. However, it is obviously as much a waste of funds to give money to privatisation of the coal industry as it was to give money for the poll tax.

A lot of nonsense has been talked—and a lot of myths—when the privatisation of the coal industry has been discussed in the House and elsewhere.

"Now the first myth that deserves a liberal dollop of embalming fluid is the notion that British Coal management can't do the business. That a change of ownership would usher in new ideas and allow productivity to soar and new markets to be exploited."

I do not know whether the Minister agrees.

"I can tell you that's absolute rubbish".

Also, people believe that there can be "a quick fix". I do not believe that there is a quick fix for the coal industry. Anyone who thinks that he can improve on the commitment and effort of British Coal managers reveals how little he knows about the coal industry and coal mining.

Those two quotes about "absolute rubbish" and "a quick fix" are not my words; they were taken from the speech made on Thursday last week by the chairman of British Coal. He ought to know; he was appointed by the Department to run British Coal. He says that the idea that British Coal can bring anything new to the industry or the nation is a myth. I should like the Minister to tell us whether he believes the myth about privatising the coal industry. If it is a myth, how can he justify the request for another £4 million of public funds to be spent on merchant bankers and other advisers like N. M. Rothschild sending reports into the country in brown envelopes which show that the future of the British coal industry is bleak?

We are debating the issues in the report of the Select Committee on Energy. I welcome the commitment of the Select Committee to secure the future of the coal industry in Britain and to develop a credible long-term strategy for research and development of clean coal technology. The whole House should commend the conclusion of the Select Committee in paragraph 89 that the strategy must include

"recognition that the UK is unlikely to succeed with clean coal technologies against foreign competition unless the Government is as supportive towards those technologies as competitors' governments."

The failure to support our industry is amply illustrated by the Bilsthorpe and Grimethorpe projects. In the case of Bilsthorpe, the Secretary of State's excuse for lack of Government support was that the project was neither commercial nor a demonstration project. In paragraph 78, the report records the Secretary of State as saying:

"the view that we took was that the technology that was involved was reasonably well proven . . . We were perfectly satisfied that it would work."

While the Government were refusing to take a 20 per cent. stake in the project, a fluid bed boiler of the same size and design was built at a mine in Lorraine on the initiative of the French Government, who funded 60 per cent. of the cost. That is a fair example of how Britain is lagging behind the rest of Europe.

In their response to the report, the Government have said that the Bilsthorpe project failed to achieve the support of the European Commission after an assessment by technical experts. Is not it the case that the European Commission, through the THERMIE programme, would back Bilsthorpe only if it was certain to go ahead, and that the only way to ensure that was through Government support? All the indications are that the Government did not support it and, as a consequence, it was not supported by the European Commission. Now the Government choose to blame the European Commission instead of putting the blame where it rightly lies—on their own lack of support for the project.

We have also had what is described by the Select Committee as the "sorry tale" of the Grimethorpe topping cycle. In paragraph 72, the Select Committee says that it reflects

"the lack of a long-term strategy and the failure to review the R & D role of the Government and other bodies in the wake of privatisation."

Apparently, the Government now agree that such a long-term project needs to be funded in such a way as to avoid unnecessary delays.

I wonder whether the Minister can tell us whether the project at Grimethorp is now securely funded, so that it will be able to complete its programme of 1,250 hours of operation? Will the money run out, as it did once before, with the consequential loss not only of the technological advantages gained but of the scientific and technical expertise? My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, East (Mr. Patchett) has taken an avid interest in the Grimethorpe project, not only because of its impact on his constituency but because of its impact on energy development. Will Grimethorpe complete its current programme without any further problems? My hon. Friend and I want to know the answer.

The report of the Select Committee is notable because it managed to clarify the Government's position in relation to the generators commitment to retrofit flue-gas desulphurisation systems to coal-fired power stations. Paragraph 107 of the report notes the Secretary of State insistence that PowerGen, the smaller of the two generators, cannot withdraw from its programme of 4 GW of FGD retrofits to coal-fired stations. However, from evidence submitted by McLoskey Coal Information Services and the British Association of Colliery Management it is clear that orimulsion, the fuel from Colombia, has a higher sulphur content than British coal. That means that those coal-fired power stations which use that fuel need FGD retrofitting. National Power and PowerGen have been given permission to burn that fuel at their power stations at Pembroke, Richborough and Ince.

The Select Committee took a great interest in the issue of FGD retrofitting. Will the Minister confirm that the Government will take the necessary steps—if necessary through Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution—to ensure that PowerGen complies with its commitment to retrofit 4 GW of coal burn should it not do so voluntarily? The Ferrybridge sea power station has not got permission for its 2 GW coal burn. That power station is the biggest sulphur emitter in Britain, and any investment in plant to get rid of sulphur emissions should be directed at such a power station.

Will the generators be required to retrofit FGD if they decide to burn orimulsion? Would the sulphur emitted by that coal be in addition to the 4 GW limit set now?

It is a pity that the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) is not in the Chamber. Attendance on the Conservative Back Benches is thin to say the least, especially when the Government tell us how much they support the coal industry. I note that my hon. Friend the member for East Lothian (Mr. Home Robertson) has moved to those Benches in an attempt to put the imbalance right.

The hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East made much about sulphur emissions, but the Government are taking no action to stop generators bringing in foreign coal. Surely that behaviour is anomalous. The Government say that those generators need the coal because it has a lower sulphur content, but at the same time they give them permission to burn orimulsion, which has a higher sulphur content than any coal produced in Britain. The Minister must explain that dichotomy.

The consultation paper of the coal task force recommended:

"the Government should accept the need for it to take action to provide a framework to encourage the development and promotion of new cleaner coal technologies"

That view is also reflected by the Select Committee's report, paragraph 67 of which states:

"without Government assistance no demonstration plants wil be built. Without demonstration plants, the UK's clean coal projects cannot proceed towards commercial implementation. Without commercial implementation, the UK's R & D in this field will have been largely futile."

Most people would agree. I hope that the Government will take on board what the all-party Select Committee has said about clean coal technologies and act on those recommendations as a matter of urgency.

The second part of the Select Committee report is about Government intervention in long-term contracts for the British coal industry. Paragraph 137 of the report says:

"it is precisely because of the uncertainty over future energy needs and supplies that secure, indigenous sources of fuel are important."

Indeed they are, and most energy commentators in Britain take that view. We do not know whether a certain institution takes that view, because it has little to say about whether the long-term security of indigenous sources of supply is an asset to Britain. The institution to which I refer is the Department of Energy.

Even so, the Government reiterate their belief that the supply of fuel is a market-only decision. They

"believe that only the participants in the market can have the necessary knowledge and the incentive to determine the economic size of an industry. It is therefore for the electricity supply industry to ensure that it has access to secure long-term supplies of competitive fuel."

In stubbornly repeating that, they rebut the Select Committee stance which rejects total reliance on the market. Indeed, in its conclusions in paragraph 149, the report points out:

"if the generators take decisions which turn out to have unfortunate long-term consequences, it is the nation as a whole (and electricity consumers in particular) who will pay the price, rather than the generators themselves."

If decisions are taken for short-term economic reasons and in the full knowledge of their likely effects, a future Labour Government would not see their duty lying in protecting the profits of the generating companies at the expense of consumers. I want the message to go out loud and clear that a future Labour Government would not feel that we had to put consumers at risk because of decisions taken now by generators in the knowledge that, while coal is offered at home with guarantees on its price structure for years to come, they feel that they should run elsewhere for short-term economic gain.

The Government's stated belief in a free and open market on the basis of willing buyers and willing sellers, their unwillingness to subsidise what they term uneconomic production and their rejection of the coercion of customers sits uneasily on the protection of the nuclear industry's markets through the non-fossil fuel obligation and the nuclear levy.

In the debate on Second Reading of the Coal Industry Act 1990, I spoke of the European Commission's proposed reference price for coal. The Minister seemed unaware of the proposals. Indeed, he said:

[Mr. Kevin Barron]

"He did not tell us what was in that plan"—
referring to the plan that I had mentioned—
"other than mentioning something called a reference price".
—[*Official Report*, 14 November 1991; Vol. 198, c. 1318.]

It was astonishing to hear a Minister say that in November 1991, when the European Commission had for many months been discussing exactly that matter in relation to the future of the European coal industries.

The Select Committee has no such qualms, for it said in paragraph 145:

"the concept of a reference price band . . . is . . . an important step towards a harmonised policy in respect of European coal reserves and towards defining the value of the security which indigenous coal production provides."

The Select Committee called on the Government to play an active part in the deliberations on that. When one considers that that was said in July and that the Minister responsible for coal said in November that he did not even know about the reference price, one cannot have a great deal of faith in him or in his ability to protect the British coal industry.

The Government's formal response to the Select Committee is muted, to say the least. They will give, as they call it, only "careful consideration" to proposals when they emerge, rather than be actively involved in formulating the proposals. That should come as no surprise to us, given the Government's record. Nevertheless, it is disappointing that the Government do not take a more positive attitude.

In a recent letter to George Stevenson MEP, the EC Director-General for Energy said:

"the Commission believes that the current world market price for coal is not a sufficient criterion for assessing the competitiveness of Community coal. It is therefore realistic to define a security premium for the Community coal production which covers both the long term prospects for the evolution of the world coal market and the coal supply security."

I hope that the Minister will join more enthusiastically in the vital discussions on long-term markets and security of supply which affect the future of the British coal industry.

The Commission's paper on reference prices says:

"it would be particularly unfair for pits to continue to close in those Member States which have nearly completed the restructuring exercise, while substantially less productive pits in other coal-producing Member States are kept running thanks to a national system of subsidies and other protective measures."

That was also pointed out by the Chairman of the Select Committee. Surely that covers the British coal industry because, if our restructuring is not complete, how many more pits will have to close in Britain?

The letter to George Stevenson MEP also states:

"Further reductions of British coal production capacity are certainly worrying."

It is a shame that the Government are not worried by such prospects. Their approach to negotiating a new contract between the coal corporation and generators is a clear expression of their easy come, easy go approach to the coal industry. I cannot believe that it is in the national interest for the Government to proceed as they have. We must not lose the nation's assets because at some stage there will be a national crisis in terms of where our energy resources should come from.

I do not think that I could conclude my speech better than by reporting the warning in the conclusions the Select Committee report:

"if a significant proportion of the UK's coal reserves were abandoned . . . resulting in a major reduction of long-term energy security, the Government should understand that the country would see this not as a commercial decision, but as a largely irreversible decision of historic significance for the UK."

I hope that the Minister and the Department of Energy will take our great national assets more seriously than in the past and ensure that we have an asset that will serve the national for many generations to come, as it has for centuries past.

9.37 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): I congratulate the Energy Select Committee and all who serve on it on the quality of their report, which is one of the subjects of this evening's debate. They examined the prospects for the coal market after 1993 and the possibilities of clean coal technology. Naturally, I do not agree with all their conclusions, but I recognise the high standard of the report.

I listened with particular interest to the opening speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford (Dr. Clark), who spoke with great authority on his report. He has given me notice that he is unable to be here for the latter part of the debate. Obviously, I entirely accept his apology and there is no possible discourtesy. My hon. Friend and other hon. Members referred to the painful restructuring that has taken place in past decades in the British coal mining industry. There is nothing new about colliery closures. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) drew attention to periods under Labour Governments when similar pit closures were experienced and large numbers of coal miners were displaced.

We have ensured that restructuring and social grants are available to help that painful process. We have also provided deficit grants to aid the industry more directly. Since 1979, more than £7·5 billion of new investment has been made available by the Government through British Coal. The total grant aid provided in those years comes to more than £17 billion—including more than £6 billion of deficiency grant provided in the Coal Industry Act 1990. It cannot be said that the taxpayer has been stingy in supporting the industry.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): Does not the Minister agree that the blocking of the RECHAR grants has deliberately stopped considerable sums of money that should have come to districts such as mine, which was a considerable blow?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: That is a separate issue. I regret that one of the European Commissioners is apparently refusing to release RECHAR money to this country as it could be of direct assistance to some of the affected regions. I know that discussions are taking place between the Government and the Commission on that issue, and I hope, that before too long, the Commissioner involved will authorise the release of the money, which we can certainly put to good use.

I am sure that all hon. Members recognise—it has been asserted again in the debate—that the coal industry faces competition from other fuels. That would be true under any Government and whether the industry were in private or public hands. It faces competition from the nuclear industry, the growing number of renewable energy sources

—which, although few at present, are of growing significance in total—and also from the gas industry, which is now to provide power for electricity generation.

Under any Government, a number of large gas generating plants would be commissioned over the next year or two, which would inevitably affect the market for coal. However, we believe that there is still a significant market for coal. The prospects of British Coal winning that market are good, particularly if we succeed in transferring the industry to the private sector.

That is why we are working out proposals to do so after the next general election and are bringing forward the supplementary estimate which is one of the subjects of this evening's debate. Decisions on the timing and details of the privatisation package and the Bill that we shall bring before the House will be taken after the next general election, but it is sensible to consider in detail the technical issues involved and some of the options that may be appropriate.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) wanted us to act faster and transfer ownership of the Monktonhall pit to a consortium of coal miners in advance of the main privatisation Bill. It is not possible for us to do that without changes in the law, so I think that he must have meant that the licensee should be the miners consortium, although there was some confusion in his remarks between the two different approaches.

The hon. Member for Gordon prefaced his main suggestions with an allegation that applicants could influence the choice by contributing to Conservative party funds. I very much resent and utterly reject that allegation. He then, confusingly and paradoxically, suggested that I should involve myself in the choice of licensee. He went further, and said that my choice should be his favourite consortium—the mineworkers consortium—which has discussed its proposals with me. I make it clear to the hon. Gentleman, to the House and to the mineworkers consortium: the choice is not for me but for British Coal. I am glad that an independent operator may be given the chance to work these reserves if the necessary conditions can be guaranteed, but the choice between competing applicants is not one for me to make.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: I accept that, but does not the Minister accept that British Coal may be compromised? The Government have made it clear that it is to be privatised. They have also said that it will continue to be the licensing authority for private coal pits. Does not that leave British Coal in a position in which its judgment of who may be the best operator for a pit may be the one likely to be the least successful, or at least less of a threat, not the one who might operate in the best interests of competition, the local community or the wider economy? Should not the Government transfer the licensing role from British Coal to the Secretary of State as soon as possible?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We are working within the statutory framework of the 1946 nationalisation legislation. Until it is altered by this House, it would be quite wrong for us to suggest that any other body could act as a licensing authority. However, when we bring our proposals for the privatisation of the industry before the House, it will be entirely appropriate to deal with matters such as this. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will support our efforts to give outside independent private miners and mining companies opportunities to exploit British Coal reserves. But that is a matter for another debate.

I noticed that the hon. Member for Gordon failed to answer my earlier point, which was that the Liberal Democrat party poses as a friend of coal—he did this evening—but the environmental document recently published by that party is extremely enthusiastic about a carbon tax and makes it clear that such a tax would bite most savagely on the combustion of coal. The economic and industrial implications of a carbon tax are discussed in the latter part of that document, but it is entirely silent on the question of the coal industry.

Not only would the Liberal Democrat proposals be highly damaging to the industry that the hon. Gentleman purports to support, but his document fails to discuss the issue at all. So I take his professed support for the British mining industry with a large pinch of salt.

Other hon. Members have rightly discussed coal research and development, a subject which formed an important part of the Select Committee's deliberations. I hope that hon. Members will therefore welcome the fact that last year we initiated a major review of the United Kingdom's coal research requirements in the longer term. We set up a coal task force, which was the Department's advisory committee on coal research, and it produced a consultation document in August.

That has already led to a large number of comments from overseas as well as from the United Kingdom industry. The report has been generally well received, and it certainly deals with the anxieties expressed this evening in favour of research being long-term. Research and development carried out in the United Kingdom should certainly be conducted in a framework that includes the long-term implications of coal burn.

At present, we are reviewing the comments that we have already received, and in the course of next year we shall publish a considered response to the coal task force. It gives the strategic direction referred to in the debate.

I emphasise that we are not standing still while we await the outcome of that review. In partnership with British industry, British Coal and overseas agencies, we have recently launched five new clean coal projects with a contract value of about £20 million, bringing the total contract value of coal research and development to more than £100 million. Further projects are at the planning stage, and announcements will be made in due course.

We believe strongly that collaboration between the Government, the coal industry and the rest of British industry is essential, not only to attract additional money for coal research but also for the technical and commercial skills that it can bring.

Reference has been made to the need for demonstration plants. We have already established an industrial working party, drawn from British Gas, the electricity generators and other plant manufacturers, to examine prospects for an integrated gasification combined cycle demonstration plant.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to Grimethorpe and the need to complete the research there. It is not true that the Department has delayed the development of the topping cycle at Grimethorpe and elsewhere. In fact, my Department found £3·7 million at short notice last year to keep the project on schedule. An important feature of that

[Mr. Heathcoat-Amory]

research is that we are working closely with other partners, in particular PowerGen, GEC Alsthom and British Coal, to decide the most appropriate next steps.

Mr. Eadie: Has the Minister had any discussions on the closure of the Westfield plant in Scotland, which was manufacturing synthetic gas from coal?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am aware of that closure and the experiments and research carried out there. There is no immediate prospect of large-scale funding from my Department, but we remain interested, and if industrial partners come forward to carry that research to another stage, my Department will be interested in encouraging that.

The hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) referred to a reference price for coal. No such request, information or details have been sent to my Department from the Commissioner concerned. However, we understand that the object of a European reference price is not to boost subsidies for coal, but rather to put a limit on them. We remain in touch with the thinking in Europe about a reference price, but the hon. Gentleman is wrong to suggest that proposals have been made. At this stage, no such proposals have been made.

No one pretends that in the years ahead the coal market will be easy. If faces severe environmental and economic pressures. We accept that the Government have a role in ensuring an adequate collaborative research and development programme, and I have instanced some of the projects that we are hoping to take forward. We believe that combined with our proposals to return the industry to the private sector after the next election, the outlook for the industry is by no means bleak.

9.53 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I am grateful for the opportunity to have a few minutes in which to speak, having been a Member of the Select Committee on Energy which produced the report that we are debating, part of which related to the coal industry's future after 1993. The sad fact is that, at best, the coal industry's future at that time will be uncertain and at worst it will have no future.

The Government have said that, if they are re-elected next year, the coal industry will be privatised, and their advisers have suggested that about 14 collieries will be left if that privatisation goes ahead.

This evening, the House is asked to vote £4 million for the industry's privatisation. Under the present Government, the coal industry does not really have a future, and privatisation is to go ahead without any word of the industry's liabilities after the next general election. They will include concessionary fuel to those beneficiaries who are entitled to it, and the industry's existing liabilities in respect of compensation for industrial deafness claims and so on, which date back a good few years.

The industry has very little in the way of assets. After 1993, it will not even have a production contract unless the generators relax their stand and agree to renew their contracts for substantial tonnages, whereas they have indicated tonnages of half the present figures.

The industry faces problems other than its run down and privatisation. It has a future only if it can sell the coal that it produces, but the power generators made it clear that they do not want its coal, for several reasons. The generators talk about importing coal, orimulsion, and using gas, to force extra concessions from the beleaguered coal industry, such as lower prices. The generators do not want reliance on British coal but diversification and a number of fuel sources.

The generators also want the flexibility to switch from imported to domestic coal. Despite advice from British Coal, the Government are reluctant to accept that once British collieries are closed, they cannot reopen for several reasons—one of which is the economics involved. All that despite the fact that the industry has improved its productivity by more than 100 per cent., and decreased its costs by more than 25 per cent. by closing collieries and reducing manpower.

Private sector generators have only one goal—to increase profits for their new shareholders. To do that, they will burn the cheapest fuel. They will go for cheaper prices and increased profits. Hence the dash for gas—increased gas generation, which has required British Gas to implement a 35 per cent. price increase for some projects suggested for the future. It could not see that enough gas would be available to meet all the new gas projects on the drawing board.

The generators talk about importing gas from Norway and the Soviet Union. The uncertainty in the Soviet Union at least means that gas supplies from that source may not be relied on. We are using a fuel to create a fuel, and wasting it for the sake of short-termism and increased profits.

We have heard also that the power generators will burn orimulsion, because Venezuelan tar sand is very cheap, but it has very high sulphur levels. The hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) said that the generators could burn orimulsion and still remain below their emission targets, because they would be burning gas, which has much lower emission standards. I make the point that the generators are willing to go to the limit—and because orimulsion is cheap, they will burn it, despite the fact that it will produce high emissions.

The Government have deliberately encouraged the coal industry's complete rundown through privatisation. The industry's only answer is further to increase production, to try to reduce its costs. We have heard that opencast production could be increased to reduce costs. That will merely flood the market with coal which the industry will not be able to sell, because the generators do not want it. Consequently, more pits will close as the industry argues that it needs low-cost capacity in a handful of collieries.

Over the past 10 years, the Government have simply allowed the coal industry to be whittled away, leaving the rump of pits mentioned in the Rothschild report. That will happen after 1993, when the generators say, "No, we will not burn 60 million tonnes, or 50 million; we will burn half what we burned in the past."

It being Ten o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *interrupted the proceedings, and the Question necessary to dispose of the proceedings was deferred, pursuant to paragraph (4) of Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of estimates).*

MR. SPEAKER, *pursuant to paragraph (5) of Standing Order No. 52 (Consideration of estimates), put the deferred Questions on Supplementary Estimates, 1991-92 (Class XIV, Vote 1 and Class V, Vote 9).*

CLASS XIV, VOTE 1

Resolved,

That a further sum not exceeding £1,680,076,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1992 for expenditure by the Department of Social Security on non-contributory retirement pensions, Christmas bonus payments to pensioners, pensions etc., for disablement or death arising out of war or service in the armed forces after 2nd September 1939 and on sundry other services, on attendance allowances, invalid care allowance, severe disablement allowance, mobility allowance; on pensions gratuities and sundry allowances for disablement and specified deaths arising from industrial causes; on income support, transitional payment, child benefit, one parent benefit, family credit, and on the vaccine damage payment scheme.

CLASS V, VOTE 9

Resolved,

That a further sum not exceeding £4,000,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges that will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1992 for expenditure by the Department of Energy in connection with the privatisation of the coal industry.

MR. SPEAKER *then proceeded to put forthwith the Question which he was directed to put, pursuant to paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 53 (Questions on voting of estimates, &c.).*

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES, 1991-92

Resolved,

That a further supplementary sum not exceeding £1,743,208,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund to defray the charges for civil services which will come in course of payment during the year ending on 31st March 1992, as set out in House of Commons Paper No. 6 of Session 1991-92.

ESTIMATES 1992-93 (VOTE ON ACCOUNT)

Resolved,

That a sum not exceeding £75,069,116,000 be granted to Her Majesty out of the Consolidated Fund, on account, for or towards defraying the charges for defence and civil services for the year ending on 31st March 1993, as set out in House of Commons Papers Nos. 7, 8 and 9 of Session 1991-92.

CONSOLIDATED FUND BILL

Bill ordered to be brought in upon the foregoing resolutions by the Chairman of Ways and Means, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. David Mellor, Mr. Francis Maude, Mrs. Gillian Shephard and Mr. John Maples.

Mr. Francis Maude accordingly presented a Bill to apply certain sums out of the Consolidated Fund to the service of the years ending on 31st March 1992 and 1993: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 11].

Ministerial and Other Salaries

Mr. Speaker: I have not been able to select the amendment on the Order Paper, because it is out of order.

10.1 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): I beg to move

That the draft Ministerial and other Salaries Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 2nd December, be approved.

I am sorry that a small error appeared in the final version of the 1991 order in article 2 on the first page, where an "of" appeared instead of an "or". The necessary correction slip is being issued.

Our proposals for increases to the salaries of Ministers and paid officials in this House are, this year, quite straightforward.

On Monday 2 December, in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertfordshire, South-West (Mr. Page), I announced in a written answer all the details of the changes that we envisage. The increase in salaries in this House and in another place would be 4·5 per cent. effective from 1 January 1992. The total cost of those increases would be just over £154,000 in a full year.

Ministers' recent record on pay restraint—and, indeed, that of the past 10 years—has been good. Over the lifetime of the present Government, most Ministers have received increases significantly lower than the increase in average earnings in the economy as a whole. From 1979 to 1991, such average earnings increased by 218 per cent. whereas Commons ministerial salaries increased by between 94 per cent. and 115 per cent. Over the same period, the retail prices index increased by 147 per cent., so there has been a fall in ministerial salaries in real terms. Moreover, ministerial salaries in the Commons have increased more slowly than parliamentary salaries, which, as the House will know, are increasing by 6·5 per cent. from 1 January 1992. There is no doubt that Ministers have given a clear lead in practice in regard to pay restraint.

I believe that the proposals that I have outlined continue to demonstrate the Government's commitment to pay restraint, and I commend the motion to the House.

10.4 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): The burden of the remarks of the Leader of the House was that the increases for Ministers were very modest. My first comment is that the performance of Ministers has also been very modest. Indeed, to say that it has been modest is almost an exaggeration—it has been much less adequate than that.

Of course, by any outside comparisons, Ministers of the Crown are underpaid. I say that in an objective sense, not in support of Ministers in the present Government. But for the fact that the salary of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition was included in the order, I might be moved to recommend that we vote against it. However, in the circumstances, such a recommendation might be open to misinterpretation, so I shall not recommend such a move to the House.

During their term of office, the Government have been molved—I was going to say "obsessed", but that is perhaps an exaggeration—to pursue arguments about performance-related pay. I can say only that, if the country was asked whether performance-related pay should apply

[Dr. John Cunningham]

to Ministers of this Administration, it would almost certainly say yes and call for cuts in the salaries of certainly a number of Ministers.

I cannot believe, for example, that people in the country at large think that the Secretary of State for the Home Department has earned any increase in salary in view of his performance in the past few months. If the salary of the Secretary of State for Employment were reduced by just 10p for every job lost in the past 12 months—and that means 580,000 jobs—he would end up having to pay the taxpayer to be able to stay in his post instead of receiving a salary. It will seem strange to some people outside that we should be recommending a salary increase to the Secretary of State for Employment when hundreds of thousands of people are losing their jobs as a result of the disastrous performance of the Government's employment and industrial policies.

We shall not divide the House on the order. The Leader of the House said that the salary recommendations were modest. I say that the Government's performance is equally modest, and I am sure that people outside this place are looking forward to the opportunity to hold their own review of the Government's performance when the general election comes. I have no doubt what the outcome of that review will be.

10.6 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): There are three component parts to the order. The third gives you, Mr. Speaker, an increase and I have no quibble with that. The second gives an increase to the Leader of the official Opposition and to the Labour Chief Whip. Although I do not quibble about either of those two gentleman being paid more, I agree with the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) about the general issue of salaries. The first and largest in terms of its consequences for the public Exchequer means that Ministers of the Crown should be paid more.

I have been advised that, although it was in order to table an amendment to try to reduce the salary of a Minister of the Crown, it was unlikely that it would be in order for it to be called. I understand that the procedure has been changed in recent years to make that an impossibility, which seems to be a protective mechanism for the Government. Therefore, one has to deal with the issue generally rather than specifically. By contrast, there have been debates in the House in which one has been able to move a reduction in ministerial salary. I think that the most recent was in relation to the Lord Chancellor, whose salary is dealt with in a different way.

I share the Lord President's view that one cannot criticise the general principle of the amount of the increase. It is a modest increase in view of the annual and average rate of increase across the board. I do not dissent from the view that Ministers—and I include Members of Parliament—should be paid relatively more. I believe that, relatively, the amount that they earn is still inadequate to recompense them for the importance of their job and their functions.

As the hon. Member for Copeland rightly said, it is an anomaly that there is no way in which the House can make a judgment on the link between Ministers' performance and pay. Ministers are carefully protected from that.

It is even more inconsistent for the Government to make a virtue out of performance-related pay. They always defend pay rises for highly paid chief executives of the now privatised but formerly public industries as justified by the importance of their jobs. When we complain about the salary increase for the boss of British Telecom or for the boss of British Gas, we are told that it is because they do an important job and deserve to be well paid. Many people have been relatively inadequately paid all the time. The great tragedy of the Government is that the gap between the top 10 per cent. and the lowest 10 per cent. has widened consistently. We are a far less equal society than we were in 1979, 1983 or 1987. There should be performance-related pay.

I put it on record in an objective way that leaders of parties other than the principal Opposition party should have a compensating increase above the allowance of the ordinary Member of Parliament. I do not include only the leader of my party, but the leaders of other parties, perhaps parties over a certain size. If we expect democracy to function and to flourish, there is a strong argument for that.

I understand the historical reasons why the Leader of the Opposition has a different status in the House from the status of the leaders of other parties, but there were often not so many other parties as there are now, and the logic of increases being given only to the Leader of the Opposition and the Opposition Chief Whip—apart from yourself, Mr. Speaker—is now historic, and the anomaly should be corrected.

The hon. Member for Copeland cited two examples. There is a failure in the system if it does not allow us to challenge the way in which Ministers increasingly hang on to office, no matter how poor their performance in specific areas. My amendment illustrates my case. No matter how serious the breach of convention, there is no possibility that a Minister in this Government will resign for a constitutional failure. It seems that that is now an historically unrecognised position.

The most relevant examples have appeared in the Home Secretary's most recent year in office. I make no personal comment about him. One may consider a Minister to be a perfectly pleasant bloke or woman, but that is not the point. The point is how he or she does his job. We are all accountable.

It has been an extraordinary year in the life of the Home Secretary since last November. I agree entirely with the hon. Member for Copeland that, if the public were asked tomorrow to judge how much each Cabinet Minister should be paid, and if they were paid according to the public's perception of how well each did his job, it would be a salutary lesson for the Government because they might discover that some Ministers would be paid very little.

I do not attribute the general rise in crime to the Home Secretary, although I attribute to him the increasing numbers in prisons, the inability to deal with that problem and the inability to cope properly with the law and order issue. The Home Secretary has had several run-ins with the courts on Government immigration policy. In March, the High Court asked him to review a decision to return an asylum seeker to Togo. In May, he said that he did not intend to introduce legislation to curb dangerous dogs, but then he decided to do so. In July, two IRA prisoners escaped from Brixton prison. One shot a friend of mine,

Malcolm Kemp, the driver of the car that was attacked outside the prison when he and his wife were on their way——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is outside the scope of the order.

Mr. Hughes: With respect, Mr. Speaker, I seek to address how we judge the record of Ministers, and I am giving examples. I accept that I may have extended that example too far. The prison escape was so significant that the Home Secretary returned from his holiday because of it. Things then became even more suspicious when we heard that someone had been planted in Brixton prison as part of an escape advisory service for prisoners.

We then had a summer of joyriding, followed by an announcement at the Tory party conference that there would be legislation to deal with that, and a Queen's Speech which suggested that there would not be any legislation. Then, in the past two or three weeks——

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): Rubbish.

Mr. Hughes: It is not rubbish——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Whether or not it is rubbish, it is wide of the order.

Mr. Hughes: The Home Secretary said that he would do one thing, but he did not do it until he was chased. As the House knows, in the past two weeks—at the very end of the year—the right hon. Gentleman was told off by the Court of Appeal. There were many protests across the House about the fact that the Home Secretary is the first Cabinet Minister ever to be held guilty of contempt of court. It has yet to be seen, of course, whether that decision will be borne out by the House of Lords. Nevertheless, the Home Secretary was criticised by the court and, in the same fortnight, refused to implement the law on Sunday trading.

There may be other examples, but if ever, in any one year, there could be more reasons for saying that somebody has failed the duty of his office——

Mr. Gale: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is this discussion about Sunday trading in order and, if it is, may I join it?

Mr. Speaker: I have a suspicion that the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) is coming to a close.

Mr. Hughes: As so often, Mr. Speaker, you are correct.

If ever there was a case for being able to ask whether a Minister should stay in office, that must be a good example of it. It is a failure of the House that there is no way in which we can challenge a Minister's entitlement to his full salary if he does not do his job properly. I hope that the next Tory party manifesto will contain a pledge to the effect that performance-related pay will be applied to Ministers as well as to the rest of the economy. That might improve their performance considerably.

10.17 pm

Mr. MacGregor: This has been a brief debate, so I shall make a brief response. The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) made two main points. I note that he thinks that Ministers—and Members of Parliament generally—are underpaid for the responsibilities that they carry. One way of dealing with that point in relation to Ministers' pay would be for the Top Salaries Review Body to undertake another review of Ministers' pay. That has not been ruled out, but none is planned at present.

In answer to the hon. Gentleman's point about my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, I shall certainly not stray into all the policy issues that were raised, in view of what you have said, Mr. Speaker, but I totally reject the hon. Gentleman's charges against my right hon. Friend. My right hon. Friend has made his position on the escapes absolutely clear, and has totally justified it.

The hon. Gentleman was completely wrong about the Dangerous Dogs Act and the Aggravated Vehicle-Taking Bill. As he knows, there were an increasing number of cases involving dangerous dogs, and my right hon. Friend acted extremely speedily to draft legislation that was not easy to draft, and to push it through the House quickly, with the full support of all hon. Members. That was prompt action.

My right hon. Friend announced his intention to introduce legislation to deal with aggravated vehicle taking at our party conference. The legislation was not included in the Queen's Speech—many Bills are not—because we were still involved in drafting what proved to be a complicated piece of legislation, but that has been done—and done quickly. The legislation has now gone through the House.

The hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey is therefore completely off beam on both those points. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary acted promptly, and a great deal faster than is sometimes the case for other urgent matters requiring legislation.

The hon. Gentleman was also wrong to suggest that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary should implement the law on Sunday trading. That is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General. He made his position clear, rightly and fairly, in the House the other day, so I reject the charges——

Mr. Gale *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: I do not want to become involved in a debate on Sunday trading, and I reject the charges absolutely.

Mr. Gale: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way on that precise point. I speak as one who opposes Sunday trading. Does my right hon. Friend recall that our right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General came to the House to announce that he did not intend to take action on Sunday trading because the matter was before the European Court, and is it not the Liberal party that wants all our laws to be made in Europe?

Mr. MacGregor: My hon. Friend makes a fair point.

My final point relates to the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham). He posed a hypothetical question about the public response on Ministers' performance. Indeed it was hypothetical. When the country is asked who should head the negotiations at Maastricht, people give a clear answer, as we saw in recent polls. By a substantial majority, they support my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary. People have shown clearly that they have faith in my right hon. Friends and do not have faith in the hon. Gentleman's colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench.

Dr. Cunningham: Clearly the right hon. Gentleman has not seen the news of tomorrow's poll—or perhaps he has seen it and is ignoring it. The greatest criticism of the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) should have come from the Leader of the House, but perhaps I understand why he did not make it. The hon. Gentleman seems to want to remove the Government one Minister at a time. It will be quicker and far better for the country for them all to be removed together.

Mr. MacGregor: I am happy to await the verdict on that matter. Meanwhile, there is general agreement this evening that the House should proceed to pass the order. Therefore, I am happy to sit down.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Ministerial and other Salaries Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 2nd December, be approved.

PETITION

Human Rights (Kashmir)

10.21 pm

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): On Human Rights Day, I am proud to present a petition signed by 2,600 Bradford citizens of Kashmiri and non-Kashmiri origin, including Councillor Amin Qureshi of Bradford.

The petitioners remind the House that the United Nations Security Council passed resolutions declaring that the final disposition of the state of Jammu and Kashmir would be made in accordance with the will of the people, expressed through the democratic method of a free and impartial plebiscite conducted under the auspices of the United Nations. Whereas both Lord Mountbatten and Mr. Nehru solemnly promised that a referendum would be held, and whereas the Indian security forces now occupying Kashmir have perpetrated gross and persistent violations of the human rights of the people of Kashmir, the petitioners pray that

your honourable House will condemn the systematic mass murders, torture, arson and rape by the Indian forces of occupation in Kashmir; promote international efforts to help refugees fleeing Kashmir and to relieve the hardship and suffering of the people who remain in the territory; demand that India permit Amnesty International and other international human rights agencies to enter Kashmir, with a view to investigating and reporting human rights violations; and calls for the withdrawal of India's armed forces and security forces from the State of Jammu and Kashmir and their replacement by an interim United Nations Administration with the task of restoring law and order, and as soon a practicable, conducting the said plebiscite.

I am extremely proud to present this petition.

To lie upon the Table.

Poll Tax (Enforcement Procedures)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Greg Knight.]*

10.23 pm

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): One of the central features of the hearing that saw me expelled from the Labour party on Saturday was my attitude to the poll tax and my work in the past three years to defend those who are unable to pay, by welding together with many others that force, which resulted in not only the demise of the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), the former Prime Minister, but the Government's biggest climbdown in their 12 years by abandoning what the right hon. Member for Finchley called the flagship of the third term of the Tory Government.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): The third Reich.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): Yes, the third Reich.

Mr. Nellist: Perhaps, more accurately, if not the third Reich, as my hon. Friends, whom I am still happy to call my hon. Friends, have just said, certainly the Titanic of that regime.

It is even more apposite to stand here this evening and to begin a short debate on the poll tax and its enforcement procedures on a day when attitudes have hardened in Scotland and a headline has apparently appeared in the *Evening Times*, "Poll tax war in Glasgow streets."

I realise that the Minister speaks on environment matters not for Scotland but for England and Wales. However, today 1,000 people in one of the poorest boroughs in western Europe stood in solidarity outside the homes of those who are unable to pay the poll tax, to attempt to stop an especially pernicious and mediaeval barbarity called poinding, which is the theft of items from people's homes by what we would call bailiffs, but by what are referred to in Scotland as sheriff officers, to sell those goods—often at a fraction of their value—to try to meet civil debt.

Of the 1,000 people, 29 were arrested. Although some were young, there were also a number of middle-aged men and women—a cross-section of working-class people—who stuck together on the cold streets of Glasgow. I think that it is the first time that sheriff officers, without any provocation from protesters, have called in the police in Strathclyde in that way. It marks a hardening of attitudes in Scotland on the enforcement of the poll tax. It is one year ahead of England and Wales on enforcement of the poll tax.

Strathclyde—a Labour authority—like many others, has promised, using the terms of the legislation and almost the words of the Secretary of State for the Environment, that only "wilful" non-payers, who can pay but refuse to do so, would ever have the full weight and majesty of the law thrown at them.

One of the people who was being protected in Springburn today—whose door the sheriff officers threatened to kick down—was an old woman who was wheelchair-bound. A large proportion of those suffering the ultimate sanction of imprisonment in England and Wales, have not been people on high salaries, whom Ministers and Tory MPs like to categorise as the only ones involved in the battle against the poll tax. In Scotland, England and Wales, the poorest and weakest are hardest hit by the poll tax and by the oppressive, authoritarian and barbaric measures of enforcement which are now being deployed.

In Britain, the final sanction is imprisonment, but it is ironic when one considers the expense. I do not know the value of goods collected today. I am told that one door went in and about £150-worth of goods were brought out. I should like to see the figures tomorrow showing how much police time and the time of sheriff officers, court and council officials was spent to get £150-worth of goods out of that person's home.

Where is that effort on a Sunday? I know that you ruled that Sunday trading was wide of the mark in a previous debate, Mr. Speaker, so I shall make only a slight diversion for a sentence or so. Where were the V formations and the special patrol groups in B and Q and Sainsbury on Sunday, enforcing the Shops Act 1950, in the same way that 25,000 hours of court time has been spent in England and Wales in the past 15 months to enforce poll tax legislation? If the same tests were applied to that legislation as Ministers have apparently said should be applied to the Shops Act, millions of people voting with their feet by ignoring it, millions of people have certainly voted with their feet on the poll tax.

We know why B and Q and Sainsbury do not get attacked in that way. Perhaps it is because B and Q put on dances for agents at Tory party conferences and Sainsbury has representatives at ministerial level.

The poll tax is unenforceable and uncollectable in Scotland—after three years, 64 per cent. of the population have not paid, and in Strathclyde 84 per cent. have not paid. Out of 3·7 million adults, 2·5 million have received sheriff's warrants. The figures are also huge in England and Wales. The best description is that they are of herculean proportions.

The Home Office has admitted to me—it took a while to get the figures readily—that, in the 18 months from 1 April 1990 to 30 September 1991, 8,023,621 people in England and Wales were summonsed to court, and 195,845 had turned up, taking up 23,558 hours of court time. That is what the Prime Minister meant, shortly after he came into office, having seen the right hon. Lady deposed, when he told a Back-Bench Tory committee that the poll tax was uncollectable and unenforceable. Up to the end of September in England and Wales, 195,000 people had turned up in court to tell the magistrates why they could not and would not pay the poll tax. Committal warrants for prison have been issued in respect of 2,815 of those people.

Although the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment will be replying to the debate, I asked the Home Office only a few days ago for comparable figures for the five years before the poll tax of the number of people who had not paid their rates. It did not collect the figures. I am not surprised; it did not want a comparison. The citizens advice bureaux did a survey in 1987, which showed that 370 people were summonsed and given committal warrants for non-payment of domestic rates. That is about 15 per cent. of the number of committal warrants issued so far in connection with the poll tax, with only one fifth or one sixth of local authorities moving down that road.

The latest figures show that 54 local authorities have sought to gaol 152 people. As of tonight, 115 have served sentences. Again we are told that they are deceitful and

[Mr. Nellist]

wilful non-payers—not people who cannot afford to pay. Let us hear an explanation when 30 were unemployed, 15 were pensioners, and three were on invalidity benefit.

Let us hear an explanation of why, a fortnight ago in Stroud, 22-year-old Maria Jones, having offered £5 a week out of her £42 a week benefit and having explained that she was 31 weeks pregnant, was still sentenced to 60 days in prison. Let us hear what her major crime was. Let us find why Richard Northover, so far the oldest person to go to prison, was sent there, not for not paying the poll tax—he had paid it—but for not having filled in the registration form two years ago. He got 28 days in HMP Dorchester at the age of 80.

Other pensioners of that age have been put away. Bill Jones, from St. Helens, was taken into HMP Walton—the same prison in which my good friend and comrade, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields), served 58 days of a sentence in principled opposition to the sentencing of pensioners and those who cannot afford to pay the poll tax. When Bill Jones arrived at Walton, what happened? Bill is old; he is also a war veteran; he is a diabetic and he has only one leg. So they collapsed his wheelchair, gave him a firefighters' lift up the stairs and put him in a cell. Bill has voted Tory all his life—another little irony. I do not think that he will be voting Tory after that experience.

Pensioners have had heart attacks in Preston and other prisons. None of this is to collect money. If we take the costs of imprisonment, the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders says that prisoners cost an average of £47 per day. It is not long before that is no longer cost-effective when the poll tax debt is £200.

There are too many poll tax prisoners. I have dealt with a number of cases with the Home Office, particularly in Kent, where people have been kept in police cells for some days. One was there 15 days. According to NACRO, the average cost of keeping prisoners in police and court cells is £220 a day. It costs only £190 a night to stay at the Ritz. Keeping a prisoner in a police cell for one day usually costs more than the entire bill the prisoner is fighting.

There are other examples, such as 69-year-old Ron Cassidy from Northumberland, near where I come from. He is a star dominos player in his local pub, where his team used to win every night. Two nights in a row they lost, so they went looking for Ron. They found him in Durham maximum security prison. He owed £62 poll tax and they put him away for 90 days in that prison—a day in prison for every 69p that he owed.

What about the Guinness scandal? What happened to Ronson? Eight million quid went in that scandal, but he got one day in prison for every £30,000 that he owed. He was not sent to a maximum security prison, but to an open prison. He was entitled to remission, and parole. Poll tax is a civil debt, however, and there is no remission and parole—one serves the full sentence when one is put away. Ronson got that parole and remission, and when he got out he was invited to dinner with the Queen Mother. No poll tax prisoner has received a letter from the royal family inviting him to dinner.

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend has illustrated powerfully the double standards employed by the Government to deal with ordinary people and those in the City. My hon. Friend should accept from me that his powerful case is ample justification for his award as Back Bencher of the year and why I believe that a serious error was committed in West Bromwich on Saturday.

Mr. Nellist: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for putting that on the record.

Many of those who have been sent to prison rely on income support alone. Others, such as pensioners, are on fixed or low incomes. Some have no income. A number of women with no income have been sent to prison because they were unable to pay the poll tax.

No doubt the Minister will tell us that safeguards were built into system when income support was increased to cover the 20 per cent. of poll tax for which everyone is liable. That support was based on the false assumption that it covered the rise in real poll tax levels as opposed to the notional, national averages. It was also based on the even worse assumption that the actual level of income support in April 1990 was sufficient for people to live on in the first place.

Four years ago, I argued with the then Secretary of State for Health and Social Security about the Fowler review, which led to cuts in income support. A 33-year-old widow with four children in my constituency lost free school meals and housing benefit—a total loss of £25.

Millions of people lost as a result of those cuts, but the difference between their anger and that felt by those in the poll tax battle is glue. In the anti-poll tax struggle, nearly 2,000 groups emerged, and at its peak we had 25 groups in Coventry. Those groups welded people together and provided collective community action. People did not have to face the problem alone as they do so often when it comes to social security benefit cuts.

In April 1990 the amount of income support was not sufficient for people to live on, so the increase to cover the 20 per cent. poll tax charge was not sufficient. Thorough research conducted by Newcastle polytechnic has been passed on to me by the Rev. Paul Nicholson, who has done sterling work to highlight the problems of those on income support. He has also opposed the imprisonment of those unable to pay their poll tax.

The research revealed that, in April 1990, the income support—including the supplement to cover 20 per cent. of the poll tax—for a family of two adults and two primary school children who use the cheapest form of fuel and do not "waste" their income through smoking and drinking, constituted two thirds of the minimum sum experts have identified as sufficient to meet their living requirements. Those who were compelled to use oil for heating and enjoyed a drink and a smoke received an income support entitlement that was just over half of what experts identified as necessary to meet their requirements.

The Secretary of State has refused to answer my questions on this matter. The Government trumpet the £140 reduction, but the reduction given to those on income support is inadequate and does not match the needs of those in receipt of that money.

In conjunction with the Home Office, the Department of the Environment should issue a circular immediately to every magistrates court. I do not know whether the rules and procedures governing magistrates' decisions on poll tax cases have been communicated to them in a proper training package. I have tabled parliamentary questions about that, but I have received no proper answers. The Secretary of State should issue an instruction tonight to all magistrates to the effect that they have the power to remit

the payment of the poll tax for anybody who cannot afford to pay. It should be their automatic policy from tonight that anyone in receipt of income support or low incomes equivalent to income support—and, say, 50, 60 or 70 per cent. above those levels—should automatically have their poll tax debts remitted.

I now intend to bring before the House a series of private Member's Bills. The first will be designed to bring English and Welsh law into line with Scottish law, which four years ago, under the Debtors (Scotland) Act 1987, abolished in Scotland the medieval barbarity of putting people in prison for civil debt. That law should apply in England and Wales as well. Were it to do so, literally hundreds of thousands of people would tonight not be sitting at home frightened about whether they might be dragged into the courts and on to prison.

Many people have been forced, when trying to pay the poll tax, into choosing between food, fuel and clothing and paying the tax. In 1991, we should not be making the poorest in society the scapegoats for a policy that even every Tory Member admits is dead, is dying and should be abolished. We could do something tonight by having the Minister announce that magistrates will stop putting in prison people who cannot pay their poll tax. He should seek immediate discussions with the Home Office with a view to having the law altered, to bring English and Welsh law into line with Scottish law.

I ask the Minister to do one more thing for those millions of families, many of whom are part of that 250,000 who are more than six months in arrears with their mortgage repayments, who fear that their homes will be taken from them and who have paid the poll tax. They have been responsible locally, particularly in areas of the highest deprivation, and they are paying surcharges to local councils of £20, £50, £70 and more a year for those who cannot pay the poll tax. Those who have paid have been surcharged. That should be on the national Exchequer, not on those locally who are trying to make ends meet.

I am grateful for the opportunity to put those arguments before the House. I do not expect much joy from the Minister tonight, but I give warning that, for the time I remain on these Benches, with the label on which I came here eight and a half years ago—as a Labour Member of Parliament, albeit a Member who has a label beneath his name on the TV as an expelled Labour Member—I shall bring before the House the necessary measures not just to talk about the death of the poll tax but to bury it once and for all.

10.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): I congratulate the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) on his success in raising an important issue on the Adjournment. I also congratulate him on winning *The Spectator's* Back Bencher of the Year award. I fundamentally disagree with his proposition, although I congratulate him on the stand that he has taken for his principles. Many parliamentarians would also congratulate him, however strongly they might disagree with him.

The hon. Gentleman illustrated his argument graphically, and so shall I. No hon. Member will forget the riots in Trafalgar square and elsewhere in the country that were provoked by those opposed to a system of taxation endorsed by Parliament. Nor will we forget those hon. Members who were regarded as the darlings of the rioters. Whatever justification there may have been 600 years ago for riot and revolt, there was never such justification today. The House will recall just how often in recent years the hon. Gentleman was compared to Wat Tyler, leader of the peasants' revolt of June 1381. They have precious little in common, except that they both worked in the construction industry before journeying to London.

I begin my answer to the hon. Member by reminding the House that those who ignore history are destined to repeat it. I will show why the hon. Gentleman has achieved nothing of any worth or substance by his protest. Tyler was a mob leader. He would have been quite at home in those Trafalgar square riots. He and his comrades sacked and pillaged their way from Rochester to Canterbury, from there to Lambeth palace and Southwark. They dragged Archbishop Sudbury from the chapel in the Tower of London and plundered and slaughtered their way through London. They, too, felt strongly about prisons. They incited prison riots, burned prisons down and sacked and burned John of Gaunt's splendid palace of the Savoy. Was history repeating itself when *The Spectator* magazine recently perpetrated the huge joke of wining and dining the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East on his success as Back Bencher of the Year at today's Savoy palace?

Wat Tyler was defeated by the courage and judgment of his king—a boy of 14—and the wisdom of Parliament. History surely repeats itself in the poll tax rebel's end. Wat Tyler was struck down and fatally injured by the sword of the loyal Lord Mayor of London, whose name is commemorated in time-honoured fashion. In the road named after him, today's so-called tribunes of the people decided to bring to an end the antics of the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East. The Lord Mayor who saved the king and all that he stood for was William Walworth. The young king had made concessions to appease the rioters and prevent further loss of life and bloody rioting, but within a year, they were revoked by Parliament, and no permanent results were obtained by Wat Tyler's poll tax revolt. None have been obtained by the hon. Gentleman, either.

The legislation ensures that people have a statutory right to pay the community charge in manageable instalments. The community charge regime is an improvement on domestic rates in that respect. On receipt of a bill, the charge payer is given a specified date by which he or she should pay each instalment. The date governing the first instalment cannot be sooner than 14 days after the issue of the bill.

If an instalment is not paid, a reminder is issued. That requires the outstanding instalments to be paid within seven days. The authority may issue a second reminder notice, but it is under no obligation to do so. Charge payers are therefore given at least two opportunities to pay their community charge instalment.

If, following the issue of the reminder, the charging authority still does not receive payment, the right to pay by instalments is lost and the charge payer becomes liable to pay the authority the full amount of community charge outstanding for the remainder of the year. That sum must be paid to the authority within a further seven days.

If payment is still not received, the authority will take enforcement action against that person to ensure that the required sum is paid. To start that procedure, the

[Mr. Robert Key]

authority applies to a magistrates court for a summons. The summons requires the person to attend the court to explain to the magistrate why the sum has not been paid.

If the bill and the reminder notice have been issued in accordance with the regulations and the charge is still outstanding, the magistrate must issue a liability order to the council so that it can take action against the defaulter. That order is made for the aggregate of the sum payable and for costs incurred by the charging authority and the court in obtaining and issuing the order.

Once the order has been issued, the charging authority has a number of recovery options available to it. We have strengthened and widened those powers compared with those that were available to authorities for the enforcement of the old domestic rates. Under the rates, the only means of enforcement available were to distrain and sell the ratepayer's goods in order to discharge the debt or, if insufficient goods were found, to apply for a committal warrant. Both remedies apply in the case of the community charge and will apply to the council tax.

In relation to the community charge, we have given authorities the powers to attach a defaulter's earnings or to ask the Department of Social Security to make deductions from income support payments. Those remedies were added because we believe the payment of debt by manageable amounts to be more civilised than distraint. Those are powerful additions to an authority's enforcement battery. They will also apply to the collection of the council tax.

Mr. Nellist: First, will the Minister give an assurance tonight that his Department will start to collect statistics on the attachment of earnings orders and how many have been collected or returned? I have asked for those figures, and apparently none exist. Secondly, why is there imprisonment in England and Wales when the Government abolished it four years ago in Scotland? Why are there two different systems of law?

Mr. Key: That is an historical question, which the hon. Gentleman should address to the Secretary of State for Scotland. I have answered parliamentary questions from the hon. Gentleman when I have been able to do so. Where the information was not available, I was obviously not able to do so.

On imprisonment and so-called amnesties, it is illegal and irresponsible to withhold payment of the community charge. Such action merely deprives authorities of funds that they need to provide services enjoyed by the whole community. It also transfers the debt to those law-abiding charge payers who pay their charge, many of whom will be earning considerably less than hon. Members who chose to default.

The Government have made it clear on a number of occasions and I repeat it now: there will be no amnesty for non-payers. People must realise that local authorities will pursue non-payers until they have secured payment, however long it takes. The introduction of the council tax will not mean that people who have not paid their community charge can forget about it. If they still owe their local authority money, they must pay it: they will not be let off the hook.

As I explained earlier, the community charge procedures give charge payers every opportunity to pay their community charge. Enforcement action can be stopped at any stage by the payment of the amount due. If a charge payer is in financial difficulties but is prepared to offer to pay off any arrears at a reasonable rate, most authorities will accept such arrangements. However, if someone wilfully refuses to pay the charge, it is right that he should have to pay the price for his illegal action. In those circumstances, a magistrate can sentence someone to a maximum of three months in prison. So far, only a tiny minority of the 36 million law-abiding charge payers in this country have chosen to face that ultimate sanction. Most of them did so to make a political point and to gain publicity.

The hon. Gentleman has made much of the power of imprisonment for non-payment. He has pointed to the difference between the treatment of offenders in Scotland and England, and said that the Scots do not imprison defaulters following their acceptance of the Scottish Law Commission's report, which recommended that civil imprisonment for the non-payment of rates and taxes should be abolished.

The collection position in Scotland is far worse than in this country. The Scottish National party must take much of the blame for the lack of payment in Scotland. They have irresponsibly encouraged people to withhold payment, and then at the eleventh hour they have made payments, leaving those poorer people who were foolish enough to follow their appalling example to face the consequences of now owing a lump sum.

The threat of imprisonment for non-payment of local taxes is not unique to the community charge. It existed under the old domestic rating system, and still exists for those who do not pay rates in Northern Ireland. Among our European colleagues, people in the Netherlands who do not pay local taxes can also be imprisoned.

To deprive someone of their liberty is never an easy decision to make. Imprisonment is a harsh measure that should be used only when every other reasonable avenue has failed. However, I state again that enforcement procedures offer plenty of opportunities for someone to pay their dues and so avoid imprisonment. Before any committal warrant is issued, the magistrates court must hold a means inquiry, and it is only following that that a warrant can be issued.

The courts have shown themselves sympathetic in cases where the charge payer does not have the means to pay. The court will issue such a warrant only where it is satisfied that the failure to pay the charge was wilful or negligent. Those warrants do not necessarily need to be served by the police. A local authority can make its own arrangements to arrest defaulters, which can include the use of bailiffs, and the defaulter must comply with such a warrant from the court.

People who go to prison for non-payment of the community charge do so because they choose to lose their liberty rather than pay the amount that is rightfully theirs to pay. Some Opposition Members have campaigned to stop the imprisonments. We have no wish to see people imprisoned any more than they have, but the law must be upheld. If someone deliberately flouts the law in that manner, they only have themselves to blame for the consequences. I urge all Opposition Members who have not paid their poll tax to do so without delay.

Mr. Terry Lewis: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Key: Of course I shall not give way. There is no question of my giving way——

The Motion having been made after Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at seven minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 11 December 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

SCOTLAND

NHS Trusts

1. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what action he takes to enforce procedures laid down in national health service circular No. 1975 (GEN) 46.

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Mr. Michael Forsyth): I have received no complaints regarding health boards' compliance with this or any other circular.

Mrs. Fyfe: I am rather surprised to hear that, because Greater Glasgow health board is very dissatisfied with the lack of consultation over the closure of two wards in Ruchill hospital in my constituency. Will the Minister of State nevertheless assure me that if the move to day care will be to the detriment of those who were receiving in-patient care for endocrine and metabolic problems, he will take action? Will he reassure me about the future of those patients who, until now, have been in the rheumatology unit of Ruchill hospital?

Mr. Forsyth: I am a little puzzled by the hon. Lady's question. I do not see how Greater Glasgow health board can be dissatisfied with the consultation process when it is responsible for——

Mrs. Fyfe: Health council.

Mr. Forsyth: Health council—the hon. Lady has corrected her position. As part of its general consultation process, Greater Glasgow health board consulted in respect of its acute services strategy for Glasgow. It has also carried out secondary consultations in respect of particular services. If the hon. Lady has anxieties, she should address them to Greater Glasgow health board, which is responsible for delivering the service.

Mr. Canavan: Why have Scottish hospital waiting lists increased by more than 4 per cent. in the past year? Why is the worst record in Scotland that of the Forth Valley health board area—which includes the constituency of the Minister of State—where the increase has been more than 24 per cent? If he has no regard at all for the welfare of patients, does he have regard for his job security?

Mr. Forsyth: I am astonished that the hon. Gentleman, as a Member of Parliament in Central region within the Forth Valley health board area, does not know the answer to that question. He will know that the largest increase in waiting lists as published is in respect of the new service and facility that have been provided in Forth Valley. He will also be aware that Forth Valley has expanded the number of treatments provided and, as a result, is offering a better service for patients.

Mr. Canavan: Why are the waiting lists so long?

Mr. Forsyth: The hon. Gentleman should give some credit to that health board and every other health board in Scotland that has managed to increase the numbers of patients treated.

Mr. Canavan: It is the worst record in Scotland.

Mr. Forsyth: If the hon. Gentleman wants to find a worse record in Scotland for waiting lists, he should look at the waiting lists that were left to us by the previous Labour Government.

Knife Assaults

2. **Mr. David Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people in Scotland have been injured as a result of being assaulted with a knife or pointed article since 1988; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Lord James Douglas-Hamilton): In the period 1 January 1988 to 30 June 1991, 2,370 in-patient discharges were admitted as emergencies having been assaulted by a cutting or piercing instrument. Figures for persons dealt with as out-patient emergencies are not available.

Mr. Marshall: Is not the Minister ashamed and horrified at those disgraceful and scandalous figures? Has he seen the excellent Glasgow *Evening Times* article of 20 November which highlights that serious problem in Scotland? When will he shake off his complacency and bring the law in Scotland in line with the law in England under section 139 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988? I have been communicating with the Minister since 1988 on that problem. Is not the simple truth that the Government do not give a damn about law and order and do not care about the safety of people in their homes and on the streets?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We are well aware of the facts in that connection and have substantially increased the capital allocations for police forces in Scotland by some £6 million this year, which is an enormous increase. We shall make certain that Strathclyde's bids are carefully considered before making a final allocation. I shall look into the point that the hon. Gentleman makes about an amendment to the law, but the existing penalties go up to life imprisonment for various forms of crime involving knives and the like. The Secretary of State's crime prevention committee is reviewing the position. If Strathclyde increased the number of police officers by 200 to the complement that it deserves, there would be a much stronger law and order policy there.

Mr. Wilson: We all know that there are crimes for which the penalties go up to life imprisonment, but that does not seem to cover the point raised so eloquently by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall). Does the Minister accept that in Scotland, particularly west central Scotland, there is currently an epidemic of violent crime such as armed robbery and the carrying of offensive weapons, including knives? I endorse what my hon. Friend said about the excellent efforts of the Glasgow *Evening Times* in drawing the matter to our attention. It is astonishing that, when the facts were put to the Minister, he was unable to give the statistics on the number of offences involving knives and other weapons

with which stabbings can be carried out. Does the Minister also accept that far too many people in such communities are now living in fear of violent crime? In addition to the rhetoric of law and order, they want action in terms of policing which will enable people to leave their homes in the evening and not be curtailed by fear of violent crime.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: We collect statistics on various crimes such as breach of the peace, vandalism, the carrying of offensive weapons, robbery, petty and serious assaults, attempted murder and murder. The Secretary of State's crime prevention committee is considering how information should be collected and will continue to do so. The hon. Member must remember that the Labour party strongly opposed the police powers of search, which we introduced and which have greatly helped to reduce the incidence of such crimes.

Mr. Bill Walker: How many additional policemen have been provided in Scotland and how much extra money, in real terms, have the Government allocated to law and order since 1979? Will my hon. Friend confirm that, if the Government were to introduce proposals to toughen up sentencing policy—to impose stiffer sentences—we could look forward to Opposition Members agreeing with us for the first time?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Yes, indeed. It is important that the strongest penalties should be available. I mentioned the sentence of life imprisonment and the unlimited fines that are available for crimes involving knives. The number of police officers has increased enormously during the past 10 years. The important figure is the £6 million extra that will be allocated for capital equipment and buildings to assist police forces this year. The use of high technology will also be of great importance.

Home Improvement Grants

3. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received about the home improvement grants scheme.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I receive representations from time to time about various aspects of the home improvement grants scheme and its operation; in the main those concern individual cases.

Mr. Darling: Is the Minister aware that there are now thousands of people waiting for home improvement grants, some of whom applied before 1984? Why does the Minister refuse to meet Edinburgh district council and other councils to discuss the crisis? Is not he aware that thousands of people's property will deteriorate unless grants are forthcoming? Why is the Scottish Office so feeble that it is not prepared to go to the Treasury to obtain the funds needed to complete the improvement scheme once and for all?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Edinburgh district council estimated the cost of clearing the backlog at £25·5 million and we made that allocation to it over a two-year period. It used the allocation, came back and said that its original estimate was entirely wrong and it required an extra £48 million—the original estimate was £48 million out. By contrast, Glasgow gave accurate estimates. I can give a commitment to the hon. Gentleman that we shall consider Edinburgh's bid with great care before making the final allocations to local authorities. Some £205 million has been made available to Edinburgh for repairs and improvement grants since 1979. That is a considerable sum; Edinburgh has done well.

Sir Hector Monro: Does my hon. Friend agree that the home improvement scheme has been one of the most successful in Scotland? Does he also agree that the increase this year is extremely valuable and that steps should be taken towards improving houses in rural districts, where improvement grants are particularly valuable and welcome?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Yes, that is extremely important. The rural housing strategy developed by Scottish Homes will also assist. Since the scheme was introduced, £957 million has been made available through it in Scotland to help bring many empty houses back into use and assist in reducing waiting lists.

Mr. Stephen: While welcoming the changes that the Minister has introduced to the home improvement grants scheme for houses affected by high radon levels, may I ask whether he agrees that in cases of severe hardship there should be access to 100 per cent. grants, as is the case in England and Wales?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: That would require legislation. However, what we can do immediately and are in the process of doing is to introduce a statutory instrument to increase the grant level to 90 per cent. That will substantially help those who are in the circumstances that the hon. Gentleman mentions. We have also made it clear that free tests will be available to anybody who wishes to have them in the hon. Gentleman's local authority area. We are conscious of the extent of the problem in the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

Sunday Trading

4. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the operation of Sunday trading laws in Scotland.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Ian Lang): The restrictions on Sunday trading contained in the Shops Act 1950 do not apply in Scotland, with the exception of hairdressers and barbers. Although there is almost complete freedom of trade, many traders choose not to do so in response to the prevailing wishes of their local communities. The present arrangements appear to work satisfactorily and I see no reason to alter the present position.

Mrs. Gorman: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. Has he any evidence of a decrease in church-going, an increase in marital break-up or an increase in the number of complaints to industrial tribunals by women who are asked to work on Sunday against their will? If he has no such evidence, does he think that the introduction of Sunday trading in Britain is likely to cause the kind of social and moral breakdown that has been suggested by some advocates of restrictions?

Mr. Lang: I am sure that the problems described by my hon. Friend have increased, but I have no evidence that

any such increase is related to shops in Scotland opening on Sunday. I have no plans to change the present arrangements.

Mr. Harry Ewing: Would not it be a good thing to allow barbers to open on Sunday, if only to help the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart)?

Mr. Lang: As ever, the hon. Gentleman takes a great interest in hon. Members this side of the House, but I suppose that from his point of view it is a receding problem.

Western Isles

5. **Mr. Macdonald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the economic situation in the Western Isles.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Allan Stewart): The Western Isles economy has performed relatively well in recent years despite a narrow base and inherent difficulties faced by island economies.

Mr. Macdonald: Does the Minister accept that the islands economy now faces its worst crisis since the war? Does he appreciate the despair and anger felt by the community at the Government's lack of response so far? Whatever the origins of the present crisis, does he agree that the brunt should not fall on the most vulnerable in the community—the elderly, the handicapped and school children? I extend an invitation to the Minister to visit the community. If he cannot accept it, can he at least dispatch a team of Scottish Office officials to see matters on the ground and report back to the Scottish Office on the grim situation faced by the islands?

Mr. Stewart: As the hon. Gentleman knows, my right hon. Friend has granted the islands council consent to borrow up to £24 million during the rest of this financial year. I recognise the effect of the decisions taken by Western Isles council. It is worth recording that before these expenditure reductions were announced Western Isles council received 98·4 per cent. of its expenditure from aggregate external finance—revenue support grant, non-domestic rate income and community charge grants. Only 1·6 per cent. of the expenditure was borne by community charge payers. The hon. Gentleman invited me to visit the area. If I am not able to visit the Western Isles in the near future, I shall certainly act on his suggestion that we should send a team of Scottish Office officials and that will be arranged as soon as is reasonably practicable.

Mr. Wallace: Does the Minister accept that transport costs are of considerable importance to the economy of the Western Isles? My constituents often look with envy at the relatively low freight costs for transport from the Scottish mainland to the Western Isles compared with transport costs from the mainland to the northern isles. When can we expect the Government to announce the subventions for next year? May we expect that the cost of transporting freight from the mainland to Orkney and Shetland will be comparable with the cost of such transport to the Western Isles?

Mr. Stewart: Orkney and Shetland are further from the mainland than the Western Isles, but the answer to the hon. Member's specific question about when an announcement will be made is, shortly.

Homelessness

6. **Mr. Hood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what he is doing to discourage young Scottish homeless from leaving home and living rough in London.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Grants totalling £150,000 over three years are being made to voluntary organisations for projects aimed at dissuading young Scots from drifting to London without making adequate preparation for housing and employment, assisting those in London who want to return to Scotland and supporting the young homeless in Scottish cities. Moreover, tomorrow I shall announce extra capital allocations of £4·137 million for specific projects for homelessness throughout Scotland, and Clydesdale will be one of the 29 authorities.

Mr. Hood: I thank the Minister for his answer. He will be aware that last night, thousands of young Scots slept rough on the streets of London and he may also be aware of the recent statement by the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, who referred to the fact that 25 per cent. of the homeless in London come from Scotland. Is not it a blight on Scotland that we cannot provide homes for our homeless, including those who are still kids? I am pleased to hear that the Minister will announce an increase tomorrow, but £1·2 million will not even look at the problem. Why does not he address the problem seriously and put real money into solving it—or will he continue to opt out and sell out, just as the Prime Minister did for the country in Maastricht yesterday?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: When we made available the special allocation of £3·5 million earlier in the year, eight authorities in Scotland came forward with specific projects that resulted in 700 extra housing units being made available. For that reason, we wish greatly to expand the programme and are doing so. If any authorities do not succeed tomorrow, they may still be considered for a share of the extra allocation of £7·5 million next year. The £50,000 awarded to voluntary organisations is specifically for the purpose of preventing homelessness and dissuading young people from coming to London when they have neither housing nor jobs.

Mr. Maxton: Is not the Minister's attitude smugly complacent in view of the fact that the Shelter survey shows an over 100 per cent. increase in homelessness in Scotland since 1983 and his Scottish office survey shows a 14 per cent. increase last year alone? Although the £4·1 million may be welcome to homeless people in Scotland, the Secretary of State for Scotland announced a £63 million cut in housing generally in Scotland last year and that does nothing to solve the problems of homelessness. Will he now announce an increase in investment in housing in Scotland and, more particularly, persuade the Cabinet to restore benefit to 16 and 17-year-olds in Scotland immediately?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: First, no young person should be without income. As to housing allocations, the hon. Member must bear in mind the fact that the receipts

are well up this year, so the gross programme should be considerable. However, there are 26,000 empty council houses, a considerable portion of which could be brought back into use. Local authorities take their statutory responsibilities seriously, so that in 1990-91, 82 per cent. of those assessed as homeless were found permanent accommodation by local authorities. We are giving them maximum encouragement in this direction.

Constitutional Change

7. **Mrs. Irene Adams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will now meet representatives of the Scottish Constitutional Convention to discuss proposals for constitutional change in Scotland.

8. **Mr. McKelvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he intends to meet the Scottish Constitutional Convention to discuss the future government of Scotland.

Mr. Lang: I have no plans to meet the self-styled Scottish Constitutional Convention, whose report fails to address the substantive issues involved in constitutional change in Scotland. But I welcome any participation in the debate I have called for on these issues, provided that it addresses the issues in a realistic way.

Mrs. Adams: Will the Secretary of State recognise that now his party is being called to the debate, not the Opposition? Will he reconsider his decision on meeting members of the Scottish Constitutional Convention, which represents 70 per cent. of the views in Scotland, including the churches, trade unions, the Labour party and the Liberal party? Will he consider bringing the Conservative party, and talking to the Scottish National party to bring it into the Scottish Constitutional Convention so that we can then have a genuine debate on which way the constitution of Scotland should go?

Mr. Lang: I certainly do not intend to fight the Scottish National party's battles for it. The Scottish Constitutional Convention, which I have described in the past as the Labour party at prayer, failed to address any of the substantive issues that would affect Scotland's representation in the House if its proposals came into effect. It took no account of funding arrangements, parliamentary representation at Westminster or the position of the Secretary of State for Scotland, and the members of the convention disagreed among themselves on the number and sex of its members, the method of election and a number of other aspects affecting Scotland's constitutional future.

Mr. McKelvey: Some hon. Members will welcome the partial movement by the Secretary of State for Scotland in as much as we have had the enormous political death-bed confession that he will look at the Scottish situation. But does not he realise that throughout Scotland he and his cronies are seen as a

"wee parcel of rogues in a nation who were bought and sold for English gold"?

Why does not he take his head out of the sand and understand Scotland's problems? Scotland as a nation will determine its own sovereignty whether he agrees to it or not and he should be talking to the Scottish Constitutional Convention about the matter.

Mr. Lang: Far from being reluctant to debate the matter, I have invited the Opposition to take part in four debates on matter days in the Scottish Grand Committee to compensate for their failure to make use of those opportunities in the Scottish Grand Committee during the previous parliamentary Session. Far from being unaware of the impact on Scotland of the Scottish Constitutional Convention's proposals, I am aware that Scotland enjoys identifiable public expenditure 22 per cent. per head higher than the rest of the United Kingdom which would be jeopardised by any change in the constitutional arrangements.

Mr. Rowe: It sounds slightly improbable that my right hon. Friend will be called to a meaningful debate on Scottish constitutional matters in the near future, but will he assure Conservative Members that were he to be so he is fully aware that people in England would take it amiss if any proposition were seriously entertained which allowed Scottish Members to decide matters in Scotland and then to have a say in English matters in England?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend identifies part of the problem which those who favour changes in the constitutional arrangements should address. In the event of the changes that the Opposition favour, one wonders whether Scottish questions could take place on the Floor of the House, or whether there would be a Scottish Grand Committee or Scottish Standing Committees.

Mr. Salmond: Both the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister have made clear statements in the past 10 days that if the Scottish people vote for independence at the election, independence is what we shall have, but will the Secretary of State say a bit more today about how he answers the current argument about whether he has the right to run Scotland with nine Members of Parliament and, according to the latest poll, 18 per cent. of the vote? Does he incorporate the votes of everyone who voted Labour or Liberal Democrat at the last election and use that as part of his mandate to enforce his unwanted policies on the Scottish people?

Mr. Lang: At the previous election I stood for election to a United Kingdom Parliament, as did the hon. Gentleman. As a Member of that Parliament, I am a member of the United Kingdom Government and no one has seriously called in question the right or propriety of the United Kingdom Government to govern Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that a tax-raising Scottish assembly would be the worst thing for Scotland because it would discourage the inward investment which will be encouraged into the United Kingdom by the fact that we are not part of the social charter?

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The tax-raising powers of such an assembly, which are referred to coyly by Opposition Members as being only marginal, would, even if they raised only 2p in the pound, cost a single man on average wages £4·72 per week. The single man on average wages will think carefully before welcoming such an impost.

Sir David Steel: Does the Secretary of State recognise how arrogant his original answer sounded with its reference to the "self-styled" Scottish Constitutional Convention? Does not he recognise that it is a broadly based representative body in which it was open to the

Conservative party to participate and that for him to call now for a debate, once its work is completed, is extraordinary? He is still welcome to join the convention.

Mr. Lang: The right hon. Gentleman can hardly refer to such a body as having the kind of authority with which he seeks to imbue it when it disagreed on a number of matters and failed to address any of the ones that really matter.

Mr. Dewar: May I add my congratulations to the Secretary of State on yet another about-turn? Does he recall that just a few months ago he dismissed devolution as a stale hangover from the 1960s in which there was no public interest? I therefore welcome his belated decision to take part in a full debate and the fact that he is now—I quote him from last week—keen to acknowledge that there is always room for constitutional change. Will he give an assurance that his ideas for reform will be produced before the Scottish Grand Committee debate on the constitution that he proposes? Does he recognise that dialogue is not criticism by Ministers of everyone else's proposals without making any positive contribution themselves?

Mr. Lang: Once again, the hon. Gentleman shows great coyness in approaching debates on the issues that he and his colleagues support. He is trying to set preconditions before agreeing to those debates taking place. I welcome the possibility of debating the proposals of the Opposition parties. They have come forward with plans which, they say, are carefully costed and carefully thought through and represent the interests of the great body of the Scottish people. I wish to explore those proposals, lay bare the dangers which lurk beneath them and identify the threat not only to parliamentary representation from Scotland in this House but to the economic well-being of Scotland if the Labour party were ever in a position to exercise in Scotland the kind of powers that it would give to such an assembly.

9. **Mr. Bill Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he has recently received about the governance of Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: A range of representations, both for and against constitutional change in Scotland, has been received.

Mr. Walker: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. Does he agree that there is only one place where the constitution of the United Kingdom can be changed, and it is this Parliament? Therefore, debates in this Parliament must address the realities of the constitution that the so-called self-appointed body would have to face such as the West Lothian question, the Goschen formula and the number of Members coming to this House from Scotland? Unless those constitutional proposals are properly, fully and adequately addressed in a manner that both this House and the other place can accept, they are no more than pipe dreams.

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. One of the important issues that would have to be addressed in any new constitutional settlement for Scotland would be the funding arrangements of Scotland within the United Kingdom. On 5 December *The Scotsman* said:

"Of course, upon devolution there would have to be an adjustment in spending: there is no dispute about that."

I think that the editor of *The Scotsman* would be surprised to hear the views of Opposition Members on that. However, it is a very important issue which would need to be fully addressed in any debate.

Mr. Eadie: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the problem is not the West Lothian question but the Westminster question, which will become predominant if, after having just nine Members, his party is left with none, or just two or three?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman is right to identify Westminster as the seat of government. It is the Union of the United Kingdom that would be breached by the sort of proposals that the Labour party identifies. I intend to expose the shortcomings of the Labour party proposals. Moreover, I do not anticipate the general election consequences to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

Mr Worthington: It is clear that the Secretary of State has not a single idea on the issue. If he wants a debate, he must produce some ideas. Part of the government of the United Kingdom consists of local government in Scotland. The Tory party's working party on local government—including Bearsden and Milngavie district council, one of the three Tory district councils—proposes that education, social work, housing, the police, fire, water, sewerage and strategic planning should be removed from local government and transferred either to the Secretary of State or to local prosperous companies, or that they should be privatised. Do the Government agree with those proposals? Is that part of the Secretary of State's proposal for the government of Scotland? Does the Secretary of State agree that when local democracy does not come up with the results that he wants he abolishes it? Is that his policy?

Mr. Lang: Oh dear, the hon. Gentleman is in a muddle. He contradicted himself within his own question by saying that we have no constitutional ideas and then identifying an area on which we are currently consulting with a view to making constitutional changes. Local government reform is important. We were consulting widely on the possible change to a single-tier all-purpose authority structure in Scotland. I do not regard the United Kindom constitution as set in concrete. It is not a written constitution—it is organic, and it can develop change and adapt to the needs of new circumstances. I should be more encouraged if I could identify within the Labour party a consensus for the preservation of the Union.

Steel Industry

10. **Mr. Oppenheim:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received from the Scottish steel industry.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. Friend recently received a letter from the chairman of the Scottish Steelfounders Association expressing concern about state subsidies to European steelfounders.

Mr. Oppenheim: Bearing in mind recent noisy Opposition condemnation of steel plant closures, has the Opposition spokesman yet had the guts to give the people of Scotland an unequivocal assurance that, given the chance, they would prevent such closures—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must ask about government policy.

Mr. Oppenheim: Is the Opposition spokesman afraid that people will remember the days before the Government's policy when political meddling led to huge overcapacity, massive losses and the closure of no fewer than three plants under Labour in Scotland alone?

Mr. Stewart: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. No such assurances have been given by the Opposition because it is not possible for them to do so.

Dr. Bray: Is the Minister aware that the recent fall in British Steel profits has made British Steel look again at capital expenditure and ways of economising without damaging future profitability? Will he use this opportunity to ask British Steel to consider modernising the Dalzell plate mill in Motherwell rather than building an expensive new plate mill, which would be less profitable for British Steel?

Mr. Stewart: I have seen speculation about that. Naturally, we would welcome any investment at Dalzell and any decision that extended the plant's long-term prospects. Some time ago the Scottish Office put a submission to British Steel on the case for investment at Dalzell. That submission was given to the trade unions and is public knowledge. We would welcome any positive news on that front.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Is the Minister aware that perhaps there were so few representations to his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State because the steel industry has been decimated in Scotland, especially in Lanarkshire? Does he accept that there should still be a future for the tube division despite the fact that workers are seeing imported tubes used in the North sea when they are capable of making them? To achieve that, there is an essential need for investment and training. That is particularly necessary in Lanarkshire.

Mr. Stewart: Like the hon. Gentleman, I regret the job losses at Clydesdale, which are due fundamentally to overcapacity in seamless tubes. I agree with the hon. Gentleman's general point about the Lanarkshire economy. That is why the Government have provided an extra £28 million for economic regeneration in Lanarkshire in the current year and why up to an extra £25 million will be available to the Lanarkshire development agency, in addition to what it would otherwise have received in 1992-93. I would hope that the hon. Gentleman would agree that many people of all political persuasions in Lanarkshire are working together extremely hard to build a better and more prosperous future for the area.

Agriculture Support

11. **Sir Hector Monro:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what increase in financial support is available to farmers in less-favoured areas for 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Planned programme expenditure on agricultural support in Scotland in 1991-92 was £158 million. Planned expenditure in 1992-93 is £199·5 million—an increase of 26 per cent. The great majority of that support is directed to the less-favoured areas, which include about 90 per cent. of agricultural land in Scotland.

Sir Hector Monro: Does my hon. Friend agree that in recent years the income of farmers in Scotland, particularly those in the less-favoured areas, has fallen substantially? I welcome the recent payment of the suckler cow premium and the ewe premium, but when will the hill livestock compensatory allowance be announced, and will it be increased?

Mr. Forsyth: I agree with my hon. Friend. Farming is in a difficult position and farm incomes have dropped substantially. We increased the HLCAs last year by an average of 14 per cent. I know that my hon. Friend is anxious for a conclusion to be reached for next year, and I hope that it will be possible to do so soon.

As my hon. Friend knows, we have agreed to review the position of hill farming, and I know that the farming union is anxious to assist the Government in recognising the problems facing agriculture.

Mr. Foulkes: Is the Minister aware that when I recently addressed a meeting of the Ayr, Renfrew and Bute Black-Faced Sheep Breeders Association not only was I extremely well received but much concern was expressed about the position of sheep rearers in the area? The association is dissatisfied with Government policy, particularly with the fact that agriculture in Scotland is dealt with by a Minister in the House of Lords. Does the Minister agree that agriculture would be given higher priority and better consideration if it were dealt with by a Minister in this House?

Mr. Forsyth: I hope that the hon. Gentleman did not try to pull the wool over the association's eyes, as he usually does. My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State addressed a meeting of farmers in my constituency. They were extremely impressed by what he said and were buoyed up by his message that the Government are determined to ensure that the proposals on reform of the common agricultural policy are strongly resisted because they are not in the interests of Scotland's farmers. I imagine that that was one of the matters raised with the hon. Gentleman, and I hope that he was able to assure farmers of the splendid job that my noble Friend is doing for farming in Scotland.

Mr. Andrew Welsh: Does the Minister agree that agriculture is the backbone of the rural economy and that the loss to the Angus economy of more than £1 million due to the closure of Anglia Canners in Brechin is a body blow to agriculture, transport, ancillary industries and the whole community? As that area of high unemployment has now lost 91 full-time jobs and 41 part-time jobs, what action does the Minister intend to take to sort the problem out?

Mr. Forsyth: As the hon. Gentleman will know, much of our agriculture policy is determined at Community level, so the strength of our voice in the Community is important. If the hon. Gentleman had his way and we had an independent Scotland, we would have four votes instead of 10 and our influence in being able to fight for the interests of Scotland's farmers would be less.

Scotland in Europe

12. **Mrs. Ray Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met CBI (Scotland) to discuss the role of Scotland in Europe.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have regular exchanges of views with CBI (Scotland) on a variety of matters. Scotland's role in Europe has featured in those exchanges.

Mrs. Michie: Will not CBI (Scotland) take a dim view of the Government's decision to opt out of a commitment to the single currency? Because of the Government's apparent lack of enthusiasm for all things European, and their determination to go along a slow track, will not Scotland lose out again without any chance of the central bank being cited in Glasgow or Edinburgh?

Mr. Stewart: I disagree with the hon. Lady and I have no doubt that CBI (Scotland) would also do so—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."]—on that matter. In relation to the agreement on social policy at Maastricht, I noted that Jacques Delors has suggested that the United Kingdom will now be a haven for inward investment from the United States and Japan. On this occasion, I agree with Mr. Delors.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Does my hon. Friend agree that the CBI, in Scotland and in the rest of the United Kingdom, is keen to see flexibility in our social standards and would not wish Scotland to be signed up to a social charter restricting the freedom of workers and employers alike, who look forward to continuing to be a magnet for inward investment from Japan and from the rest of the European Community?

Mr. Stewart: As I suggested in my previous answer, I am sure that my hon. Friend is absolutely right. I have no doubt that the agreement that has been reached will enhance the position of the United Kingdom in relation to the creation of enterprise and the attraction of inward investment. I am sure that that view is shared by Scotland.

Mr. Dewar: When considering our relationships with Europe, will the Minister explain to the CBI why agreeing to a social charter which gives protection to the young employed, gives equal status to part-time workers and sets decent standards for maternity leave should be a barrier to prosperity, given the experience of France and of Germany? Why cannot this country afford social justice when the Governments of Portugal and of Greece have no doubt where the balance lies? Is it not shameful that Britain should opt out in that way? Is not the Minister embarrassed that 11 countries are signing a protocol stipulating that the United Kingdom will take no part in the Community's deliberations on the social agenda? Is that not a humiliating prospect for the Edinburgh summit next year?

Mr. Stewart: The hon. Gentleman is talking absolute nonsense, as will be confirmed when my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister makes his statement to the House later this afternoon. I emphasise that I do not believe that it is right to agree to measures which are damaging to the Scottish or to the British economy, and we have not done so. I also emphasise our excellent record on structural funds from the Community, from which Scotland has gained £1·25 billion under this Government.

Homelessness

13. **Sir Russell Johnston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has for the alleviation of homelessness in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: To help Scottish local authorities carry out their statutory duties towards the homeless, we have among other things made available in the current financial year extra capital allocations of £3·5 million announced earlier, and of £4·1 million, the specific allocation of which will be announced tomorrow. We have increased housing support grant so that all local authorities that incur a deficit in running a hostel will qualify for grant. We have issued an updated code of guidance for authorities dealing with applicants under the homelessness legislation. On 6 December, I announced a further £7·5 million capital allocation for projects for 1992-93.

Sir Russell Johnston: Regarding the £4 million, is not telling local authorities that they have to produce schemes within two weeks and that the money has to be spent by March a disorderly way of doing things? If £4 million is divided by the number of district authorities in Scotland, they will have £355,000 apiece. That is a pathetic response to the size of the problem, which is extremely serious in my area.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The hon. Gentleman's own authority in Inverness will be one of those that will benefit. Authorities that feel that they have not benefited sufficiently will be considered for the £7·5 million allocation for next year. I ask the hon. Gentleman to bear in mind all the other sources of public funds that are available. Scottish Homes has brought back into use 1,000 units that it has helped to create in the past two years. Our revised code of guidance has been warmly welcomed by authorities. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is very gratifying to see such an interest in Scottish questions. I ask hon. Members to listen carefully to the questions and answers because they will find them enlightening.

Mr. McFall: The Minister will remember that the Stopover project in my constituency, which was designed to allow 16 young homeless people to stay in the area, was rejected by the Scottish Office last year. Only last month, my council applied for extra funding for another eight young people to be retained in the constituency rather than making the futile trek southwards. Those positive initiatives have the support of the entire council. Will the Minister respond positively by stating that he will grant both applications to allow that small number of people to be retained in my constituency? That would help the problem of homelessness in Dumbarton.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that his local authority of Dumbarton will benefit. The details will be spelt out tomorrow. I can also tell him that urban aid of £9·7 million has been made available over the years for homelessness projects in Scotland. That comes within the responsibility of my fellow Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart), who will have heard what the hon. Gentleman said about further applications.

Defence Industries Initiative

14. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many direct employees of Scottish Enterprise are currently working on the defence industries initiative he announced on 14 October 1991; and if he will make a statement on the actions which have so far been taken.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The allocation of Scottish Enterprise staff to particular projects is a matter for the body itself. So far, a survey has been conducted of companies in the defence sector in Scotland and work is in hand to develop the best approach to assisting these companies. The nature of future activity will depend on the outcome of this work.

Mr. Strang: Against the background of the thousands of jobs that have been lost in the defence industries in the past couple of years, and the thousands likely to be lost in the future, is not the Government's initiative wholly inadequate? When will the Minister accept that only when the Government can find new money for research and development, retraining and investment in new facilities will there be a real impact on this serious problem in the Scottish economy?

Mr. Stewart: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's criticisms for one moment. The key decisions on diversifying in defence-related companies must be taken by those companies. With regard to the work being undertaken by Scottish Enterprise, it is hoped that early in the new year there will be a version of the work being done —not including commercially confidential information. It will show the hon. Gentleman that his criticisms are wholly unjustified.

Mr. Michael J. Martin: The Minister will recall that when he was a Scottish Office Minister before, he offered Springburn a special initiative to help with unemployment. The demise of the defence jobs has added to the difficulties in my constituency, where many workers travel to Yarrow's and to Barr and Stroud. What action is the Minister taking to help with unemployment in the north end of Glasgow?

Mr. Stewart: The primary responsibility for that lies with the Glasgow Development Agency. I know that it is taking a full part in the exercise being undertaken by Scottish Enterprise. I should be happy to discuss any particular problems with the hon. Gentleman at any time.

NHS Trusts

15. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what further representations he has received on hospitals applying for trust status.

Mr. Lang: My hon. Friend the Minister of State and I regularly receive representations, both for and against, on the subject of NHS trusts. I have now approved three applications.

Mr. Griffiths: Does the Secretary of State agree with Duncan McNeill, whom he appointed to promote his hospital trusts, that trust status provides an alternative to operating and remaining within the mainstream national health service? Does he realise that for patients throughout Scotland, including those in the Edinburgh royal infirmary and the Royal hospital for sick children, that is a chilling message?

Mr. Lang: I have a great admiration for Mr. Duncan McNeill, and also a great approbation for the concept of trust status for hospitals. Contrary to the rumours constantly spread by the Labour party, such hospitals remain in the national health service and continue to provide a free service at the point of delivery.

Mr. Galbraith: Is the Secretary of State aware that the first wave of opt-outs in England were examined by Coopers and Lybrand, which found that 45 of the 57 were financially non-viable? Was a similar exercise carried out in Scotland? If so, will the Secretary of State make the results publicly available? If not, why not? Is this another example of the Government opting out, as they do in Europe?

Mr. Lang: The hon. Gentleman is talking nonsense and yet again trying to mislead the public on the achievements of hospital trusts. The fact is that those hospitals south of the border that have achieved trust status are now delivering more patient care, recruiting more consultants and buying more equipment, and improving the service that they provide to the public in their areas.

Erskine Bridge

16. **Mr. Graham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the future financial provision for the Erskine bridge.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Financial provision for the Erskine bridge is contained within the overall trunk road provision for Scotland. Arrangements for the financing of the bridge beyond the end of the extended tolling period in 1996 are under consideration.

Mr. Graham: Does the Secretary of State realise that we were promised 20 years ago that after 20 years the toll would be abolished? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I wish to hear what the hon. Gentleman has to say.

Mr. Graham: I am most grateful for your assistance, Mr. Speaker. When I heard the rowdy noise earlier, I was sure that there was a John Doe—dead on arrival—back from Maastricht.

Is the Minister aware that the people of Dumbarton and Renfrewshire are sick and tired of paying the toll given that, after 20 years, the promise to abolish it has not been fulfilled, even though local business men, the local community councils and even some Tories wish it to go? Why does not the Minister support the local economy in Renfrewshire and Dumbartonshire by abolishing the toll now? Why does not he give freedom to the people of Scotland to move about without dipping into their pockets?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I regard the toll as absolutely fair in the circumstances. The bridge cost £10 million or more to build and successive Governments have supported the tolling of estuarial crossings of this nature. The tolling period will extend to 1 July 1996 and the Government will then make a decision about the future.

Forestry Commission

17. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is the total acreage of land sold by the Forestry Commission in the last five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Forestry Commission sold 42,800 hectares of land in the five years to 31 March 1991.

Mr. Evans: Is my hon. Friend aware that 40 per cent. of all men and women have walking as their main sport? Can he assure me that the woodlands sold off by the commission will be accessible to all walkers, especially as after the next election a lot of Scottish Labour Members will have a lot of time to do a lot of walking?

Mr. Forsyth: As a walker myself, I agree with my hon. Friend that access ought to be continued in respect of land that is disposed of by the Forestry Commission. As my hon. Friend will know, an agreement dating back to November last year provides for the Forestry Commission to offer land to local authorities prior to disposal so that an agreement can be reached with regard to access. I hope that my hon. Friend feels that that is a step in the right direction.

Lockerbie

18. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the discussions which the Lord Advocate has had with representatives of the German Government and the Bundeskriminalamt about the alleged use by Libyans or the Libyan People's Bureau of premises in East Berlin in relation to his inquiry into the Lockerbie bombing.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: No, Sir. Discussions by the Lord Advocate and his representatives with the authorities of other countries in criminal investigations are confidential.

Mr. Dalyell: Will the Government confirm that when the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), and President Reagan dispatched the bombers that had the effect of bombing the residential areas of Tripoli and Benghazi in 1986— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Mr. Dalyell.

Mr. Dalyell: Against the evidence of the German authorities and the German police, and given that even the Israeli secret service thinks that others may have been involved, would it not at least be a sensible plan to talk to the Arab League about the very serious problem of Lockerbie and at least consider accepting the request to send British and American judges in the first instance to a trial under Libyan law?

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I cannot comment on the evidence, but the Lord Advocate has made it extremely clear that the criminal proceedings are the result of an extremely brilliant, thorough and painstaking investigation by the Scottish police services and their colleagues, to whom I also pay tribute. We have rightly increased their allocations this year. The detailed points raised by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) are matters for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, who will have heard what the hon. Gentleman has said.

Health Boards

19. **Mr. Ernie Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last met the chairman of health boards in Scotland to discuss finance.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I meet chairmen regularly to discuss a wide range of strategic issues affecting the management of the NHS in Scotland.

Mr. Ross: When the Minister next meets the chairmen of the health boards in Scotland, will he have had a chance to study the correspondence from Tayside about the relocation of the casualty department of Dundee royal infirmary to a green-field site at Ninewells? Given that the health board has said that it will have difficulty finding the money for that relocation and upgrading, will the Minister consider favourably any requests that may be made at the meeting?

Mr. Forsyth: That is clearly a matter for the Tayside health board. However, it may interest the hon. Gentleman to know that, as part of the patients charter initiative, we will take steps to consider accident and emergency and casualty cover to improve standards of provision applying to Tayside and to all other health boards.

European Council (Maastricht)

3.30 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the European Council in Maastricht which I attended with my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The European Council has reached agreement on a treaty on European union. The relevant texts have been deposited along with the presidency conclusions. The House will be invited to debate the outcome next week.

Let me set out the main provisions of the agreements we reached.

The treaty covers economic and monetary union and political union. It follows the structure for which the United Kingdom has consistently argued.

The treaty creates a new legal framework for co-operation between member states in foreign and security policy and in the fight against international crime. That co-operation will take place on an intergovernmental basis outside the treaty of Rome. That means that the Commission will not have the sole right of initiative and the European Court will have no jurisdiction.

On defence, we have agreed a framework for co-operation in which the primacy of the Atlantic alliance has been confirmed and the role of the Western European Union has been enhanced.

As the House knows, there was strong pressure over many months for all aspects of co-operation to come within European Community competence. That was not acceptable to this country. Instead, an alternative route to European co-operation has been opened up. I believe that this will be seen as an increasingly significant development as the Community opens its doors to new members, and more flexible structures are required.

I turn now to the main features of the text. The treaty provides for the possibility that member states will wish to adopt a single currency later this decade, but they can do so only if they meet strict convergence conditions—conditions for which the British Government have pressed from the outset. These cover inflation, budget deficits, exchange rate stability and long-term interest rates.

A single currency may come into being in 1997, but only if a minimum of seven countries meet the convergence conditions, and eight of the Twelve vote in favour. The treaty lays down that a single currency will come into being by 1999, but only if those convergence conditions are met and only for those countries which meet them. It is therefore highly uncertain when such a currency will be created and which countries it will cover.

In the House on 20 November, I said that there must be a provision giving the United Kingdom the right to decide for ourselves whether or not to move to stage 3. That requirement has been secured. It is set out in a legally binding protocol which forms an integral part of the treaty. The protocol was drafted by the United Kingdom and fully protects the position of this House. The effect of the protocol is as follows. We have exactly the same option to join a single currency at the same time as other member states if we wish. We shall be involved in all the decisions. But, unlike other Governments, we have not bound ourselves to join regardless of whether it makes economic or political sense.

The treaty text on political union provides for enhanced intergovernmental co-operation on foreign and security policy, on defence policy and in the fight against terrorism, drug trafficking and other crimes.

International crime knows no frontiers. Terrorists and other criminals must not be allowed to escape justice or to retire abroad with the proceeds of their crime. This text gives us a new basis for co-operation with our partners in bringing these criminals to justice.

The text provides for joint action in foreign policy, building on what was already agreed in the Single European Act. But, as I told the House on 20 November, if Britain needs to act on its own, it must be free to do so. The treaty meets that requirement. Joint action can take place only if we agree. Where there is no joint action, each member state is entirely free to act on its own. If, after joint action has been agreed, a member state needs to take its own measures to meet changed circumstances, it may do so.

There was pressure from other member states to take foreign policy decisions by majority voting. I was not prepared to agree that Britain could be outvoted on any substantive issue of foreign policy. Some of our partners also sought to draw a distinction between decisions of principle, where unanimity would apply, and implementing decisions which could be subject to majority voting. No one was able to explain how that distinction would work. I told the European Council that, if such occasions did arise, we should consider the case for majority voting on its merits. The treaty reflects our view. It provides that the Council may, but only by unanimity, designate certain decisions to be taken by qualified majority voting. But we cannot be forced to subject our foreign policy to the will of other member states. We have, in fact, preserved unanimity for all decisions where we decide that we need it.

We are agreed that Europe must do more for its own defence. We should build up the Western European Union as the defence pillar of the European union, but the treaty embodies the view set out in the Anglo-Italian proposal two months ago, and endorsed at last month's summit of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation that whatever we do at European level must be compatible with NATO. The WEU must in no way be subordinate to the European Council. It is not. We have avoided the danger of setting up defence structures which would compete with NATO. We have created a framework in which Europe can develop its defence role in a way which complements the American presence in Europe and does not put it at risk.

In these negotiations, we put forward a series of proposals designed to be of direct benefit to the European citizen. All of them were accepted. The Community has agreed to increase the accountability of European Community institutions; to strengthen the European Parliament's financial control over the Commission; to allow the European Parliament to investigate maladministration and to appoint a Community ombudsman accessible to all Community citizens; to build up the role of the Court of Auditors, which becomes an institution of the Community; and to ensure compliance with Community obligations by giving the European Court of Justice power to impose fines on Governments who sign directives but subsequently do not implement them.

We wanted—and secured—a sensible enhancement of the role of the European Parliament. We did not accept the proposal made by other member states for a power of

co-decision between the Parliament and the Council. As I told the House on 20 November, the Council of Ministers must be the body that ultimately determines the Community's laws and policies.

I also said then that we were prepared to consider some blocking power for the European Parliament. That has now been agreed. The treaty sets up, in a limited number of areas, a conciliation procedure where there is disagreement between the Council and Parliament. In the last analysis, the Parliament would be able to block a decision in those areas, but only if an absolute majority of its members turned out to vote the proposal down.

The House has been rightly concerned at the creeping extension of Community competence over the last few years. The Commission has often brought forward proposals using a dubious legal base, and the Council has found it difficult to halt that practice in the European Court. We have taken significant steps to deal with that problem.

First, the structure of the treaty puts the issues of foreign and security policy, interior and justice matters and defence policy beyond the reach of the Commission and the European Court. Secondly, the treaty itself embodies the vital principle of "subsidiarity", making it clear that the Community should only be involved in decisions which cannot more effectively be taken at national level. Thirdly, in some areas—notably health protection, educational exchanges, vocational training and culture—we have defined Community competence clearly for the first time. Fourthly, there will be no extension of Community competence in employer-employee relations—the so-called social area.

We have a high standard of social protection in this country. Our national health service, free at the point of use, is the envy of many in Europe, but we recognise the Community's social dimension. Also—unlike some of our European partners—we have implemented that dimension too; 19 out of the 33 measures in the social action programme have been agreed. But there is no reason for the Community to get involved in employment legislation, which must be for each country to decide for itself.

Over the past 12 years, we have transformed labour relations. In 1979, 29 million working days were lost in strikes. Last year the figure was less than 2 million. I was not prepared to see that record put in jeopardy. Nor was I prepared to risk Britain's competitive position as the European magnet for inward investment. I was not prepared to put British jobs on the line. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. A great many people outside the House are interested in what the Prime Minister has to say.

The Prime Minister: Many of our partners have a wholly different tradition of employment practice which is reflected in the separate arrangements which they have agreed, which will affect only their countries and for which only they will pay. But even among these member states there are many who fear the effect of Community measures on their jobs and their ability to compete. Our arguments are based not only on our national interest but on the risks we perceive to the competitive position of the Community as a whole.

This week's events in the Soviet Union were a salutary reminder that reform in the Community is not an end in itself. The Community's primary task must be to extend its own advantages of democracy, stability and prosperity to eastern Europe. At British initiative, we committed ourselves at Maastricht to the further enlargement of the Community, starting with the EFTA countries. When they and, in due course, the new democracies of eastern Europe are ready to join the Community, we shall be ready to welcome them.

With this in mind, the Commission will report on enlargement to next June's European Council in Lisbon. Thereafter, it will be for the British presidency to carry that work forward. I look forward to doing so.

We agreed a number of statements on foreign policy issues. I will single out two of them. On the Soviet Union, the European Council calls on the republics to respect the rights of minorities, to implement international agreements on arms control and nuclear non-proliferation, to control and secure their nuclear weapons, and to honour their obligations in respect of the Soviet Union's external debt.

The European Council has endorsed the demands which we, France and the United States have made to the Libyan Government requiring them to abandon their support of terrorism and to hand over the alleged perpetrators of the Lockerbie bombing.

The founders of the Community knew that they could not create a viable organisation if they established goals that could never be achieved. In talking about European union, we are talking about concepts that have to be cast in the reality of national legislation and everyday life. The Single European Act started as a grandiose design and ended up as a workmanlike blueprint for a free market. Those treaties have followed the same course.

Our role has been to put forward practical suggestions—and sometimes to rein in the larger ambitions of our partners. Where we believed their ideas would not work, we have put forward our own alternatives. Those can be found throughout this treaty. As with all international negotiations, there has been give and take between all 12 member states. But the process was one in which Britain has played a leading role, and the result is one in which we can clearly see the imprint of our views.

This is a treaty which safeguards and advances our national interests. It advances the interests of Europe as a whole. It opens up new ways of co-operating in Europe. It clarifies and contains the powers of the Commission. It will allow the Community to develop in depth. It reaches out to other Europeans—the new democracies who want to share the benefits we already enjoy. It is a good agreement for Europe, and a good agreement for the United Kingdom. I commend it to the House.

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): May I first of all welcome aspects of the outcome of the Maastricht Council, including the strong statement against racism, the reaffirmation of policy on the middle east, the commitment to the enlargement of the Community, the statement on the republics of the Soviet Union, and, of course, the statement on Libya as a host Government for terrorism?

The statement that we have just heard is a statement from a double opt-out Government who have isolated Britain—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinnock: It is a statement from a double opt-out Government who have isolated Britain on the most vital issues of economic and monetary union and the social charter. It is impossible to regard the Government's

[Mr. Kinnock]

actions as effective negotiation when they have simply opted out of the two basic economic and social issues and have left an empty chair in the European Community. That is abdication, not negotiation.

Is it not clear that the Government's self-imposed exile from the main stream of the Community will severely disadvantage the British people? Isolation means sacrificing essential influence over the process of European monetary union; it means shadowing the creation of others and ultimately accepting conditions determined by others; it means throwing away all chance of getting the European central bank to Britain. The agreement, which the Prime Minister has accepted, will exclude Britain from any say in the appointment of the president, vice-president and executive board of the ECB.

The way in which the Government have sidelined themselves on EMU means uncertainty for business and industry in their planning for the future. When a major purpose of investing is to take advantage of access to a single market with a growing monetary union, the opt-out country reduces its value as a place for investment. That is how the Government are putting Britain into the economic, financial, industrial and employment second division in Europe.

Will the Prime Minister confirm that the protocol on social policy which he agreed at Maastricht means that, when social policy and employment standards are discussed in the Community, the United Kingdom "shall not take part", shall not vote or have a voice?

How can the Prime Minister claim to be seeking the best deal for Britain when he is determined to get the worst conditions for British workers? By refusing to agree to the social chapter, is not he wanting to exclude British people from the provisions for equal status for 6 million part-time employees, many of whom are women; for fair and equal treatment for women at work; for proper protection for young people at work; for rights to minimum holiday leave; and for better information for employees? He claims that those decent basic provisions for individual employees, whether they are in or out of trade unions, would inhibit competitiveness. But how does he answer his fellow Conservatives like Herr Kohl, or Mr. Eyskens, of Belgium, who says:

"It is a fact that the most competitive countries in Europe are also the ones with the best social and employment provision"?

When will the Government learn the lesson that civilised standards help efficiency and competitiveness, while exploitation and injustice harm them? When will they listen to the British people, the great majority of whom know that there should be improved and common employees' rights for all Community countries in the single market?

After the summit, we must ask how the Prime Minister can claim to be at the heart of Europe when, because of his actions, our country is not even part of the key decisions that will shape the Europe of the future. Our country's interests cannot be served by isolation or opt-out. They will be served by maximising influence, full involvement and insistence on the best standards. That is how a Labour Government will serve the British people.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the Leader of the Opposition for welcoming some aspects of our agreement. At the outset of his remarks, he referred to a double opt-out. I was surprised to hear him say that because he was clearly referring to economic and monetary union. As the shadow Chancellor said on 24 November:

"We should not commit ourselves now, in advance of 1997, to enter into a single currency. That is the point of agreement all sensible people will have".

I agree, and that is what we have negotiated. I am sorry that some others have apparently taken leave of their senses.

As for the second alleged opt-out, the right hon. Gentleman confuses the distinction between the social dimension of the Community, to which Britain is fully committed—it has implemented all 19 of the directives thus passed—and the so-called social chapter, which deals with employment and labour laws where they are best determined in this country and in this House, and not imposed from outside.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to investment, but I fear that his judgment is not shared by others. He said that inward investment will not come to Britain. Perhaps he should have a word with the President of the Commission, Mr. Delors, who said yesterday:

"Britain will become a paradise for Japanese investment".

The right hon. Gentleman wants to know what we shall not accept from Europe. We are not prepared to accept the imposition of other people's directions on many forms of flexible job opportunities now available in this country. We are not prepared to accept restrictions on the employer's right to recruit the best qualified person for the job. We are not prepared to accept new trade union powers to represent individual employees and bargain on their behalf. The right hon. Gentleman may be prepared to hand over the government of this country to trade unions abroad, but that is not the position of the Conservative party.

The right hon. Gentleman said that this country would not be part of the key decisions on economic and monetary union. He should read the treaty: we are part of all the decisions on economic and monetary union, with the additional point that, unlike our European Community partners, we have the choice, when the decision is made, whether to go into stage 3. It is a choice for the House whether we go in or stay out. That choice is best made in the light of the conditions that prevail at the time.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I was pleased to hear the Prime Minister say that there is to be a debate next week. Perhaps it will help hon. Members to know that those who are called to put a question today may not stand quite such a good chance in next week's debate.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): Although the Prime Minister did not say it, the agreement that he signed yesterday in Maastricht is historic. It marks the point of irreversibility in the continuing process of the integration and unity of Europe. The pity of it is that the Prime Minister, who said that he wanted to be at the heart of the process, has instead condemned this country to be semi-detached from it. The Prime Minister has told us that it is a good agreement for Britain. He is wrong: it is a bad agreement for Britain.

Does not the Prime Minister realise that, after 40 years in which this country has been dogged by the uncertainty of its position in Europe, he had the opportunity to answer that question once and for all, and he ducked it? The rest

of Europe said yes; the best that he could say for Britain was maybe. Does he not realise that his maybe will cost us? *[Interruption.]* Oh yes, it will. Does he not realise that uncertainty about Britain's future in Europe will mean higher interest rates when the pound comes under pressure? Whatever President Delors says, it will mean lower inward investment. It will mean that we cannot shape the institutions to which subsequently we shall have to submit.

That uncertainty will mean that the City of London will lose any aspirations that it has to accommodate the central European bank. Does not the right hon. Gentleman believe that that is too high a price to ask the people of Britain to pay in order that he may put the divisions of the Conservative party before this country's long-term prosperity?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is mistaken in much of what he says. British industry and the City have welcomed the agreement reached yesterday, which is a step towards European co-operation. Most importantly, it opens up new ways of co-operation with our European partners, not just the way of straight-through Community competence and the European court of Justice.

In no sense is the United Kingdom semi-detached from the decisions that will be made in Europe. It will be part of all the decisions made in Europe. That was an odd comment to come from the right hon. Gentleman who, judged from his comments in recent days, would not have accepted the social charter. Like us, he would have opted out. I welcome the support of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) on that issue. No doubt the right hon. Member for Yeovil, (Mr. Ashdown) would have regarded himself as semi-detached. We have a part in shaping all the decisions of Europe. That is clearly understood by our partners and has been agreed in the treaty. I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Yeovil did not have the grace to accept that.

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): My right hon. Friend has shown the utmost skill and stamina over the past two days in keeping us away from the dangerous path towards the centralised Europe that none of us who are good Europeans want to see. Does he agree that the time has come to put forward with ever greater clarity the kind of Europe which we want and which he has already outlined in his comments? Does he further agree that that needs to be a Europe which is not only open and ready to trade fully with the rest of the world, but also ready to grapple with the greatest danger facing European stability, a danger which was scarcely mentioned at Maastricht, and which must be faced by ensuring that the nations of eastern Europe make it all the way to open democracies and that the vast and scattered nuclear arsenal of the former Soviet Union is brought under proper control and we prevent a great proliferation of nuclear weapons in the successor states?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my right hon. Friend. We discussed collectively, and I discussed bilaterally with President Mitterrand, the specific points that my right hon. Friend mentions and, in particular, the potential dangers of nuclear proliferation within the republics of the Soviet Union. It is precisely because of our wish to create the sort of free market and wide community that we have in mind that we have included, at our insistence and with the agreement of other colleagues, a declaration in the presidency conclusions about the future enlargement of the Community. We propose to carry that principle forward, both in communal discussions next year and as a key part of the British presidency in the second half of 1992.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): Since yesterday's decisions are clearly further progress towards European union, can the Prime Minister say whether the United Kingdom has moved any closer to the acceptance of a single European currency? Will yesterday's decisions mean any increase in the United Kingdom's contribution to the European Community budget? Was there any discussion on further Community support for the regions such as Portugal, Greece and Northern Ireland?

The Prime Minister: We are a full part of the process towards economic and monetary union and a single currency. As I said both in my statement and in an earlier answer, we have the option to decide at a later stage, when others enter stage 3, whether that is the right thing for this country to do. It is a choice that is fully there for us to make at the same time and in the same fashion as other countries, except that we have the additional option of deciding that it would not be right for this country.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the regions of the Community. A cohesion fund was agreed that would turn out to be a subset of structural funds with the intention of ensuring that money which is diverted within the Community for the right purposes goes to the areas that most need it.

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): I join the many others who will welcome the prominence that my right hon. Friend gives to the enlargement of the Community, especially in the context of central and eastern Europe. When the issue of the single currency was being discussed at Maastricht, did its promoters suggest that this would make more easy that enlargement, and how did my right hon. Friend respond?

The Prime Minister: It is a matter that has been discussed among the Finance Ministers on many occasions. I do not think that there is an expectation among people that it will make it easier, and that is one of the arguments that we have frequently advanced against it. One of the difficulties of proceeding with the single currency, particularly if a small number of member states within the Community were to proceed on their own, is that it would become increasingly difficult for others to join them at a later stage. It is for that reason that, if and when the decision is made to move forward, it would be desirable for as many members of the Community as possible to move collectively.

Mr. Peter Shore (Bethnal Green and Stepney): For those who do not want a federal future for this country there are many reasons for concern in the Prime Minister's statement on the treaty of union. If the treaty bears the imprint of our views, how can the Prime Minister explain the acceptance of article 104B, under which present and future Governments of this country would be limited by European authority to a borrowing requirement of no more than 3 per cent. of GDP? Is this not an intolerable interference with the freedom of action of any British Government, and is the Prime Minister aware that, in 12

[Mr. Peter Shore]

of the past 18 years, successive Governments, Labour and Conservative, have spent more than 3 per cent. of GDP on their borrowing requirements?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman might have been better advised to raise that matter at a meeting of the parliamentary Labour party than inviting me to answer it. I have two points to make in reply to him. First, as a result of the negotiations by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, there is considerably more flexibility now than there was with the 3 per cent. figure that the right hon. Gentleman mentioned. Secondly, the 3 per cent. does not apply in stage 2 and, even with that greater flexibility, would apply only to those countries that decided to enter stage 3. That will be a factor that the House will be able to have in its mind when it decides on whether to enter stage 3.

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, entirely contrary to what the Leader of the Opposition has just said, the settlement that he has won will be welcomed by the overwhelming majority of people in this country? Is it not clear that the so-called social measures that he rejected would have led to unemployment and the loss of jobs? Are those not exactly the issues that should be settled in this country and not in Brussels?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his remarks, with which I entirely agree. It was precisely because the measures in the social chapter would have damaged first employment prospects and secondly our competitiveness against Japan and the United States that I found them unacceptable. A further reason is that measures of this sort are best decided in the House, in accordance with the traditions of this country, and not abroad by trade unions and others.

Sir Patrick Duffy (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Does the Prime Minister recall my earlier concern that the parameters that he was instrumental in drawing up at the Rome summit, to separate an incipient European Community defence policy from NATO's responsibilities for the defence of Europe, should be preserved? Will he now reassure the House that they have not been breached by article B of the agreement in what *The Guardian* this morning called a defence compromise? It commits the Community to the "eventual framing" of a defence policy. Do not those words portend an eventual challenge by the Franco-German axis to the primacy of NATO?

The Prime Minister: Of course it was challenged in the discussions, but the outcome is that set out in the Anglo-Italian paper. It is a good outcome for NATO and the United Kingdom. It is the right framework for the European Community in the 1990s. It means that there will be a stronger European contribution to common defence, and that is right. That will be organised through the Western European Union and it will not be subordinated to the European Community.

Mr. Cranley Onslow (Woking): I add my congratulations to my right hon. Friend and his team on what will rightly be seen in the country as an excellent result for Britain and Europe, especially on enlargement. As it is now all the more important that Europe should prove that it can walk before it tries to run, may we look forward to a rigid application by our European partners of all those directives that they have so far chosen to ignore?

The Prime Minister: Yes, we can look forward to that application, for under the provisions agreed in the treaty, if we and our European partners fail to implement directives that we sign up to, we shall be subjected to substantial fines by the European Court of Justice.

Mr. Jim Sillars (Glasgow, Govan): Is the Prime Minister aware that his claim to have reined in the ambitions of our partners is a vain boast that bears no relation to reality, and that going into Maastricht we had a Community of 12 and coming out we had a Community of 11 and a half? The 11 are ambitious, able and united and, judging by history, are likely to be successful, and the half is a self-disabled United Kingdom. Is he aware that what he achieved, or failed to achieve, might please the little Englanders behind him but will be a tragedy for the people of the United Kingdom and the Scottish part of it through the 1990s?

The Prime Minister: An odd comment from a home ruler for Scotland, I must say. The agreement is good for the United Kingdom and good for Europe. It is an agreement to which our European partners were happy to sign up, and they have gone back to their own countries to celebrate. They do not share the views that the hon. Gentleman has just expressed.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Will the Prime Minister take it from me that all right-thinking people would like to congratulate him on escaping unbruised from the street fighting at Maastricht, where he met the heavies of Germany and France? Was the vexed question of extradition discussed at the Council? Is the United Kingdom financially committed to the policies of cohesion and convergence?

The Prime Minister: The question of extradition is one of the matters that would fall under the interior and justice pillar to be decided on an intergovernmental basis. It is likely that under those agreements extradition within Europe would in future be easier than it has been in the past, which I think the hon. Gentleman would welcome.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is the Prime Minister aware, first, that people will want to study in detail what he has brought back and will need far more time to do that, and, secondly, that a treaty committing us to a European union probably represents an even bigger change than our entry into the Community in 1975, the long-term effect of which over many Parliaments will be great? In those circumstances, does he really think that a dying Parliament, a week after the Maastricht summit, should empower a lame-duck Prime Minister to use the royal prerogative to sign that treaty without any consultation with the British people whose rights will be affected far more than this Parliament? Does he not think that, with a general election coming, if he is confident in his position, the least that he could do would be to put that forward in a general election so that at least people will have an opportunity to give a view before they are committed by the right hon. Gentleman's signature of a treaty of this magnitude?

The Prime Minister: But that is the case. Legislation will need to be drafted and taken through the House in

order to ratify the agreements that have been provisionally reached at Maastricht. That legislation cannot be carried through in the remainder of this Parliament and will be a matter for the next Parliament. With regard to the right hon. Gentleman's earlier remarks about opting in, I suggest that he discusses that matter with his right hon. Friends who would have signed the treaty in full without waiting to see what the economic conditions were at a later stage. Does that not give an absolute lie to the belief that the Opposition are united on Europe?

Mr. Julian Amery (Brighton, Pavilion): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the agreement that he has secured will be widely welcomed in northern and eastern Europe, particularly as they are the new frontier of Europe and of all of us? In particular, I congratulate my right hon. Friend on having laid the foundations—not more than that yet—of a European defence and foreign policy as pillars of the European house distinct from the collective will of the European Commission.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend has it exactly and precisely right in terms of laying the foundation for European action on foreign affairs and defence, and that is the right direction in which Britain should go. I welcome very much the options that are now open for both the EFTA states, and, in due course, when their economies are ready, the eastern European states, to join the EC. Perhaps not in the political lifetime of most hon. Members but at some future stage, we may see a Community that stretches from one end of Europe to the other, for which I for one will wish to work.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): The Prime Minister has said that the Maastricht settlement is game, set and match to Britain. Quite apart from the inappropriate Chamberlainesque triumphalism, how can it be game, set and match to Britain if the Government have decided to opt out of future social developments and remain undecided about a single European currency?

The Prime Minister: I set out the Government's objectives in a speech in this House before I went to Maastricht. We met all those objectives.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the lesson that we learned from the Single European Act was that, whenever there is an extension of Community competence, the institutions of the European Community seek to extend that competence? Does he also agree that, where he has extended the competence of the institutions of the European Community, we shall increasingly see, as we have seen in relation to Sunday trading and British Aerospace, the emergence of two forms of law—first, British law, which we encourage the population to obey and honour, and, secondly, European law, which we try to avoid—and thus we shall succeed in undermining the rule of law here?

The Prime Minister: There have been twin forms of law since this House took the decision to enter the Community 20 years ago. I know that that is not entirely agreeable to some of my hon. Friends and to some Opposition Members, but that is the fact of life—and has been for many years. What we sought to do, in terms of Community competence, in the discussions was to extend it in areas where we thought it was appropriate and to define it more adequately than it has been defined in the past in order to prevent, as far as it is possible to prevent it, that element of creeping competence that so offends many people in this country.

Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Does the Prime Minister accept that we are pleased that the United Kingdom is signatory to a treaty that commits it to an ever closer union among European peoples, where decisions are to be taken as close to the citizens as possible? When does the Prime Minister intend to implement that part of the treaty in respect of Wales and Scotland?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his earlier remarks. The subsidiarity agreement was particularly an aim of both the United Kingdom and Germany. The intention is to ensure that decisions are taken at national level whenever that is the most appropriate way to deal with the decisions. That is what we have achieved.

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): From a different political viewpoint, may I congratulate the Prime Minister on his ability and the authority that he demonstrated during the negotiations that secured this agreement, which, despite all the odds, will be beneficial to the United Kingdom. I am sure that it will be beneficial to Northern Ireland, in view of the number of unemployed people in the Province and the need for Northern Ireland to become more closely involved in Europe.

Is the Prime Minister satisfied that sufficient steps have been taken to deal with terrorism?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the overall agreement that we have reached. I share his view that it is a good agreement for this country and a good agreement for Northern Ireland. The decisions that we have made on the interior and justice portfolio—to deal with terrorism more closely in an intergovernmental agreement—open up the possibility of much greater co-operation against terrorism. We are studying specific plans, under the Europol heading, that will be geared specifically against terrorism, mafia activities and drug dealers. It will provide for far more cross-European co-operation against crime than we have ever known.

Mr. Jack Ashley (Stoke-on-Trent, South): The Government are great disciplinarians. Can the Prime Minister explain why participation in the exchange rate mechanism is a beneficial discipline for British industry, whereas participation in the social chapter is a damaging discipline? Is not the real answer that the Conservative party has very little time and even less concern for British workers?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is inaccurate, and I believe that he is fair-minded enough to know it. The exchange rate mechanism is a discipline to reduce inflation. As for the provisions in the social chapter, that would be a discipline that would reduce jobs.

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the skill with which he conducted the negotiations. Is he aware that the setting of arbitrary deadlines for a move to a single currency is really gesture politics, and that he is right to dissociate Britain from it? I am delighted to see that he has also dissociated us from the objectionable features of article 104B regarding fiscal

[Mr. Terence L. Higgins]

deficits. Will he not rest on his laurels? Should he not turn his attention vigorously to sorting out the common agricultural policy, which is endangering the Uruguay round and remains a serious blot which is totally inconsistent with the sort of policies that are embodied in the new treaty?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend's third point is right. In recent weeks, I have had several opportunities to discuss that matter with the presidency of the Commission and with the Commissioners who negotiate on behalf of the European Community. There is no doubt that the European Community needs to make amendments to its common agricultural policy and to its agricultural policies to ensure that an agreement on the general agreement on tariffs and trade can be reached. Agreement on GATT is as important to this country as anything else at the moment, and the Community will have to make amendments to its policy to play its part in reaching that agreement.

I referred earlier to article 104B, and I have nothing further to add.

My right hon. Friend is correct about the deadlines. The deadlines refer to the time at which the convergence conditions will be examined. The dates for moving forward must be subordinate to the convergence conditions. Without the convergence conditions, it would be improper and absurd to contemplate moving forward.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): Will the Prime Minister confirm that there is a protocol in the Maastricht agreement calling for greater involvement of national Parliaments and Assemblies in the work of the Community? I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks about the work of the Select Committee on European legislation made during the debate on 21 November. Is he aware that that Committee is charged with the responsibility of assessing the legal and political impact of EEC proposals on the United Kingdom and for its reports, together with the proposals, to be debated here before decisions are made by the Ministers concerned? Therefore, is not it inappropriate for the Government to place before the House a motion endorsing the Maastricht deal before comparable examination of the draft treaty has taken place? Is not that against the resolution of the House and its spirit, and is it not a reduction, not an increase, in the involvement of this national Parliament?

The Prime Minister: I can confirm the hon. Gentleman's remarks about the protocol. We shall be placing a motion before the House inviting it to endorse the agreement. However, as I told the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), there will be an opportunity in due course for the legislation that enacts the agreement to be considered in detail by the House. So there will be ample opportunity for every hon. Member to consider in detail what the agreements into which we have entered would commit the country to.

Sir Michael Marshall (Arundel): Will my right hon. Friend accept that there will be a warm welcome for his commitment to a widening process on his own behalf and that of Her Majesty's Government? Recognising the difficulty that arises in the countries of central and eastern Europe, can he commit himself to the urgent introduction of EFTA applications, recognising the special bridges that they have with those countries and the Baltic states?

The Prime Minister: I can say that to my hon. Friend. I anticipate that at least two of the EFTA countries will place their applications before the Community shortly and that it will be possible to begin examining them in early 1993.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): Is not the Prime Minister saying that he has used all the influence that he can muster to ensure that working people in Britain have fewer rights and less protection against bad employers than the rest of Europe?

The Prime Minister: No, Sir. I have used all the influence that I can muster to ensure that working people do not lose their jobs as a result of a lack of competitiveness and costs on employers that could not be met without shedding labour. I note that the hon. Gentleman wishes to introduce measures that would cost jobs in Britain. We have noticed that in other Opposition policies in the past.

Sir Jim Spicer (Dorset, West): Will my right hon. Friend accept that the outcome of Maastricht, both for the people of this country and for the Community, is a treaty based on common sense and realism? Will he accept the gratitude of every Conservative Member and of the people of this country, because the treaty bears the imprint not only of my right hon. Friend but of the Foreign Secretary and of the Treasury? We are grateful to them.

My right hon. Friend spoke at length about EFTA applications. He will not forget, particularly when we have the presidency next year, that Malta has applied for membership of the Community and that we owe a great debt of gratitude to the Maltese people.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. As I said earlier, during our presidency we shall be looking particularly at the prospects for enlargement of the Community.

Mr. James Lamond (Oldham, Central and Royton): But is not the Prime Minister's decision to opt out of the social charter—*[Interruption.]*—"opt out" were the words that he used—an admission that, after 12 years of Tory rule, the economy is not as sound, robust and healthy as the Government try to claim but is so fragile that it cannot support the most basic workers' rights that will be enjoyed in the rest of Europe?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is wrong in everything he says. What I find so extraordinary is that Opposition Members are so keen to place with trade unions abroad so much of the authority on labour law matters that resides in this House. Just as they are subordinate to trade unions at home, so they yearn to be subordinate to trade unions abroad.

Sir Trevor Skeet (Bedfordshire, North): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on his courageous stand against the 11 who opposed him, but may I ask him a simple question? Compared with the European Communities Act 1972, what additional authority has now been conceded to Brussels from the United Kingdom Parliament?

The Prime Minister: Since the 1972 Act, there have been many additional authorities to Brussels through European Court judgments, individual directives and the implications and effects of the Single European Act, quite apart from the effect of the treaties which we have agreed in the past two days but which have yet to be ratified by Parliament. The detailed information that my hon. Friend requires can be found in documentation that has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Joseph Ashton (Bassetlaw): If legislation is needed to get the treaty through Parliament, if it is so popular with the country, and if it will be such a wonderful thing for unemployed people, for women, for the regions and for business, why does not the Prime Minister dissolve Parliament next week and have a general election in January?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will get his election in due course.

Mr. Nigel Forman (Carshalton and Wallington): Is it not clear that one of my right hon. Friend's most important achievements at Maastricht was to get a clear definition of subsidiarity written into the treaty as a bulwark against creeping competence by the Commission and other Community institutions? Will he confirm that, once that definition is lawful, it will be possible to ensure that the Community will be able to act on appropriate areas such as trans-border environmental pollution, but on areas where there is no need or justification for action, such as national and fiscal policies, the House will retain its rights?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The provisions that he refers to are in the agreement that we have signed, which provides greater safeguards than before to ensure that the Community deals with those matters that are most appropriately dealt with by the Community and that other matters are left to national Parliaments.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Will the Prime Minister confirm that the Secretary of State for Employment will no longer be able to participate in the Social Affairs Council —I am sure that many of our partners will not miss him —and, if that is so, will he consider demoting him and reducing his salary?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady is mistaken. The social dimension of the Community has been there for a long time. As I said in answer to an earlier question, over recent years we have agreed 19 directives on the social dimension—more than anyone else in the Community—and we have implemented them. All of them have been agreed and discussed with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment and his predecessor.

Dame Elaine Kellet-Bowman (Lancaster): My right hon. Friend said that Labour would have signed in full. They would indeed. Yesterday, the shadow Chancellor said on the early morning news that Britain should fall into line with its partners—in other words, that we should give in to them without bothering to do anything to secure the best deal for this country. Is my right hon. Friend aware that my constituents, whether farmers, industrialists or citizens, who obey the law will be delighted that those who do not do so will in future be fined for that failure?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right. The Opposition's position is even more incredible than she sets out. The Leader of the Opposition previously expressed three conditions for joining a single currency. None of them has been met, yet today he says that he would have signed up to a single currency without any opt-out clause.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Did the Prime Minister feel no sense of humiliation at having to meet the other 11 Heads of Government and having to explain to them in the most public way why the British economy was so uniquely vulnerable and fragile that we alone were unable to provide the basic minimum provisions of the social charter? If he thinks that he can come back to the House, whatever the supine press may say, and present it as a triumph for Britain that he has managed to prevent those provisions from being applied in this country, although they are being applied everywhere else, he shows that the Government are not only economically bankrupt but bankrupt of values.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is an ungracious loser. This country has done very well in the negotiations and we have got an agreement that is right for this country. The reason for not accepting what people call the social chapter, which is in reality the imposition of labour laws that would damage our competitiveness, is that we intend to keep our competitiveness and we are not prepared to lose our competitiveness against Japan and the United States, even though that is the express policy of the Labour party.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that we in Britain will retain complete freedom to run our own monetary and economic policy, that we have transferred no significant powers from Westminster to the European Parliament, and that, in securing the deletion of the word "federal", he has secured the deletion of the whole federal agenda? Is my right hon. Friend aware that, in securing all his aims at Maastricht, he will have the gratitude and admiration of the entire nation?

The Prime Minister: I am most grateful to my hon. and learned Friend. He is clear about our management of our own economy in the future in the way in which he sets it out. If at some stage we entered into a single currency, we should have to deal with a different matter. That is a matter for the House to decide at a later stage. The words "federal vocation" were unacceptable to the majority of hon. Members. They have been removed from the chapeau and replaced by the words that were in the original treaty of Rome—

"an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe".

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Why is it that German competitiveness can stand the social chapter and British competitiveness cannot? What is the distinction?

The Prime Minister: The Germans have had a different structure of labour laws for many years.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): May I join in congratulating my right hon. Friend on negotiating an agreement that meets all our aspirations and protects our national interest? As the way is now open, with the agreement of the House, for us to join a single currency in

[Mr. Anthony Nelson]

just over five years, will my right hon. Friend spell out clearly to the House and to the people of this country what benefits will or may derive to them from a single currency?

The Prime Minister: If the House were to decide at a later stage to enter a single currency, it would be, first, because it had decided that the economic convergence conditions in Europe were right for a single currency to be beneficial to this country. A primary benefit that, if successful, a single currency would be likely to deliver for Europe would be low inflation across the whole of Europe. That would be a significant benefit for all the peoples of Europe.

Economic conditions in Europe at the time when the decision is taken will be crucial in determining whether that will be achievable. Because no one can know at this stage what those conditions might be, it would be unwise for anyone now to decide irrevocably to take that decision at a future date.

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): May I remind the Prime Minister that the predecessors of his Back-Bench colleagues waved their Order Papers for a Prime Minister who promised "peace in our time", just as he has promised "no single currency in our time". Wrath turned on that Prime Minister when it was realised that he was not right, just as it will turn on the present Prime Minister. As one who has never thought that we have got much benefit from the European Community, I say that the right hon. Gentleman is following the path of his predecessor, which is, "Negotiate nothing but accept everything."

May I add——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is enough. The hon. Gentleman should ask only one question.

The Prime Minister: I notice that another strongly anti-European Labour Back-Bench Member is giving the lie yet again to the newly found Europeanism of the Labour Front Bench. The hon. Gentleman has it precisely wrong on European policy. The Labour party's policy is, "If it has a European label on it, buy it, even if it is worthless; but if it is the British national interest, sell it, even if it is valuable."

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have to protect the business of the House. We have two other important debates today. I shall allow questions to continue until 4.45. Then we shall move on. May we have brief questions, please?

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): Will my right hon. Friend note that, in comparison with the Labour party, which has changed its mind many times, the Conservative party has been consistent since the 1960s—a policy that has led to greater union among the peoples of Europe? My right hon. Friend is to be congratulated on showing that that can happen, and that a further step can be taken towards "ever closer union" on an intergovernmental basis, and not just on the basis of the treaty of Rome.

Will my right hon. Friend also confirm——

Mr. Speaker: No.

The Prime Minister: Labour Members have changed their minds and their policies on Europe at least seven times, but in that they still lag behind the changes of mind of their leader.

Mr. George Galloway (Glasgow, Hillhead): Does the Prime Minister accept that for many people of my age and younger in this country the British leaders' performance at Maastricht was rather embarrassing? Pasty-faced Englishmen waving their union jacks and shouting boo at Johnnie Foreigner are never an edifying sight—whether on the football terraces or in intergovernmental relations.

Is it not time that the older Members of the House realised that the empire has gone, that the idea of Britain as east America—Athens to America's Rome—is a phantom of their imagination, and that our future lies in Europe? It lies at the heart of Europe, which means that we must be not in a minority of one but right there where the decisions are made.

The Prime Minister: That is precisely where we have been, which is why so many of the decisions reached in the past two days have been on British initiatives that have been accepted across the whole of Europe. The hon. Gentleman is not a very convincing advocate of the policies of youth.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Although I remain strongly opposed to any closer political or economic union with Europe, will my right hon. Friend accept that the leadership that he has shown at the Maastricht conference and his toughness in the negotiations clearly display that he is the only party leader competent to govern this country during the next few years?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to agree with my hon. Friend. I am grateful for his remarks.

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Instead of erroneously portraying the social charter as a formula for increased unemployment and as a dangerous capitulation to the trade unions, should we not realise that a policy of co-determination that gives employees a say and a stake in the running of their firms is the very reason why the economies of so many western European countries have been so successful? Even though the Prime Minister has not incorporated the provision into the agreement at Maastricht, does he not agree that it is high time that we in this country also took those steps for ourselves?

The Prime Minister: I have great sympathy with the premise on which the hon. Gentleman bases his question, but such matters are best determined by individual employers and their work forces and not by the imposition of general blanket rules that may not be appropriate to individual countries or companies.

Sir Anthony Durant (Reading, West): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on what he has done at Maastricht in limiting the powers of the Commission, about which my constituents have been concerned for a long time?

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I think that that view was held widely across Europe, and I was delighted that our European partners were content with the proposals that we advanced.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): Did I hear the Prime Minister correctly? Did he refer to the high standards of social protection in this country? What, if anything, will the Maastricht agreement do to eradicate the real inequalities throughout Europe, which mean, for example, that pensioners in this country receive about 43 per cent. of average net earnings compared with the European Community average of 73 per cent.?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman did indeed hear me correctly. He may recall that it was his party and not mine that cut health and welfare expenditure in the 1970s. On the pensions point, he does not compare like with like. He is comparing the state pension in this country with the cumulative state and private pensions abroad.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): It has been estimated that signing up to the social charter would have cost Britain a minimum of £5,000 million a year, decreased competitiveness and increased unemployment. Is my right hon. Friend aware of any Opposition party—it is the Opposition parties that are so keen for the social charter—ever having contested those figures, and, if not, why are they so keen to go into something that would disadvantage Britain? Or are they just keen for a pat on the back from M. Delors?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is quite right about the costs. He will, of course, know that the Leader of the Opposition has said in the past that

"Sweden is certainly a model for us".

If the right hon. Gentleman does not accept what I say about industrial matters, he will perhaps listen to the head of the Swedish employers federation, who said that the Community should learn from Sweden:

"It could above all avoid mistakes when it comes to regulations based on the social charter. The ideas behind the proposal for the working time directive have been proved wrong in Sweden."

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): Has not the Prime Minister managed to get the worst of all worlds by vetoing what he should have accepted—the social upgrading that we all want—and by half accepting what he should have vetoed—economic and monetary union, which will be deeply damaging and which will lock both this country and Europe into a decade of deflation? Has he not ignored the main problem of Europe, which is to get a realignment of currencies so that the deutschmark goes up and sterling down and we can get out of the present debilitating recession?

The Prime Minister: We have heard yet another consistently anti-European Labour Member. The hon. Gentleman has been consistent in his opposition to the Community and, if he stands his ground—as I have no doubt he will—in due course those on his Front Bench will agree with him once again.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): May I congratulate the Prime Minister both on his performance at Maastricht and on his performance here today? Does he agree, however, that what we need to pursue now is cross-nation inspection of the implementation of rules and regulations emanating from Brussels to ensure enforcement in other nations and not just in Britain? Will he ensure that the Italians and French do not get away with a failure to put into practice the rules and regulations that this country puts into practice immediately?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend touches on a serious problem. A certain amount of cross-border examination to ensure that European Community rules are met already exists and, as my hon. Friend knows from what I said earlier, in future we shall have much tighter enforcement rules to ensure that those countries—all of them—that sign up to European directives will have to obey those directives or face fines for not doing so. I think that that will ensure two things: first, greater equality of action across the Community; and, secondly, to a greater degree than ever before that every nation that signs up to a directive considers in detail the implications and costs of that directive before it becomes law.

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): The Prime Minister alleges that the social charter will cost jobs, but will he confirm that nearly three quarters of a million British citizens have lost their jobs since he became Prime Minister? Is he aware that the best of British companies, such as ICI and Pilkingtons, which already provide their employees with far better conditions than anything that is in the social charter, are increasingly concerned about unfair competition from their sweatshop competitors? Is not his rejection of the social charter a kick in the teeth to the best employers and a massive boost to sweatshop, anti-union employers in Britain?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman has been more than usually maladroit in his choice of example. He referred to ICI, whose chairman, Sir Denys Henderson, has this morning warmly welcomed the agreement that I reached.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the one existing example of convergence in Europe is the convergence of west Germany and east Germany, which has resulted in the highest inflation and interest rates that Germany has ever had, and which is costing Britain at least 1·5 per cent. more in terms of our interest rate than would have been the case had the two countries remained separate? What guarantee do we have that, when we have to converge with, for example, the Greeks, Portuguese and Italians, the money transferred from our pockets to theirs will not merely impoverish us and give money to those who have not earned it while we have to work harder for less and pay higher interest rates?

The Prime Minister: It is, of course, largely for that economic reason that convergence of the economies before a single currency becomes operative is absolutely essential. If there were a single currency without convergence, it would have several serious effects on the smaller countries. There would certainly be a collapse of asset values and large regional unemployment and, as a result of those two factors, there would undoubtedly be a demand for very large transfers of resources from northern states to southern states. All that argues strongly for proper convergence conditions.

My hon. Friend referred to the merging of the economies of west Germany and the former German Democratic Republic—the merging of one large economy with one small economy. The merging of 12 mature economies is a much bigger undertaking than that. That is why it is essential, as a preliminary to any future action that the House has to consider, that there is a proper convergence of the economies.

Points of Order

4.48 pm

Several Hon. Members: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am on my feet.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Call Mr. Skinner.

Mr. Speaker: Sit down, please.

I shall bear in mind some—I emphasise "some"—of those hon. Members who have not been called today when it comes to the debate next week.

Mrs. Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. There is no need to point out to you the extent to which women are under-represented in the House, and many women will be disappointed to note that, on an agreement affecting the female population—especially in relation to maternity rights and pay—we have not had a proper hearing today. I hope that you will do something about it.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Lady is complaining about the fact that she was not called. She knows, as she is an Opposition Front-Bench spokesman——

Mrs. Fyfe: No, I am not.

Mr. Speaker: If she is not, she should be. I thought that she was a Front-Bench spokesman. I will bear her very much in mind when we debate the matter next week.

Mr. Denis Howell (Birmingham, Small Heath): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you consider what you have just said? Front-Bench spokemen also represent their constituents, and their constituents are as entitled to be heard on this matter as they are——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I entirely agree and I do not exclude them wholly. However, I bear in mind the fact that Front-Bench spokemen have an automatic right to speak on their subject from the Front Bench—and sometimes at considerable length.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of what you have just said, are you likely to be more generous to members of the Whips Office who may wish to speak in a debate?

Mr. Speaker: I am very generous to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I know that the hon. Gentleman is going to be helpful.

Mr. Ewing: I raise a point of order in relation to Scottish questions. In accordance with the procedures of the House, two weeks ago today I tabled a question asking the Secretary of State for Scotland to meet Scottish chief constables to discuss the need to inform the public about when nuclear waste material was passing through their areas. The question appeared as No. 16 on the Order Paper. The Scottish Office decided on Wednesday or Thursday of last week to transfer that question under the priority written procedure to the Secretary of State for Transport.

It is Wednesday today, and Scottish questions have been answered. Obviously, I did not receive an answer to my question from the Scottish Office and, even under the priority written procedure, I have not yet received an answer from the Secretary of State for Transport. Having tabled my question two weeks ago according to the procedures of the House, I have not yet received a reply. That is unfair.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has a legitimate complaint. I notice that the Government Whip is making a note. I am sure that he has recorded what the hon. Gentleman said. The hon. Gentleman should have received an answer by now.

Social Security

Mr. Speaker: We now come to the Social Security orders and the Opposition prayers.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will notice that in relation to the Opposition prayers, the three instruments concerned have not yet been considered by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments. When it was announced that the orders were to be considered this week, the instruments were not in the hands of our clerk and our counsel. If our Committee can consider an instrument and make a report —as we are obliged to under Standing Orders—in time for a debate, we use our best endeavours.

It is a matter of deep regret that the Department of Social Security failed to provide copies of the instruments in time for the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments to consider them and report to the House. The House has not had the opportunity to consider the instruments in detail or subject them to detailed technical examination. Your Counsel, with his expert advice, has not been able to run a fine-toothed comb over them. My Committee has an important job to do.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has made an important point. The House should be grateful to him and for what his Committee does in examining statutory instruments.

4.53 pm

The Secretary of State for Social Security (Mr. Tony Newton): I beg to move,

That the draft Social Security Benefits Up-rating (No. 2) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 4 December, be approved.

I understand that it will be for the convenience of the House if we also discuss the following Government motions:

That the draft Social Security (Contributions) (Re-rating) (No. 2) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 4th December, be approved.

That the draft Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase (No. 2) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 4th December, be approved.

That the draft Statutory Sick Pay (Rate of Payment) (No. 2) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 4th December, be approved.

That the draft Social Security (Introduction of Disability Living Allowance) Regulations 1991, which were laid before this House on 26th November, be approved.

That this draft Disability Working Allowance (General) Regulations 1991, which were laid before this House on 26th November, be approved.

That the draft Social Security (Disability Living Allowance) Regulations 1991, which were laid before this House on 26th November, be approved.

That the draft Social Security (Adjudication) Amendment (No. 3) Regulations 1991, which were laid before this House on 26th November, be approved.

Perhaps we can also consider the three Opposition prayers:

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Social Security (Attendance Allowance) Regulations 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 2740), dated 5th December 1991, a copy of which was laid before this House on 5th December, be annulled.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Social Security (Claims and Payments) Amendment Regulations 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 2741), dated 5th December 1991, a copy of which was laid before this House on 5th December, be annulled.

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Disability Living Allowance and Disability Working Allowance (Consequential Provisions) Regulations 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 2742), dated 5th December 1991, a copy of which was laid before this House on 5th December, be annulled.

In view of the plethora of material for debate and the fact that the debate is starting rather late for reasons that the House understands, I think that it will be sensible if I curtail my remarks to some degree. I will not therefore take the time of the House with the conventional lengthy explanation of the detail of what are in fact relatively routine pieces of annual business, such as the guaranteed minimum pensions order and the draft contributions rerating order, which are very much in line with their predecessors over a number of years. The detail of the proposals on contributions was, of course, fully set out in the very full statement that I made to the House by way of a written answer at the same time as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's autumn statement on 6 November.

Similarly, I will refer only briefly to the statutory sick pay order, which gives effect to the SSP proposals announced in my uprating statement to the House on 21 October. The order increases the lower rate of SSP by the full retail prices index increase of 4·1 per cent., from £43·50 to £45·30 a week, while leaving the higher rate unchanged at £52·50. At the same time, the earnings threshold which forms the boundary between the two rates, which is now aligned with the earnings threshold for payment of full-rate employers' class 1 contributions, will go up from £185 per week to £190 per week. In no other respect does the order make changes in arrangements put in place last year which were extensively debated at the time and which, as I said to the House in October, appear to be working well.

My speech is therefore directed principally to what will no doubt be the two main areas of interest to the House: that is to say, the benefits uprating generally and the voluminous regulations that provide or pave the way for the introduction of disability living allowance and disability working allowance in April 1992, to the advantage of tens of thousands of disabled people.

First, I deal with the general uprating order. As the House knows, for those benefits which are not income-related, the basis for the uprating is the full increase in the RPI for the 12 months from September 1990 to September 1991, which was 4·1 per cent. With the exception of the higher rate of SSP to which I have already referred, this has been applied to all the relevant main benefits rates—notably retirement pensions, war pensions, widows' pensions, invalidity benefit, severe disablement allowance, the disability living allowance rates equivalent to the present mobility and attendance allowances, invalid care allowance, industrial injuries benefits, and the national insurance benefits for unemployment, sickness and maternity. It has also been applied to the special Ministry of Defence payment to the pre-1973 war widows.

In particular, we have thus once again honoured in full our commitment to increase in line with prices the basic retirement pension, which will thus rise from £52 to £54·15 a week for a single person and from £83·25 to £86·70 for a couple, entailing additional expenditure of about £1 billion.

Just over a year ago, I told the House that child benefit is, and will remain, a strong element in our policies for family support. It is fair to claim that those words have been amply borne out in the intervening period and are

[Mr. Tony Newton]

confirmed again in this order. Following the increase for the eldest eligible child last April, we have made a further increase for all children in October, with corresponding increases in income-related benefit rates to make sure that the less well-off families also gained to the same extent.

This order now provides for the full year's 4·1 per cent increase to be applied from April to the October rates, even though they will have been in place for only six months. Thus the rate for the eldest eligible child will rise in April by 40p to £9·65 a week and the rate for other children by 30p to £7·80.

If I may anticipate a point which, I know from experience, the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) may in due course seek to make, those increases mean that, when looked at alongside the extra help that we have made available in the past four years through income-related benefits for the less well-off families with children, which will amount to some £600 million next year, total expenditure on help to families next year will be higher than if we had simply increased child benefit each year since 1987-88.

Turning now to the income-related benefits, as the House knows, the uprating is, in this respect, based not on the full retail prices index, but on what is known as the Rossi index, which, in essence, is the RPI less housing costs but which we have this year brought more exactly into line with what the benefits are intended to cover by including in the calculation 20 per cent. of community charge, certain miscellaneous housing costs previously excluded and—perhaps most importantly—water and sewerage charges.

That more exact calculation has, I think, met with general approval and as I said in my statement about our proposal for council tax benefit in a written answer on 28 November, we intend to maintain that closer alignment in the wake of the changes in local taxation that are intended to take effect in April 1993. That is to say, the Rossi index would then need to reflect that there will be no minimum contribution to the new council tax, but water rates and the other miscellaneous items that I have mentioned would, of course, continue to be taken into account.

The House will also recall—I know that hon. Members of all parties will welcome this—that I have also made it clear that there will be no downward adjustment in 1993 in income-related benefit rates to correspond to the nearly £700 million which, in terms of 1992-93 benefit rates, is included in them in respect of the 20 per cent. contribution to the community charge.

The Rossi calculation on the basis that I have described produces this year an uprating index of 7 per cent. Thus, those on income-related benefits, who are the least well-off, will have their benefits uprated next April, under this order, by nearly 3 per cent. more than the rise in prices generally over the relevant period. Again, with one exception to which I will come in a moment, all the main rates of income support and the related applicable amounts for housing benefit and community charge benefit, together with the credits in family credit, will rise by the full 7 per cent.—producing, for example, an increase in income support for a couple with two children aged 10 and 12 from £104·55 to £111·85, and for a pensioner couple aged under 75 from £83·15 to £88·95.

The exception, of course, is those less well-off pensioners who are disabled or over 80, where the order provides for additional increases of £1 a week for a single pensioner and £1·50 for a couple, over and above the 7 per cent. Thus, the benefit for a pensioner couple over 80 will rise from £88·45 a week to £96·15 a week—an increase of 8·7 per cent., which is more than double the increase in the retail prices index.

I remind the House that this is the third year running in which, using the new pensioner premium structure introduced by the 1988 reforms, we have directed real extra support to those over pension age who are least well-off. Overall, by next April—when nearly 1 million people will gain from this year's real increase, either directly through income support or through increased entitlement to housing or community charge benefit—we shall in three years have steered an extra one third of a billion pounds in real extra benefit to less well-off pensioners, in a way which I believe the whole House will welcome and support.

Before leaving the uprating order, there are three other points on the income-related benefits on which I should touch. The first, which is, of course, also a point of particular although not exclusive concern to large numbers of less well-off people over pension age, is the further large increase in the special income support limits for those in residential care and nursing homes. Following the very important increase last year, which focused especially on the needs of those in nursing homes in the light of the survey information that we had received, the increase next April will give an additional £15 a week across virtually all the main categories and with an even larger increase, of £20 a week for two residential care categories—the very dependent elderly and the mentally handicapped—which together account for nearly two fifths of all residential care cases on income support.

The only increase smaller than the £15 is in what is known as the terminal illness category for nursing homes, for reasons that I explained to the House in my uprating statement, where we have instead thought it more appropriate to make, through the Department of Health, an additional grant of £1 million specifically directed to the funding of hospices. I am, of course, aware that these increases have not removed all controversy from this area of the benefit system. Indeed, if I had thought that, I would no doubt have been disabused of it by last night's debate, to which my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) so ably replied.

I think it can fairly be claimed that the increases are widely regarded as having appropriately addressed a number of important concerns. Certainly, at a cost of nearly £200 million, they are a further reflection of the Government's continuing commitment to disabled and elderly people in need of residential care.

Secondly, I should refer to one aspect of the uprating order which does not reflect the proposals in my uprating statement, which is in respect of the non-dependant deductions made from housing benefit, or income support for housing costs, in cases where the claimant's home contains another adult who could reasonably be expected to contribute to those costs. The present order contains the current structure and rates of those deductions, simply because the amendments that I outlined in the uprating statement require a separate set of amending regulations.

following statutory consultation with the local authority associations and referral to the Social Security Advisory Committee.

I expect to lay those regulations shortly, to provide, as I indicated in the uprating statement, for four rates of deduction, ranging from £4 to £18, to replace the present two, which are at £5·70 and £13·50. The effect would be to reduce the contribution expected from the least well-off non-dependants by over a quarter, while expecting somewhat more than at present from those with incomes of £130 a week or more. This has been generally thought to be fairer and more sensible than the present arrangements and, indeed, the Social Security Advisory Committee decided not to undertake a formal consultation.

Lastly on the income-related benefits, although for the most part not arising directly from the uprating order itself, I should remind the House of two other important changes that are taking place in April 1992, when we are introducing a new maintenance disregard of £15 a week into family credit, housing benefit, community charge benefit and the new disability working allowance, and at the same time reducing from 24 hours to 16 the number of hours of work required for someone to be able to qualify for family credit. Those changes will be of particular benefit to lone parents who wish to work, and I am glad to be able to announce today a further measure which I believe will contribute to making those changes even more effective.

I am providing a grant of £1 million to the National Council for One Parent Families to enable it to run courses for lone parents who are thinking of returning to work. The council has an impressive track record in this area and I am very pleased that the Government are joining it in this venture. Its work will be complementary to the services already provided by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment. I believe that that adds to what is a package of solid and practical help from which many lone parents and their children will stand to derive real benefit.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Before the Secretary of State leaves the issue of income support and income-related benefits, could he tell us what further progress has been made towards ensuring that those pensioners who are now eligible for income support take it up? I know that the right hon. Gentleman chased up this issue with the local authorities and that he has issued a circular on it.

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman has asked a fair question, but I cannot give him a report on the outcome of that effort—our biggest single effort—to encourage local authorities to use what the jargon terms their "housing benefit computers" to notify people aged over 80 who might be expected to gain. It is expected that those notices will go out early next year. We are well on the way towards achieving that notification, but obviously I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman what result has been achieved.

Nevertheless, I assure him and anybody else who is interested in such matters that I am not in the business of putting up benefit rates, as we have done, with a view to minimising the number of people who are helped by them. We shall do everything that we can, in that way or through more normal publicity in magazines and the specialist press, to ensure that people who are entitled to additional payments as a result of the increases actually get those additonal payments.

The other major area covered by the regulations before the House is the introduction next April of disability living allowance, which will embrace the existing mobility and attendance allowances for those of working age and at the same time extend help with mobility or care costs to some 300,000 disabled people who at present get no such help at all, and of disability working allowance, a completely new benefit to help those disabled people who wish to work to some extent but who feel inhibited from doing so by the present benefit system.

The number and bulk of the regulations perhaps indicates just what a major undertaking the new disability benefits represent, involving as they do not only the payment of benefit to substantial numbers of new beneficiaries but a comprehensive improvement of the way in which we assess and adjudicate benefits.

Taking the latter aspect first—it is certainly not the least important—the amendments to the adjudication regulations and claims and payments regulations indicate radical changes in the way in which we assess disability benefits. I highlight particularly the proposed self-assessment process, which is the key to both disability living allowance and disability working allowance and to the new regime for attendance allowance, which continues for the over-65s.

The new system changes the basis on which the benefits will be assessed to give disabled people themselves more say and an opportunity for the first time to tell us about their everyday needs, with the help and support of their carers and those professionals, including their GPs, who know most about their needs. That means that we will be able to minimise the requirement—a feature of the benefit arrangements often criticised—for claimants to be subjected to medical examinations. That objective will be widely supported.

In devising the new self-assessment procedures for the three benefits, we have consulted widely with disabled people and their organisations. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People deserves great credit for that. We have tested the leaflets and claim forms with disabled people and taken their advice on ways of improving the process. We are also consulting disabled people on the best ways of publicising the new benefits, using every possible means at our disposal.

In that regard, I echo the words that I uttered a few moments ago in reply to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen). The process of involving disabled people and their organisations in a wholly different way from what happened before, perhaps under either Administration, has been widely welcomed. It has brought a helpful response from disabled people and their organisations.

Mr. Allen: I will try not to bother the Secretary of State again. He has probably seen early-day motion 356, tabled in the names of my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) and myself, about the distribution of claim forms. The claim forms will be the property of the individuals. There is great anxiety that groups or welfare rights people who may assist individuals to fill in those forms will not be able to get hold of the forms. If they could get them, they could short-circuit the

[Mr. Allen]

process and assist the Department. Will the Secretary of State undertake to look at the early-day motion and comment on it constructively?

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman has asked a reasonable question in an extremely reasonable way; I do not mean to express the surprise that might be detected, but I am always anxious to give credit where it is due. He will no doubt have noticed my right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security Disabled People muttering in my ear as he spoke. My right hon. Friend assures me that there is no question of seeking to deny forms to those who feel that it would be helpful to have them to perform the role mentioned by the hon. Gentleman. My right hon. Friend will say more about it when he replies to the debate.

I assure the hon. Gentleman again, in line with what I have said twice in a sense, that we are in the business of doing everything that we reasonably can to help disabled people, elderly people or whomever we are seeking to help. If disability organisations, Age Concern, citizens advice bureaux or other organisations can be assisted by being provided with forms, I would not want to put any impediment in the way. That is the spirit in which we shall approach it.

As I was about to say before I was so politely interrupted, the other point for particular mention is the right of appeal to a new form of independent tribunal. All the new disability appeal tribunals—for appeals on disability matters on all three benefits—will include not only a legal chairman and a doctor but, most importantly, someone with practical experience in the needs of disabled people. Indeed, we intend that as many tribunals as possible will include a member who is himself or herself a disabled person.

The complexity of the next set of regulations, on disability living allowance, arises from our decision to introduce the new benefit in a single step, unlike the many years of phasing which occurred when mobility allowance was started in 1976. I do not want to go over the difficulties or the sense of unfairness that the phasing caused, but I am sure that our decision to introduce the new regulations in one go is right.

The first and most important function of the regulations is therefore to provide for a smooth transition from the old benefits to the new disability living allowance. More than 600,000 people getting mobility allowance and about 300,000 people under 65 getting attendance allowance will all be automatically transferred to the appropriate rate of disability living allowance. If I emphasise that it is because I hope that it will help to allay finally any misplaced concerns about the position of existing claimants. There is no question of the transfer being used as an opportunity to review and remove or downrate anyone's existing benefit entitlement.

The other "technical" regulations, the consequential provisions regulations, cover the consequences throughout the social security system of the introduction of DLA and DWA. I draw the House's particular attention to the fact that people on income support, who from April qualify for one of the new rates of DLA, will automatically get title to the disability premium in their income support. That means that someone who may currently be getting £39·65 in income support at this year's benefit rates could from April 1992 get £71·80 in income support and disability living allowance, an increase of around £30 a week for several thousand of the least well-off disabled people.

What might be called the "main" sets of regulations in that area are the disability living allowance, disability working allowance and attendance allowance benefit regulations. Taking disability working allowance first, the regulations are a voluminous bundle from which I draw particular attention to the radical new functional disability test which underpins DWA. I hope that hon. Members who, understandably, in debates during the passage of the Act expressed concerns about how the Department might be planning to adjudicate the definition of

"disadvantaged in getting a job"

will gain reassurance from what the regulations provide.

The functional test will be set out in a simple-to-answer claim form in which all that the claimant has to do is tick the boxes which apply to him. Most claimants, particularly people making the transition from incapacity back to work, will not have to fill in even that simple form. All that we will ask for is a straightforward declaration that the claimant has a disability which puts him at a disadvantage in getting a job; we think that in such cases the supporting evidence from the disability benefit or recent incapacity benefit is sufficient confirmation of the person's disadvantage.

Disability working allowance is a totally new depature in social security. It provides a benefit not only for those who can work but whose disability prevents them from achieving their full earnings potential, but for those on the road to recovery from long-term illness who need some short-term help to re-enter the labour market. The majority of people who will claim disability working allowance could not afford to take a job at present, to put the matter very clearly. The aim of DWA is to change that.

I acknowledge that it will inevitably take some time for that large change to work through: it will take some time for disabled people to start taking DWA into account when deciding whether to seek a job; and, because it provides a new opportunity for disabled people, it is bound to take time to build up the case load.

I assure the House that we shall monitor progress closely to see what we can do to ensure that disabled people are aware of the new opportunities for independence that the new benefit will offer—my right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People may want to say a word more on that. If matters come to light which we can tackle and which will help to make the benefit even more effective, we shall consider them.

Disability living allowance regulations and the accompanying attendance allowance regulations are, happily, much less lengthy. That is largely because the conditions of entitlement for disability living allowance are clearly set out in the primary legislation.

The regulations, however, also give effect to important improvements beyond those contained in the Bill that we published last autumn, including changes for children who are in hospital for up to 12 weeks, and the higher rate of benefit for severely mentally handicapped people with severe behaviour disorder—10,000 of whom can now look forward to £73·65 a week from DLA—or rather more than £90 per week in recognition of their disability needs if they are on income support.

I have necessarily taken a good deal of the time of the House in describing the content and purpose of the orders.

Let me conclude by saying simply this. The orders themselves are inevitably often complex and technical—sometimes wearisomely so, even to those of us who are enthusiasts in such matters—but underneath the technicalities lie some very straightforward points.

We are honouring our commitment to 10 million retirement pensioners. We are directing real extra help, over and above that, to nearly 1 million pensioners who are among the least well off.

We are making the third increase in a year in help to all families with children; we are reinforcing the growing success of family credit for low-income families in work, and not least for lone parents; and we are carrying forward a programme of improvement and reform of disability benefits, from which hundreds of thousands of disabled people will gain.

In agreeing these orders, the House will have done a good day's work.

5.21 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): We have just listened to a speech by the Secretary of State which was, as he said, quite detailed and technical, but was also quite effusive, especially in his peroration, when he set out how the Government had carried out all their commitments, how much expenditure had increased and how generous the Government have been to this, that or the other group with regard to the minutiae of social security provisions.

It was the sort of speech which is listened to with respectful deference, if, I suspect, with a measure of blind incomprehension on the Government Benches, and it will no doubt earn congratulations or plaudits later in the debate from Conservative Members, who will say how well he has done for the various groups, with minute improvements eulogised out of all proportion.

I sometimes wonder whether I am the only person who finds these debates predictably sentimental and not a little hypocritical. The truth is that the Secretary of State, having commended the measures to us as not only decent but even generous, would be horror-stricken if he, or any members of his immediate family or any of his hon. Friends who will be supporting him, had to live on the benefit standard of living that he enthuses about. I do not suppose that most of them know, or have any understanding of, what that standard of living is.

I suspect that the truth is that most Conservative Members would rather be dead than seen claiming benefit in a social security office. It is that lack of identification with the victims of our society which I regret seems to give these debates such an unreal air of ministerial mutual congratulation. That is a pity, because the standard of living of about 17 million people in our society depends, technically at least, on the result of this debate.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Does my hon. Friend remember a former Conservative Member of Parliament who was challenged to live on the same amount of money that one would receive in income support? He lost his seat—I am not suggesting that that was a result of the experiment, which was shown on television. He found that it was impossible to manage on that sum of money, which ran out before seven days were up. Are any Conservative Members willing to try to live on the state pension plus income support? If they are—perhaps the Ministers or one of their Back-Bench supporters would like to try—I should certainly like to know.

Mr. Meacher: I should like to know, too. My hon. Friend raises a significant matter. We know that Mr. Matthew Parris tried to live for one week—I give him credit for trying—on such a sum. At the end of the week, he had a far better understanding of the appalling standard of living to which we in the House condemn about one in seven of our fellow citizens for months or for years on end.

If hon. Members had to live for a week or two on income support, I do not think that it would remain at the present level. No one can keep themselves together, eat healthily, get the basic clothing that they need, or participate as an active citizen in society, on £42 a week.

I would be the first to admit that the numbers that I quoted—17 million—are so enormous that any substantial or significant improvement in their living standards could not be brought about overnight or by any realistic adjustment of one year's uprating orders.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Let us suppose that the hon. Gentleman is right, for the sake of argument. Is it not the case that he has no proposals to do anything substantial about it, because his proposals relate only to child benefit and pensions, and not to any other social security benefit? Can we have that on the record, please?

Mr. Meacher: One thing that we would have done differently, and that we shall do differently, is that we shall not allow the poorest in our society not to share in the rising living standards of the rest of the Community. That applies to 10 million pensioners and to people on income support, which is not merely extremely low, but has fallen steadily as a proportion of average earnings in the past few years. That is unforgivable. I would be the first to admit that, under the last Labour Government, supplementary benefit was not a prince's ransom. However, it is unforgivable to allow it to fall further, and not to use the vast extra resources available to the Government through North sea oil, privatisation assets—and the money that they gave away in taxation to the richest instead—to give more to the poorest.

Mr. Newton: I shall try to approach my intervention in the same way as the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen), and simply try to establish a fact.

An important development seems to follow from what the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) has said. I previously understood that his reference to uprating by the increase in earnings or prices was confined only to the pension area of the benefit system. The implication of what he has just said is that uprating factors of earnings or prices—whichever is the larger—would be applied throughout the benefit system, including to income-related benefits. Can he confirm that?

Mr. Meacher: It is, indeed, confined to pensions, but if the Secretary of State looked at the experience of what happened to supplementary benefit under the last Labour Government, he would see that it did not fall. It is in the discretion of the Government. The Labour Government used their discretion to ensure that the poorest at least maintained their living standards. We intend to do that again, although it is not a commitment like the one that we

[Mr. Meacher]

made on pensions. We intend to reduce the number of people on income support—we certainly do not intend to let income support levels fall further behind.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): I wanted to intervene before the Secretary of State did so, with regard to what the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) said. He was the candidate in Ashfield in 1979. The blue posters that he placed in windows at that time talked about cutting public expenditure, particularly on social security. He stood on doorsteps saying that the Labour Government were pouring money into people's pockets.

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend exposes the hypocrisy of some Conservative Members' interventions.

Our case against the Government is not that a £2 a week increase in pensions is a penny-pinching and niggardly exercise—although it is—but that in the past 12 years the Government have consistently and deliberately pursued a policy of pushing down the poor even further and penalising them for their poverty. It is not that the Government have tried but failed to redress the cancer of poverty in our midst, nor even that they did not try, but that they actively made the problem worse, either by indifference or by design.

They made it worse by indifference in 1986, when 8·25 million people were on income support and the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) declared—I have never forgotten his words:

"Poverty is just not an issue".

They made it worse by indifference in 1987, when the Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Moore) declared that poverty had ceased to exist, despite the fact that 8·25 million people were still on income support.

The Government made matters worse by design in 1988, when 7·5 million people were on income support and the so-called reforms of the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) cut benefits by more than £1 billion a year. They are making matters worse by design in 1991 when, once again, 8·25 million people are on income support and the Government say that their first priority is to cut income tax by a further 1p in the pound.

Our charge is that, under this Government the poor are "the disappeared ones"—tolerated so long as they are invisible and resented if they obtrusively sleep in shop fronts or badger pedestrians for money in subways, or if their poverty and unemployment prove a cause of inner-city disorder or riots, as the chief constable of the West Midlands police claimed a month ago.

Our charge is that, after all the small print and technicalities of the orders that we are debating are set in place, Christmas will still be typical. On current trends, 50 or 60 pensioners will probably die of hypothermia in the next month, nearly 1,000 more people a day will join the income support queues, and a further 100 or more 16 to 17-year-olds a day will probably find themselves not only without further education, jobs or training but without benefit and often starving. It is hoped that, so long as they all do it quietly, no one will notice.

Our charge against the Government is that none of that need be so. Let us consider each of the groups that will be affected by the orders. Had Labour's link with earnings not been broken by the Government in 1980, single pensioners would celebrate a pension next April not of £54 a week but of nearly £70 a week, and married pensioners would receive not £86 a week but £111 a week.

Mr. Tim Smith: Where would the money come from?

Mr. Meacher: That is exactly the point that I am coming to. Every time we suggest the slightest improvement, Tory Members ask where the money will come from because, deep down, they do not really want to make improvements. They claim that improvements cannot be afforded. May I call in aid an important witness who has stated unequivocally that they could be afforded? Speaking about the financing of the state pensions framework which the Government inherited from Labour —that is, the earnings-related increase in the basic state pension plus SERPS—he said——

Mr. Newton: Who is he?

Mr. Meacher: I shall come to that. He said:

"There is no immediate cause for alarm. The main growth in pensions expenditure has come from improved benefits, not more claimants. Over the next 20 to 25 years, there is expected to be virtually no growth in the number of claimants, because of the low birth rate in the 1920s and 1930s. Indeed, the number of people over pension age is actually expected to fall as a proportion of the whole population, from about 17·5 per cent. now to 16·7 per cent. at the end of this century. Even as a proportion of the working population, which is what really matters, the numbers over pension age will be fairly stable until 2010 AD. So, unless decisions are taken to improve pensions further in real terms during the next 25 years, there is no major problem of finance."

I think that that person will carry great weight with the Secretary of State, because it was Sir Michael Partridge, his permanent secretary.

A Labour Government would have ensured that pensioners enjoyed their fair share of rising community living standards, whereas the Government deliberately decided to deprive them of it. According to a parliamentary answer that I received just a couple of weeks ago, this year alone pensioners have lost £5·7 billion as a result of that link being broken. One must conclude that the Government have cruelly neglected pensioners. Even on today's issue—the protection of occupational pension rights arising from the Mirror Group Newspapers scandal —there has been a deafening silence from the Secretary of State, who is rapidly becoming the Government's "invisible man".

The right hon. Gentleman is still dithering on the regulations on self-investment and on disclosure. Millions of pensioners whom the Government have cheated of a decent state pension are now deeply worried about the security of their occupational pensions, yet the right hon. Gentleman has been as silent as the grave.

What does the right hon. Gentleman propose for the unemployed? I do not think that he even mentioned them in his speech—if he did so, I did not catch it—yet, according to documents that were leaked about a week ago, the Government expect unemployment figures to rise to 2·9 million next year—that is, if they have not already reached that figure on a proper count, as many of us suspect. Our charge against the Government is not just the indifference to the unemployed shown by the right hon. Gentleman today, but the vendetta that the Government have waged against the unemployed in the past 12 years.

A few months ago, I tabled a parliamentary question asking the right hon. Gentleman to list the cuts in benefit to the unemployed in the past dozen years and the annual

savings to the Government as a result of each cut. I can now tell the House that 11 separate cuts were made in unemployment benefit, and the total annual saving to the Government from all those cuts is now £1·5 billion a year. If Labour's benefits framework had been preserved, the unemployed would receive £1·5 billion more than they receive at present.

It is bad enough running an economic policy that makes the unemployed bear the price of the Government's crass mismanagement of the economy, but it is unforgivable gratuitously to force them down into poverty by repeatedly cutting the benefits for which they have paid through their own national insurance contributions.

As we know, the Prime Minister last night rejected the social chapter of the EMU treaty on the ground that it would be uncompetitive for British industry. He confirmed that again today. What he meant was that the Government are now placing the burden of competing squarely on the shoulders of British workers. Why is it that, under this Government, we can compete only if we make the terms and conditions of British workers—and those out of work—worse than they are even for Spanish, Portuguese and Greek workers?

Mr. Tim Smith: They will not get jobs.

Mr. Meacher: The unemployment rate in those countries, with the exception of Spain, is below that of this country, where it is still rising rapidly. Why is it that the employers in every other Community state can turn a profit while ensuring proper social rights and benefits for their employees, whereas in Britain we must have poverty wages, topped up by social security through family credit, before employers can make a profit? That is the worst way to compete. It is not competition based on efficiency, productivity or product innovation, but lower wages for those in work and lower benefits for those out of work.

No wonder the Prime Minister rejected the social dimension when unemployment benefit today in Italy is about £60 a week, in Germany it is £125 per week, in France it is £147 a week, in the Netherlands it is £211 a week, and in Denmark it is £271 a week.

Perhaps the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith), who likes to intervene, can give the House the level of unemployment benefit that he and his hon. Friends intend to impose on the 2·5 million to 3 million unemployed people in this country. Does he know what the level of unemployment benefit is in this country? Would he like to tell the House? Would the Secretary of State or indeed any Conservative Member like to tell us the level of unemployment benefit? Perhaps they need a note from those who can provide the information. It is significant that not a single Tory Member——

Mr. Newton: The hon. Gentleman has used the figure on a number of occasions and knows perfectly well that if we are talking about the most relevant rate—probably the income support rate—it is £39·65 per week at present. One fact to which he has not adverted is that many of the countries he mentioned have far more restrictive rules on the relation of such benefit to contribution payments. Many people who receive help here would not receive anything like the rates that the hon. Gentleman gave.

Mr. Meacher: That is an interesting point. Without looking into the full details—which I certainly intend to do—I should be very surprised if the right hon. Gentleman were right. After he and his right hon. Friends have imposed the actively-seeking-work rule, the restart procedure and the extension to two years for the contribution requirement, and after they have knocked out benefit for university and polytechnic students, I should be extremely surprised if what he said was correct. I was referring not to income support levels, but to unemployment benefit, which is a national insurance benefit for which people have paid and to which, under insurance principles, they have a right. It is perfectly clear that not a single Tory in the Chamber today knows the figure.

Mr. Newton: If the hon. Gentleman wants to proceed with this discussion, I can tell him that the rate for a single person is currently £41·40.

Mr. Meacher: I am pleased that the Secretary of State has finally tumbled to the figure: he is right in saying that it is £41·40. It was clear than none of his hon. Friends, certainly none of those behind him—those who are to impose that level on the people of this country—know what the figure was. The rate is indeed £41, when the average wage today is about £300. That is not just slightly lower than every other EC country, but five or six times lower than that of some of our competitors.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): My hon. Friend was right to say that unemployment benefit is paid for from national insurance contributions. Under the Government's rotten legislation, a person whose employer claims that he or she left work without reason—for example, a woman working at night who feared an attack and who left work without an excuse that the employer found valid—could have his or her unemployment benefit reduced for up to 26 weeks. In practice, unemployment benefit offices cut the benefit for the total 26 weeks.

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I imagine that the Secretary of State was deeply embarrassed when, as a Minister, he introduced that legislation in Committee. I credit him with being embarrassed because it was iniquitous to increase from six weeks, initially to 13 and then to 26 weeks, the period when such people are not entitled to unemployment benefit and to reduce income support by 40 per cent. below the extremely low levels that I have already mentioned.

Such a policy does not just provide a disincentive, but places an intolerable penalty on some of the most helpless victims in society. That policy is dependent not on "industrial gross misconduct"—the imposing, solemn words used—but on the say-so of the employer. If, for any reason, the employer has a grudge against the employee, the employer's word will be taken by the DSS, not the employee's. My hon. Friend was entirely right to raise that issue.

We often hear about the Prime Minister having suffered dole hell when he was 19. What a pity that, when he became a Social Security Minister, along with the present Secretary of State for Social Security, he imposed the rule that created a much worse dole hell for those who came after him. When the Prime Minister left work in order to look after his father and cared for him for a time—a creditable thing to do—he sought to claim, and received, unemployment benefit. For the sort of reasons outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr.

[Mr. Meacher]

Cryer), I doubt whether the Prime Minister would receive unemployment benefit today. If he did, he would probably be disqualified from receiving it for 26 weeks.

No one is suggesting that differences of the order of magnitude to which I have referred can be made good in a single uprating order. I am not saying that sufficient changes to make our system comparable with those in the EC can come overnight. Our charge against the Government is that, instead of seeking to close the gap, during the past 12 years they have deliberately widened it by a massive degree. That is what we oppose.

We have one of the lowest levels of child benefit in the EC. Despite what the Secretary of State said as he tried to make excuses by talking about alternative ways of providing help to families, the orders do nothing to remedy the losses to families and children that resulted from three years of Tory freeze. For the second and subsequent children, those losses amount to more than £2 a week. Despite the rhetoric about choice, the Secretary of State and his hon. Friends have done nothing to provide mothers with increased opportunities to work and paths to independence, which is what they want.

It is not enough to increase child benefit; mothers want the opportunity to be independent and stand on their own two feet. The Government have made no attempt to secure nationwide child care provision for working mothers. In addition, the Secretary of State has made no attempt to remove the poverty trap whereby if a mother stays home on income support, the mortgage interest on her home is paid, but if she works and receives family credit, the interest is not paid. As a result, many mothers are often forced back into unemployment and dependence.

The uprating orders are equally disappointing for disabled people. I listened carefully to what the Secretary of State said and I do not disagree with a good deal of it. However, I disagree with the fact that, after 12 years, the Government have not implemented a strategy of steadily working towards a comprehensive disability income benefit. That is what we should have had, but instead we have had 10 years of procrastination because the Government did absolutely nothing until 1990. I cannot blame the right hon. Gentleman personally for that. Reshuffled minutiae is not an unfair description of disability living allowance and disability working allowance.

The legislation was amended on Report to allow the affirmative procedure, and it is absurd that we have not been given proper time to debate these long and quite complex technical documents. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South said, the Government were determined to have them debated today, and documents have been pushed into the debate before the instruments have been examined by a statutory instruments Committee. That is an abuse of the House, and it is impossible in an hour or two of open debate such as this to go into the detail of the orders in the way that is required.

Before I run out of time, I should like to raise some of the key issues to which we expect full answers from the Minister. Will provision be made for visiting officers to help claimants who ask for assistance to complete the self-assessment forms? Will the disability working allowance claim packs clearly alert claimants to the fact that if they delay they may lose benefit? Why have several commonly occurring disabilities been excluded in devising the DWA tests? The Minister looks puzzled. Urinary incontinence is one and respiratory disorders are another. Will there be at least one specialist benefit adviser in each local office to deal with the likely huge influx of inquiries about DLA? Will the Government introduce rules to prevent disabled people from losing benefit if they serve, as I hope they will, on disability appeal tribunals?

The debate should be about a major further step towards comprehensive disability income. Every time that we debate disability benefit, which is a huge gap in our system, that is what we should discuss. Nothing more starkly reveals the parsimony of the Government than the fact that we are debating a £1·50 a week increase in the pathetically inadequate £10 lower care component of the DLA.

The last and biggest group of those covered by the orders are those on income support, and here, more than anywhere, the Government and especially the right hon. Gentleman should be ashamed. The Minister looks terribly tired. No doubt he finds tedious my repetition of these facts. I repeat them, because they get worse all the time.

In 1979, there were 4,400,000 people on supplementary benefit. I agree that that figure was too high. There are now 8,300,000 people on income support. When unemployment rises, as the Government expect and forecast, to 2·9 million next year, the total number on income support will rise to about 8,800,000. That will be the highest number for 50 years of those forced to live on the poverty line. That is the Government's memorial after 11 years of rampant Thatcherism and one year of the classless society. In that year alone, the number of people on income support has risen by more than 1 million.

The Prime Minister speaks about the power to choose. Where is the power to choose on £42·50 a week? One can scarcely survive on that, let alone have the power to choose healthy food or essential clothing. It is time for the House to ask on what basis it is right for one seventh of our population to be paid £42 a week when they cannot work, while the average worker receives £300 a week, MPs £600 a week, Ministers £1,200 a week and many directors more than £5,000 a week.

What makes the situation far worse is that the Government have pushed a record number of people to below the poverty line, a line which is worth less as a proportion of average earnings than ever before. The right hon. Gentleman and the Prime Minister, who as I have said was a Social Security Minister in 1986, have produced a new category of poverty. They have pushed more than 1 million people below the poverty line, below £42 a week.

A parliamentary answer to me of 21 October showed that, as a direct result of the right hon. Gentleman's policies, more than 1 million people have been forced below the poverty line because of deductions of income support due to the poll tax, the social fund, and rent and fuel arrears. In addition, again as a direct result of the Act that the right hon. Gentleman and the Prime Minister together placed on the statute book, it is estimated that there are now about 115,000 16 to 17-year-olds with no education, no training, no jobs and no benefit entitlement. Many of them have not eaten for several days.

By contrast to these miserable orders, the next Labour Government will immediately raise the pension by £5 and £8 a week and the recipients, without deduction, will

include those on income support. We shall restore the link with earnings so that pensioners will get their proper share of rising living standards, and we shall consolidate Labour's SERPS which already grants an entitlement of more than £40 a week for someone retiring on average earnings this year.

We shall restore to child benefit what was lost during the three years of Tory freeze, and it will also be paid without deduction to those on income support. We shall provide pathways to independence for lone mothers, restore benefit entitlement to 16 and 17-year-olds, introduce a minimum wage of £130 a week and implement the social charter. For the 17 million who are the subject of these orders, that day cannot come too soon.

5.57 pm

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): I went to Moscow for the weekend. In that city where the Soviet Union was slowly disintegrating I saw much poverty. Many people were queuing for food and I saw people with insufficient clothing for a temperature of minus 15 deg C. I also saw much unhappiness. As is the way with disintegrating socialist and communist economies, the guidebook took a rather different view. It was only two years old, but it painted a glowing picture of all the benefits that the communist and socialist system offered its people. It said much about the happiness of people. It showed happy faces and splendid statues and clean streets without queues. It gave not promises but statements, which it claimed to be accurate, about plenty of food and consumer goods.

When I listened to the overlong and turgid speech by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) I was reminded of that guidebook. He paints a picture that bears no semblance of realism to the United Kingdom today. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman's feelings and inadequacies were encapsulated most beautifully in his question about where the money would come from and by his claim that that was some sort of Tory threat. The great weakness of the socialist system is that it has no money at all. All the hon. Gentleman's grand statements about what the next Labour Government will do—they will not, because a Labour Government will not be elected—will come to naught because there will be insufficient funding to do what the hon. Gentleman anticipates and would dearly love to do.

The hon. Gentleman's statement also displayed his great lack of understanding of the statistics—either that, or I have to conclude that he was putting before the House statements that were not absolutely valid because they were so selective that they did not give a proper picture. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman does not know that statistics have to be soundly based before one can use them. For example, he spoke about unemployment in Greece, but how does he feel about the 1 million mythical olive trees that the common agricultural policy so sweetly supports because Greece has reported to Brussels that they are in need of being set aside and nurtured?

Statistics are only as good as the base from which they are taken. That is why I suggest that, when the hon. Member for Oldham, West claimed that we had the lowest level of child benefit in the European Community, although he was not exactly misleading the House, he should perhaps also have said that we have a significant scheme of family credit that is not shared by any other member of the European Community.

When the hon. Gentleman spoke about high unemployment payments and the levels of funding supplied by the state to the unemployed by other European countries, why did not he also add that in those member states there is no wife's pension, so that unemployment payments have to go towards providing a larger pension than the state provides? He spoke about the social charter, although he did not use the word "harmonisation", but why does not he admit that in Denmark, for example, men and women alike have a mandatory retirement age of 67? Why is it that he selects statistics that support only his own most abnormally inaccurate statements?

It is difficult for the hon. Gentleman, because he is trying to pursue an untenable case. I saw my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench look surprised when the hon. Gentleman spoke about the young being without a job or anything else, because he overlooked the largest youth training programme in the European Community.

The hon. Gentleman said about the elderly—this was his largest misunderstanding and cannot have been by accident—that people have paid and therefore have a right to have back in equal kind. I must correct that large and crucial misunderstanding. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will have better statistics on this than I do, but surely to goodness the hon. Member for Oldham, West understands that, as we are a rapidly aging population, the people over 65 or 60 now, whom we deem to be elderly and who are of pensionable age, are taking more back from the state than they ever put in. I do not deride them for that—it is merely a question of understanding that there is no equal balance in our society between the amount that one puts in and the amount that one gets back. That rapidly aging population is placing an ever larger burden on the younger people who are earning. *[Interruption.]*

I see that this accurate statement wholly eludes Opposition Front-Bench Members, who are merely laughing and jeering at it. It is a pity that they are doing so, because with a rapidly aging population what we need above all is intelligent and careful planning of social security benefits rather than the mediocre statements that we get from them.

Mr. Meacher: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Miss Nicholson: The Opposition Front-Bench spokesman has had his say, but I will give way to him because I know that he will merely trot out more nonsense for me to knock down.

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Lady is so anxious to lay about her, claiming misapprehensions, that she seems rather to have overlooked the obvious point that it is an insurance system, that there is such a thing as a contributory principle, and that the problem with the national insurance system is not the increasing number of elderly people taking more out of it. The Government increased national insurance contributions from 6·5 to 9 per cent.—that is, by 38 per cent. If there is a problem with the national insurance system, it is that the Government have spent billions bribing people to take up personal pensions and at the same time have ended the Exchequer supplement, which was 18 per cent. of the total income in 1979. Perhaps

[Mr. Meacher]

the hon. Lady needs a bit of a lesson about the nature of the national insurance system before she makes accusations against others.

Miss Nicholson: It was unparliamentary to claim that the Government have bribed the electorate, and it was not accurate either. It should not have been said. The hon. Member for Oldham, West has again picked selective statistics to support his untenable premise. He wholly overlooks the enormous investment in the national health service and other benefits and the way in which the elderly press heavily on the younger people who are putting the money into the system. My statements are accurate, and I should be happy to take the hon. Gentleman out to coffee afterwards to explain the matter to him. Exactly the same phenomenon occurred, a little ahead of us, in the United States.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about the social charter, or, more accurately, the social chapter that was taken out of last night's treaty, but he overlooked entirely the fact that the social chapter delineates gaps in the social service provisions of member states which do not exist here. For example, other member states do not have a national health service. There are many more benefits that our people have but that the hon. Gentleman would not dream of bringing to the attention of the House.

As the hon. Gentleman rightly said I would, I warmly welcome the statement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. It is good, for example, that income support is going up to 7 per cent. and I am particularly pleased, having served on the Committee considering the Local Government Finance Bill, which sets up the council tax, that those on income support will keep the payments given for the 20 per cent. poll tax, or community charge, payment and will not, on top of that, pay anything towards the council tax. That is an excellent thing, and I am delighted that it should be so.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West spoke disparagingly about the disabled benefits that my right hon. Friend announced today. With characteristic quietness, my right hon. Friend made a statement towards the end of his speech that highlights the purpose of these benefits. He said that they gave new opportunities for independence and that has been the key to both the disability working allowance and the disabled living allowance.

The disability working allowance is an important move forward. I should like to see it matched by something else —disability rights in employment. In a report, the Select Committee on Employment, whose meeting I am missing so that I can contribute to this important debate, asked the Secretary of State for Employment to look into such a concept. The disability working allowance will empower disabled people who wish to work to go to work and, one hopes, to reach their full potential. I am glad that it applies also to those with long-term illnesses.

We have a long way to go when personnel managers still do not allow someone an interview if he mentions on his application form some disability. Even something as minor as a small fit of epilepsy may disqualify somebody for interview. From the social security point of view, the disability working allowance, far from being something small and modest, is an important marker. I hope and believe that it will give the disabled new opportunities for independence, as my right hon. Friend suggested.

I do not consider a comprehensive disability allowance to be a desirable goal, because it would reflect a paternalistic attitude. It would not empower disabled people but rather depress and marginalise them, telling them that they are different and so must have a comprehensive disability allowance. Far more important is to give people the ability to follow the path that they wish. In this instance, I particularly welcome the disability working allowance.

I am glad to learn that there will be a self-assessment programme which will again help disabled people, who may feel different from the rest of society, to take charge of their own fate. That is a crucial part of the proposal that we are debating. I am also glad to hear that those on mobility allowance, for example, will be able to transfer automatically to the disabled living allowance.

I cannot help but remind my right hon. Friend the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People of the excellence of the independent living fund. Only yesterday I sent him a letter congratulating him on introducing that excellent measure which will not yet have reached him. Some of my friends who are active in various areas of disability are still concerned about the independent living fund's short life, and I again ask him to consider that once more. It is an extraordinarily positive measure, which is immensely important.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on the grant for the National Council for One Parent Families. It is difficult for one-parent families to learn skills which will enable them to bring up their children in the way that I am sure they would wish and the grant is excellent.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West accused Conservative Members of being hypocritical and sentimental. That is surprising from a man who was a Minister in a Labour Government when the Christmas bonus was denied for two years to some of those in greatest need.

The hon. Gentleman talks about the victims of society. Conservative Members do not see their fellow citizens as victims; we see them as citizens of the United Kingdom and people whom we wish to assist to achieve their potential. Throughout the hon. Gentleman's too lengthy speech, I detected not just the outdated guidebook to a defunct socialist philosophy, but a hefty dollop of hypocrisy and unacceptable sentimentality. I would not have confidence in his ability to bring home the British bacon were I a member of British society who needed help.

Finally, I do not want to let the Minister off too lightly, so when he replies will he be kind enough to tell me how he will treat the transitional payments on housing benefit from next April onwards?

6.13 pm

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson). I was interested in what she said, particularly towards the end of her remarks. I agree that some of the recent changes in the area of disability have been commendable. The Government have moved quite a distance in a short space of time. The introduction of the new living allowance and disability working allowance scheme is another welcome improvement.

However, I profoundly disagree with the hon. Lady when she says that a comprehensive disability benefit would not be sensible in principle. I am sure that she is wrong about that. Those who study such matters have certainly persuaded me that it is the only sensible and fair way in which to deal with disability in the long term. I do not doubt that it would be more expensive, but we must move towards the situation where people can be fully compensated financially for the physical and learning effects of their disability.

Individuals need the help and support that is tailored to their needs and is right for them, so that they can play a full and proper part in the community in which they live. I am sure that that is a principle on which we should make progress. It may take time to achieve, but I should be much happier with that general approach. The hon. Lady seemed to be saying that she did not want to move in that direction, which I think is a mistake on her part. However, I agree with much of what she said towards the end of her speech.

I certainly agree that the grant that has been announced for the National Council for One Parent Families is extremely welcome. A retraining grant will be of considerable assistance to many single-parent families. However, there are between 300,000 and 400,000 single-parent families in Britain and £1 million, welcome though it is, will not go too far towards dealing with the sort of difficulties that single parents have in trying to fight their way back into the employment market.

I endorse the criticism made by the hon. Member for Oldham, West with regard to the disability living allowance and disability working allowance regulations. It is regrettable that the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments has not had a chance to consider them. The draft regulations amount to 80 or 90 pages and are fiendishly complicated. I have never been a Minister, but the Minister must be able to tell the business managers that he will not go before the House without at least the protection of such regulations having been considered by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments. If he has not, he should quickly arrogate that power to himself. Without such consideration, it is difficult for us to be sure that the regulations are intra vires. These are important and complicated regulations.

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Nicholas Scott): The hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) raised that matter, and it seems to be a slightly running issue. Three sets of the regulations referred to by the hon. Gentleman are subject to the negative procedure. There is no requirement to send them to the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, but it is always open to the Opposition to pray against them. That they have done, so the proper procedure has been followed.

Mr. Kirkwood: I entirely take the Minister's point. I was confusing those regulations with some others, because I happened to be dealing with the lack of adequate time for the disability working regulations. As the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) said, dangers and difficulties arise as a result of the shortage of time that is available to consider the regulations. The Minister is right. Scrutiny by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments applies to other affirmative regulations.

Mr. Allen *rose*——

Mr. Kirkwood: I am obviously considered to be in need of some help.

Mr. Allen: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not accept the Minister's explanation too readily. In Committee, an Under-Secretary of State agreed to a debate on the Floor of the House under the affirmative procedure. It was not the Committee's understanding, nor, I am sure, was it in the Under-Secretary of State's heart, that those crucial regulations would be bodged together with the uprating statement so that there would be insufficient time to discuss them.

Mr. Kirkwood: That is helpful. I do not want to make a meal of this, but the point has obviously been well made. If Ministers were tempted to give undertakings to the Committee, on which unfortunately I could not serve because I was dealing with other orders such as the Scottish seed potato order at the time, what has happened is a bit below the belt. I hope that the Minister will reassure us that the fact that some of these orders have not been considered by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments will not happen again.

Mr. Scott: The hon. Gentleman knows, as I do, that these arrangements are not made by Ministers. The intense interest displayed on the Opposition Benches tonight about these matters hardly suggests that their desire to debate them is being frustrated.

Mr. Kirkwood: The Minister may be surprised to learn that I am not responsible for what is said by Her Majesty's official Opposition. However, if hon. Members had been given more time to study these complicated regulations, more of them might have realised how adversely they affect some of their constituents and would have made it their business to be here. This complex system of social security is beginning to get out of hand.

Mr. Allen: Conservative Members say that this is a stupid procedural diversion. The Disability Alliance, Mencap and other disability groups are outraged at the way in which these four affirmative orders have been spatchcocked on to the normal debate. Although Conservative Members have had a lot to say on the subject, in Standing Committee E the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe) said:

"The effect of the amendments"—

in other words, an amendment to the Bill in order to make these affirmative orders—

"would be that all regulations under the Bill would be subject to the affirmative procedure."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 24 January 1991; c. 268.]

Opposition Members and all the organisations which were present at the proceedings were under the clear impression that all affirmative orders would be the subject of a separate debate so that these very important matters could be gone through line by line, if necessary. That is not the case when they are added on to the normal uprating statement, as has happened today.

Mr. Kirkwood: I am grateful for that helpful clarification. I had not originally intended to make a great issue of the fact, but it is true to say that the pressure groups that study these matters in great detail are incensed at the way in which the orders have been introduced. In his comprehensive speech, the hon. Member for Oldham,

[Mr. Kirkwood]

West was able to touch on only some of the detailed and complicated matters that may receive scant attention tonight.

Mr. Haynes: I am a bit surprised at the Minister. Social Security Ministers are ducking about all over the place. They are not accepting their responsibilities. My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) has being doing a first-class job on the Committee. When I have been in the Chamber, he has raised the matter regularly with Mr. Speaker. He is appalled at what is going on; the orders have not been considered by the Committee. My hon. Friend does not raise the matter just for the fun of it; he raises it because of its serious nature. Ministers make excuses in their own interests, but they are responsible for these matters and they should do their job properly. Incidentally, the Minister of State knows that he has got a real pressure group round his neck when it comes to disability and the disabled. He knows what I am talking about.

Mr. Kirkwood: These are difficult interventions to deal with. I am not responsible for what is said by Her Majesty's official Opposition. Even less am I responsible for what is said by the Minister of State. Nevertheless, I subscribe entirely to the hon. Gentleman's helpful intervention.

Self-assessment may lead to difficulties. To the extent that it avoids medical bureaucracy and so on, it is an improvement, but self-assessment is a radical change. The pressure groups want a clear assurance that they will be able to ask, as of right, for a visit from the visiting officer —at least in the initial stages so that the new self-assessment procedure can be carried through correctly. By 3 February 1992, we know that all fresh claims for attendance allowance and mobility allowance will be treated as claims for disability living allowance. One can imagine, in such a relatively short period, the delay and uncertainty that will be caused if the transitional arrangements are not properly set out.

Even with the help of highly motivated and expert Benefits Agency staff, I cannot see how, with the best will in the world, that can be achieved in an ordered way. Correct information must be made available to people who claim the new allowances. If it is not provided, it may prejudice some of the other benefits to which they are now entitled. I am told that the Under-Secretary of State gave an undertaking in the House of Commons that steps would be taken to warn claimants about the possible loss of benefits. Failure to do so now would be a breach of promise. I hope, therefore, that appropriate information packs will be made available so that benefits are not inadvertently lost.

A number of the regulations have given rise to concern. They omit some of the qualifying disabilities. The pressure groups consider the omissions to be flagrant discrimination. The hon. Member for Oldham, West referred to respiratory problems and incontinence. The Minister of State must reassure the pressure groups. He would go some way to doing so if he told the House tonight that he intends to monitor carefully what is happening and to initiate independent research into the strengths and weaknesses of the new system in its initial stages.

I am the secretary/treasurer of the all-party pension group. I have followed the pension changes and difficulties that have been experienced by my constituents and the work that has been undertaken by the all-party pension group. The 1992 pension increases are welcome, as far as they go. The Government's pledge on price protection has also been honoured, so far as it goes. Nobody, however, would deny that there is a growing gap between those who rely for the majority of their income on state benefits and the average working population.

That disparity causes me great concern. The increases of £2·15 or £3·45 that have been announced for next April are not enough in terms of the basic state pension, which supplies most of the income for the majority of our pensioners. Those who sit on the Treasury Bench make claims about average net income increases. I do not doubt the figures and I welcome the fact that, on average, there has been a 33 per cent. increase in income over the period 1979 to 1988. To a certain extent that was inevitable as a result of the changes that have occurred over the past three or four Governments and I am certain that it will continue to improve.

I hope that I shall not be retiring too soon, but if I see out the rest of my working life as a Member of the House, I shall retire with a pension that should look after me comfortably. I am concerned about the people who are retired and over 70 between now and then. The Government can say that increased amounts have been devoted to pensions and that their pledges have been kept. However, Age Concern has done some research and found that the percentage increase in the average income of the lowest quintile of pensioners over the period 1978 to 1988 is 15 per cent. and for the second lowest quintile it is 19 per cent. I see the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) looking puzzled. If those figures are right—they bear out the experience of some of my casework—there is a group of pensioners in deep financial trouble.

I understand that the Government's policy is to target pensioners and, as I said, the increase in premiums is welcome as far as it goes. I hope that, in his discussions with the Treasury, the Minister will not just look at the statistics that he quotes with monotonous regularity, and I guess with some justification, about average incomes, but that he will say that some people below that average have real problems.

The only way in which that can be addressed sensibly is by putting extra money into the basic state pension. Current average adult earnings are about £263 per week. The disparity between that and even the increased pension rates of £54 and £86 for a single person and married couple is enormous and it is getting worse every year. It is unacceptable. The Minister should tell the House that he is prepared to go to the Treasury and argue not just for increases that provide price protection, but that he will start to look at the experience of those in the bottom two fifths of the pensioner population and make arrangements to do something significantly better for them.

The Minister could use all sorts of devices to achieve improvements. He could make substantial increases in the severe weather payments scheme. I know that there have been improvements, but as I represent part of the country where the climate is meteorologically colder, I know that there is a great deal of scope of increases in the support that we provide for heating allowances for our elderly population. Also, the 20 per cent. community charge payment should have been abolished completely this year.

I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement that the poll tax compensation of £700 million will not be clawed back. However, the Government should have done something this year to mitigate the costs of that 20 per cent. contribution. That, taken together with water charges, is driving pensioners into real poverty and will wipe out any increase that the uprating orders will bring in April.

I receive more complaints from retired people about standing charges than anything else. The reason for that is obvious. The recent announcements of salaries and profits being made by the new privatised energy companies whether gas or electricity, are galling in the extreme. The same is true of British Telecom and the BBC television licence increase that has been announced recently. Older people are incensed that those companies are making huge profits and that their chief executives are receiving huge increases in their salaries to bring them up to the so-called market rate, while they are paying high standing charges. It is indefensible.

The Christmas bonus has also been neglected for too long. The Minister should make a statement of intent about that. It should have been substantially increased, as it is a useful contribution to the income of retired households at this time of year. The Government should index it or come clean and abolish it. It is unforgivable to leave it to wither on the vine.

Increases in the costs of transport, housing and health charges and other costs for food, heating and clothing, are becoming unbearable for retired people in my part of the world. I have given the Minister credit for what has been achieved, and I am disappointed that he has not been able to go further.

There is now an overwhelming case for the Government to undertake an urgent investigation into simplifying the structure of the benefits system. Their public excuse was that they attempted to do so in the Social Security Act 1986, but it has clearly been a failure. We have been discussing the DLA scheme, which is good in principle. However, when the regulations are published, even good schemes become a nightmare of complexity for those of us who are supposed to make sensible policy and for those to whom the schemes are supposed to apply.

I make a plea for the Government to consider a matter of urgency, either through independent research or their own officers, finding a long-term method of achieving a much more comprehensible system that is easy to use and that can be understood by ordinary people.

6.36 pm

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Like the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), I was concerned when I first saw the complexity of the disability regulations. I do not like complex subordinate legislation. As far as possible, it should be included in primary legislation; otherwise it makes it difficult for the House to consider the issues. However, if we choose, we can continue the debate for nearly an hour and a half. I am struck by the paucity of hon. Members in the Chamber. I do not think that it will be difficult for all those present to make a contribution to the debate. That is why I described what happened earlier as a stupid procedural diversion. It is better if we consider the merits of the orders before us.

I do not want to be predictable, because the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) does not like people to be predictable. He was fairly predictable except in one important respect. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his speech—I am sure that he would not have predicted that—because he attempted to deal with the question of who would pay for increased benefits by quoting a statement apparently made by the permanent secretary to the Department of Social Security, Sir Michael Partridge. I listened to that with great interest. There is something in what he said about a prospective demographic change over the next 10 or 20 years.

However, I do not think that one could increase pensions in line with earnings each year if one did not address oneself, not to the rate at which contributions are made, but to the income on which contributions are assessed. Under the present arrangements, the minimum and maximum limits are increased each year in line with prices. If we were to move to an earnings-linked set-up, we should have to make changes accordingly. Working people, especially those at the top of the range, would have to understand that they would be paying more. Of course, under a Labour Government they would be paying more anyway, because the Labour party proposes to undermine the contributory principle further by extending the 9 per cent. contribution rate with no maximum limit.

The point is rather academic for the Labour party. It is all very well for the Labour party to say that it will increase pensions in line with earnings, but that presupposes that earnings will rise faster than prices. Of course, that has been the case over the past 12 years—the record is remarkable. Over the past 12 years, the take-home pay of a married man with two children has increased by more than 30 per cent. Take-home pay hardly increased under the Labour Government of 1974-79. Indeed, in some years, prices increased faster than earnings and people's standard of living fell. Therefore, the fact that pensions were to be increased by earnings rather than prices was academic; it meant nothing to pensioners.

The previous Labour Government not only robbed pensioners of the Christmas bonus but, in one year, failed to uprate pensions for eight months—there was a gap when no improvement was made. Unlike some young people, pensioners can remember exactly what happened under the previous Labour Government. They will want to place the promises that Labour is now making to them in that historical context.

Mr. Meacher: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will confirm, if he is aware, that under the previous Labour Government the pension increased by 20 per cent. in real terms, whereas in the past 12 years the 2 million pensioners who are dependent entirely on the basic pension or on income support have had a zilch increase in their standard of living.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman may be right—I am not in a position to argue with him—and I am prepared to concede the point for those 2 million pensioners; but millions of other pensioners have benefited enormously under this Government, not only from increases in the standard pension but from rising income from the state earnings-related pension scheme, rising occupational pensions and increased income from savings. That fact must be put in the wider context.

If I may be predictable for a moment, I should like to welcome the benefit increases. The Government have a fine record on increasing benefits in line with prices every year,

[Mr. Smith]

but I have a particular point to raise with my right hon. Friend, although it is principally a matter for the Treasury. Pensions are increased each year in line with the retail prices index. Some pensioner constituents have written to me to say that they think that their cost of living is rising by more than 4·1 per cent. I think that they are right. I have had to try to explain a rather sophisticated argument; last year their pensions were increased by more than 10 per cent., when the increase in the cost of living was lower.

The RPI is a broad-brush measure of inflation, especially for pensioners. Housing costs account for a large proportion of the RPI, and mortgage interest rates play a significant part in housing costs. That is relevant to people who are in work, as those of us who have mortgages know, but, generally speaking, it is not very relevant to pensioners, who, if they had a mortgage, have usually paid it off.

What has happened is a swings-and-roundabouts operation, whereby last year pensioners received more than the cost of living that they had incurred, whereas this year they will receive less. It is rather difficult to explain that. A different index, the Rossi index, omits housing costs. It was not surprising to learn that that was rather higher—7 per cent.—as it takes into account the point that I have just made.

There is no simple solution to the problem, which was examined recently by the Public Accounts Committee. Therefore, although the RPI is a widely followed and widely understood index, it is not entirely satisfactory for the indexation of pensions.

My next point is on a relatively minor announcement that was made on the same day that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced the changes in benefits and contributions. It dealt with something about which I had been writing to Social Security Ministers for about six months—abuse of the benefit-in-kind regulations, whereby highly paid people were paying themselves in gilt unit trusts. The loss of revenue amounted to about £1 million a week. I was concerned about that and very much welcomed the change that was made. It is wrong that people should be able to abuse the social security contribution system, and I hope that Ministers will keep a close eye on the matter because the smart people who offer advice may be looking for further ways of getting around the regulations.

Quite rightly, social security contributions are applied to benefits in kind, but it creates an extra burden for employers if the system of assessing the benefit that will be subject to contributions is out of line with income tax. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will keep closely in touch with the Chancellor of the Exchequer so that the system for taxing benefits in kind runs parallel with the system that he operates in his Department. Most people do not think of the Department of Social Security as a great taxing Department, but it raises enormous sums that go into the national insurance fund to pay benefits. That is welcome, but I should like that element of the contributions to be kept in line with income tax to minimise compliance costs for employers.

6.45 pm

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): In the spirit of affability, may I congratulate the Government on one of the changes that they made some time ago, in which they followed fairly accurately the views expressed in early-day motion 488, which noted that when

"the Social Fund cold weather payments scheme trigger mechanism was put to a serious test it collapsed three times under the weight of its own absurdity . . . the scheme is inadequate, inefficiently targeted and wasteful as the cost of advertising and administration are unjustifiably high; and urges a new saving limit of £3,000 that would create a fully automatic scheme".

The Government followed that early-day motion, except in the principal respect of the claim about the inadequacy of a payment. I say that to show that the payments are ludicrously inadequate—£6 last year, £6 this year and presumably the same next year.

The other matter with which I wish to deal is the false feeling among Conservative Members that the Government have acted correctly on child benefit. That was said by the Secretary of State and by the Prime Minister, who said that the Government

"attach particular significance to support for families through the provision of increased child benefit".—[*Official Report*, 29 November 1991; Vol. 199, c. *667*.]

It is worth noting what has happened. The Prime Minister could not have said that between 1987 and April 1991—the four years when child benefit was frozen. Nor could he have said it in 1985, when the uprating was 35p per child below inflation. Can he honestly say it now? After next year's uprating, child benefit will still be worth substantially less than in 1984, the last year before the process of erosion began. Even for the first child in a family, despite the fact that this year's uprating mainly benefited first children, there is still a shortfall of 75p a week. For other children, the losses are much higher—£2·60p a week for every child from the second onwards.

For instance, if child benefit had been uprated fully in line with prices since 1984, a three-child family would receive £31·20 a week from next April, whereas they will receive only £25·25p—£5·95p a week less than in 1984, or a loss per child of £100 a year. That is little for the Government to congratulate themselves on.

The logical basis for uprating child benefit is not prices but average earnings, as the main purpose of the benefit is to reduce inequalities in living standards due to family size. A similar comparison of 1984 and 1992 child benefit rates, taking into account the increase in earnings, shows that the benefit from next April should be £12·55p per child; instead it will be £9·65p for the first child and only £7·80p for each subsequent child. For a three-child family, child benefit has fallen below earnings by £12·40 a week or £645 a year. The value of child benefit for a three-child family relative to average earnings has fallen by 33 per cent. over a mere eight years. Yet the Secretary of State says that child benefit is one of the main elements in support for the family, and the Prime Minister says that he attaches "particular significance" to it.

I shall continue to pursue another matter on which I touched in an Adjournment debate, although it is difficult to arouse great interest in it among Conservative Members or among anyone else. It is a matter of great importance, on which the Government are at it again. As there were signs of some useful action by the Government on cold weather payments, I believe that the struggle may avail something, so it may be worth pursuing the point.

The Government's commitment to child benefit has been shown to be only lukewarm, and they regard the benefit as a politically necessary extravagance. We have heard the argument time and again because the benefit is paid to all families, whether rich or poor. However, dependency additions are paid to people who have suffered greater losses and who are the most deserving, whom the Government claim to target. The additions are paid to people such as widowed mothers, retirement pensioners with children—surprisingly, there are many—invalidity pensioners, guardians and other carers who receive invalidity care allowance. There are 200,000 such families, and more than half of them include a sick or disabled parent.

Those families have lost in two ways. First, like other families, the value of their child benefit has fallen since 1984. Secondly, there has been a dramatic erosion in the value of the children's allowance which they receive as part of their national insurance benefit—the child dependency addition. Since 1979, with one exception, every increase in child benefit has been deducted from the additions. If the increase in child benefit had been a real increase, there might have been some logic in that. However, child benefit has fallen in real value, so there was no justification for reducing the dependency additions. The Government have offered the excuse that that happened under a Labour Government in 1977, as if it was right to continue to do something that was done once before for a short time. There is no justification for the policy to continue.

The cumulative effect has been dramatic. When the Government took office in 1979, child benefit was £4 per child and the child dependency addition was £5·35—a total of £9·35 per child. The 1992 equivalent, simply adjusting for inflation, would be £25·50 per child. Instead, the combined amount payable from next April will be £19·40 for the first child and £18·65 for the second onwards. Those most deserving families have lost more than £6 a week for each child. For a widow or for a chronically sick parent with three children, the total loss is almost £20 or £1,030 per annum.

The one occasion on which the Government did not cheat on the payments was earlier this year and we hoped that it had something to do with the Adjournment debate. Under attack from hon. Members of all parties, the Government decided that the increase in child benefit in October would not be deducted from other benefits. The conversion was short-lived. I understand that next April's increase will be deducted from the national insurance dependency addition, just as all previous increases have been.

The Secretary of State has argued today that at least part of the money saved has been spent on other benefits and he has implied that on balance, people are no worse off [illegible] familiar argument. The fact is that the people who have lost out from the erosion of children's allowances have also lost in other ways. Widows and the long-term sick, for example, have suffered big losses in the breaking of the link between benefits and earnings from 1980 onwards. Widows have suffered an additional loss from the freezing of the £1,000 widow's payment, a matter on which the Government are curiously shy.

I hope that I can catch the attention of the Secretary of State. The widow's payment was introduced at the level of £1,000 in 1988. Like so many other worthwhile benefits, it seems destined to wither away year by year, even though the benefit that it replaced, the widow's allowance, would have been uprated annually if it had continued.

Cold weather payments, child benefit and the dependency allowances are important matters on which the Government have cheated in the uprating statement. They affect the poorest and most vulnerable families in the land. When will the Government start to do the proper thing and uprate the benefits as they should?

6.55 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): There is certainly no room for complacency when we debate pensions and the other provisions in the orders. There are far too many pensioner households in which the total income is very small. The obvious reason for that is that the state pension is low.

I listened carefully to what the Secretary of State said about the reasons for the 1980 decision whereby the pension was no longer increased in line with earnings. Whatever the Government say, there can be no doubt from the answers given to parliamentary questions that, if the pension had been increased in line with earnings, a married couple would now receive more than £20 a week extra. That extra sum is very much needed by people who rely on the state pension or on income support and by those who rely on the state pension and a small occupational pension which disqualifies them from receiving income support.

Many people live in poverty through no fault of their own. Some pensioner constituents who come to see me ask why they are penalised and punished. The hon. Member for Derby, North (Mr. Knight) seems to consider it a matter of amusement. I do not know whether he, although a Whip, wants to intervene. If he does, I shall give way. Do those of his constituents who have to live on the margin, as many of mine do, consider the subject to be a matter of amusement? The hon. Gentleman continues to be amused. He is a Whip who receives about £35,000 a year or more and he does not have to worry about the daily necessities of life. He should consider pensioners who have to rely simply on the state pension and income support or a small occupational pension.

We all know how bitterly cold it is now outside; it is not very cold here, of course. How many of our constituents cannot keep their homes adequately heated? They simply have not got the money, and they are frightened to put the heating on and to keep their homes warm because of the bills which they know they will not be able to pay. We should be concerned about that.

The main reason why pensioners are in this plight is the Tory Government's decision in 1980. Another reason is the drastic reduction in housing benefit in 1988. Local authorities no longer have the discretion to decide on rebates, and the rebates are very limited. What shocks me and should shock every hon. Member is that those whose total income is so small have to pay out of that income far too much in rent and poll tax. I hope that a Labour Government will change that system.

We debate the orders against the scene that my hon. Friends and I have described. Literally millions of elderly people live in poverty or in near-poverty through no fault of their own. It is understandable when pensioners who come to see me ask, "Who won the war? What crime have

[Mr. David Winnick]

we committed that we should have to live in this way?" They have to struggle desperately every day to make ends meet.

I welcome the changes affecting cold weather payments. I understand that the payments will be triggered automatically so that people on income support will not have to apply for them. Anything along those lines is welcome, however modest, but let us understand clearly that those payments are triggered only when the temperature reaches zero or below for seven consecutive days. It is bitterly cold outside today, but probably not cold enough to trigger the payments.

Help should be given to pensioners—certainly to those on income support, and if possible to those whose income is just above that level. In winter, they face many difficulties in trying to keep their accommodation warm. How shocking that must be. When we go home, we put the heating on. We may worry a little about how much it will cost, but we know that, by and large, we shall be able to meet the bill. That is not true of the people about whom I am talking. I see that the Under-Secretary is nodding in agreement. I wish that she would use whatever influence she, as a junior Minister, may have to bring about a more generous cold weather payments scheme.

I began by describing the position as Labour Members see it. While my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) was speaking, I said that I challenged any Conservative Member of Parliament to spend just one week—I do not ask for longer—living on the money that so many of our constituents who are pensioners have to rely on—the state pension and income support. Conservative Members should try that for a week.

When Matthew Parris and another Tory MP who has since lost his seat tried to live on income support for a week, they both found it virtually impossible. By the fifth or sixth day—certainly by the end of the week—their money was exhausted. Would any Conservative Member here tonight accept my challenge to try to live on the state pension and income support? They know the answer. They know that it would be almost impossible for them, even though it would be for only a week, after which they could return to their comfortable lives.

Much has been said about what a Labour Government could and could not do, but I am certain that a Labour Government would set out with the best of intentions to improve the situation. Between 1974 and 1979, we kept the pension in line with the increase in earnings or prices, whichever was the greater. As my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West has already said, during those years the pension increased by 20 per cent. in real terms. That is far better than anything achieved for pensioners during the past 11 years.

I welcome the fact that, when we are returned to government at the next election, pensions will go up by £8 and £5; those are steps in the right direction. If we can do more—if we can do what I have described—so be it. The basic difference between us and the Conservatives is that Conservative Members do not want that to happen. They believe that the miserly increases being made now are enough for pensioners.

We take a different attitude. We believe that retired people who have worked all their lives are entitled to a decent standard of living. There is no reason why they should have to live in poverty and near-poverty. We want that to end as quickly as possible, and an effective way to achieve that would be the election of a Labour Government.

7.4 pm

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): This is the last uprating debate before the general election. We are thankful that we have also had the last uprating statement that will be issued in the name of the Conservative party for many years to come. This is a suitable time to examine the record of this Administration, of the Secretary of State and of the Prime Minister.

It is also a suitable time to look forward to a new Government which will use the Department of Social Security to defend the interests of pensioners, the disabled and others in need, rather than the interests of the Treasury, the wealthy and the political constituencies of the Conservative party.

Sadly, this uprating, like all the others announced by the Secretary of State, is a civil servants' uprating—a shuffling of the pack. It is an uprating after the Treasury officials have filleted it. It is the first draft—one which the officials probably expected Ministers to beef up and argue about. Instead, the civil servants have had a walkover. This is not so much "Yes, Minister" as "Yes, Permanent Secretary".

The uprating, like its predecessors, betrays a Department on autopilot—a Department and a Secretary of State both suffering from advanced anaemia. They can do whatever they like provided that it is what the Treasury has already agreed. Those terms of reference seem to suit the Secretary of State down to the ground. If a pre-election bribe is needed, the Government can knock a penny in the pound off income tax, and social security will probably deliver the cost. I can tell our friends in the Box that after next May that will not happen any longer. They might now begin to turn their minds to the new opportunities that will arise for them, as well as for the people whom we shall seek to represent.

The uprating deals with the expenditure of the largest Government Department—it spent some £60 billion this year. When the history is written, for what positive things will the Secretary of State's tenure be remembered? I shall be glad to give way to any Conservative Member who can think of any. Sadly, there do not appear to be any takers.

Unfortunately, many people will have cause to remember the Secretary of State and the Government—for all the wrong reasons. The pensioner couple, who even after the uprating will still be £25 a week worse off, will remember him. As my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) said, that is not this week or next week but every week. Pensioners will be worse off every week because the Government broke the link with earnings. Single pensioners, too, will be worse off by £16 every week.

What an indictment it is that people wholly dependent on the state pension, with no other source of income, are now almost automatically eligible for income support. The compression of the state pension down to income support levels has gone so far that it has superseded the income support level, so that every pensioner, as of right, should be on income support. What a pass we have come to when state pensions have been screwed down so far.

Other people who may remember the Secretary of State and write his epitaph are the mothers whose child benefit is still worth £2·15 a week less than it was worth in 1987 for second and subsequent children. There is a whole litany of people. There are the unemployed who, as my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) told the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson), have suffered 11 separate cuts in benefit. A total of £1·5 billion a year has been taken away from the unemployed. That is a record of shame.

Those cuts apply not only to the group of people whom the Conservatives would like to have us believe are claimants—the little group of scroungers whom Labour Members wish to prosecute at least as much as Conservative Members do, because of the vast number of people in need who are tarred with the "scroungers" brush that the Government choose to use.

In fact, the biggest section of people involved in the social security system are ordinary working people—the 20 million or so people who contribute every week to the national insurance fund, those mugs who pay in every week in the mistaken belief that at the end of their working days, or if a crisis should arise, they will have benefits to fall back on when times get tough.

There is a long catalogue of people who will queue up to write the Secretary of State's epitaph. Sadly, his tenure has been characterised, too, by an affront to the House and to our democracy. Even during my brief tenure at the Dispatch Box, the Secretary of State has been party to several actions to which parliamentarians and democrats should not be party. First, the Government made law when Parliament was not even sitting. In the summer, the statutory instruments arrangements were abused when certain backdated benefits were effectively eliminated in instruments moved after Parliament had risen. That law came into being when we were not even here.

Secondly, the Government have evaded parliamentary questions by placing the Benefits Agency and other agencies beyond our reach: we could not find out the answers without going through ever more tortuous procedures.

Today, despite assurances given by the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security in Committee, crucial regulations on disability have been botched together with the uprating measures so that they cannot be effectively and properly considered by Parliament. [HON. MEMBERS: "Not true."] Disability organisations and their members may dispute Conservative Members' sedentary interventions. They know very well from their reading of *Hansard*, and because they were present during the Committee stage, the assurances given and the spirit in which they were made. They are aware of the fraud, and my hon. Friends and I will make them even more aware of it. Like everyone else, they will be able to pass judgment by means of the ballot box.

The very principle of social insurance lies not merely threatened but broken by 12 years of abuse by the Government. Its restoration will be one of our first and continuing tasks at the Department. The violation of the state pension fund by the Secretary of State and his predecessors makes Robert Maxwell's activities look like those of a dabbling amateur. They have ripped off £6·7 billion from our state pension fund—a process that started when the current Prime Minister was a Minister at the then Department of Health and Social Security.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham, West said, by the end of the decade, they will unilaterally have slashed £12 billion from the value of SERPS, transferring funds paid in by all of us for the future into private funds run solely for the benefit of the few. Even those few are now being bled dry by charges and commissions just when they thought that they had entered the land of milk and honey.

The Government have given themselves a permanent contributions holiday by no longer making an Exchequer contribution to the national insurance fund. As was said earlier, before 1979 18 per cent. of that fund was paid in by the Government, but now the Government have taken a holiday. It is little wonder that the private sector mimics the Government in its disrespect for pensions. It is not so much a case of Captain Bob as of Major John and Petty Officer Newton. I hope that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will impound the Secretary of State's passport because it may well be needed when the full inquiry gets under way.

Mr. Flynn: My hon. Friend caused some agitation on the Government Front Bench when he quite fairly referred to the Government's policy of denying information by diverting answers through the agencies. He will be aware that only the most diligent of hon. Members and outside organisations used to go to the Table Office or the Library to get those replies.

Perhaps my hon. Friend does not know that the Government have just announced that they intend to nationalise the private enterprise operation that I am running, which entails my sending those replies to all Opposition Members—as I have been doing for the past three months—and, this month, to Conservative Members, following an offer made to their Whips some time ago. My hon. Friend will be glad to know that the denial of information will shortly come to an end.

Mr. Allen: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention—although anything that the Government nationalise they may flog off at a profit at a later date, so I ask him to keep an eye on the situation. As a member of the Procedure Committee, I was one of those who urged —not least at my hon. Friend's insistence—that the House should once again be able to see the answers to parliamentary questions on social security matters. I can promise him and you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we shall examine the new arrangements. I can say fairly confidently that those arrangements are inadequate and will be reviewed by my hon. Friend and his team when we come into office next May.

The Conservatives' strategy of holding back the state pension on the ground that the deficit could be made good by additional private sector pensions has been blown out of the water, not least by the vulnerability of occupational pensions which we have witnessed recently and by the under-performance and the milking of private pension schemes themselves.

Labour will put that right. We will legislate to ensure that the Maxwells, Hansons and Lucases cannot raid our occupational pension funds. We will also need to restore an honest state pension fund that can be kept at arm's length from the rip-offs of future Conservative Governments if necessary. No doubt, as the election approaches, the Conservatives will seek to blame everything on the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher)—a close friend of the Chancellor, whom I am glad to see in the Chamber. How very convenient to have

[Mr. Allen]

the right hon. Lady to blame. One is reminded of how those huddled in the dock at Nuremberg pointed towards the bunker. We shall see ever more frantic gesticulating in the direction of Finchley, Dulwich or the American lecture circuit as the election approaches.

We must remember, however, that today's uprating comes more than a year after the Conservative leadership coup and that there can be no excuse for the provisions. In the intervening year, nothing has been done to right the wrongs of the decade, so what profit has been gleaned in the first year of the new leadership of the Conservative party? What has been the harvest?

More than 300,000 more families are on income support as a result of the economic mismanagement and incompetence for which the Government and the Chancellor are responsible. Thanks to the Prime Minister's ban on benefit for unemployed 16 and 17-year-olds, another 21,000 youngsters have been sucked into a black hole where there is no job, no school, no training and no benefit.

This year, 25,000 pensioners, sick and disabled and others have received no increase whatever in their weekly benefit, which was frozen in 1987 when the Prime Minister was pushing through the Fowler cuts. The right hon. Gentleman was the grinning accomplice of those who reduced benefits for people injured at work. He was the accomplice of those who pushed for the 20 per cent. poll tax contribution required from the poorest. His fingerprints are also to be found on the introduction of the hated social fund. He was at the Department when it abolished the maternity grant. He was Minister at the Department when the Government halved help with mortgage interest repayments for the newly unemployed.

That is the Prime Minister's social charter for Britain. That is the way in which he devised his social charter when he had the ability to make policy at the Department. That is the right hon. Gentleman's pedigree. Little wonder, then, that the Tory party is laughed at even by its continental sister parties for being so backward and Victorian.

The present uprating puts none of that right. The Conservative Government are content with their decade of work on the jobless, the disabled, mothers, pensioners and others who deserve better. I am sorry to say that there is no joy here, only despair. The only cause for celebration tonight is that is that this uprating will be the Secretary of State's and the Government's last.

7.18 pm

The Minister for Social Security and Disabled People (Mr. Nicholas Scott): Whatever that was, it was not a winding-up speech. It is said of some speeches that they smell of the lamp. The speech of the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) smelt of a weekend with the thesaurus and a few reference books, and was made without reference to what had preceded it.

I am not one to accuse the hon. Gentleman of misrepresenting the position; I know and like him too much for that. Nevertheless, he betrayed a total and absolute misunderstanding of the public expenditure survey process and the part that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State played in it. I am not one who crawls, but I feel bound to respond to such attacks on my right hon. Friend. Anyone who has served with him at the Department—and I am talking not just about his present ministerial team—knows that he not only brings a greater degree of expertise to his job than anyone I can remember but does it with great inventiveness in terms of improving benefits and with an exceptional degree of compassion and, above all, integrity. I say that with absolute passion about a man who is my boss and my friend and with whom I am proud to serve in this Government.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) takes a close interest in these matters. He wanted to know whether we would monitor the introduction of the new disability benefits and their impact in policy terms and with regard to their administration. I give him that absolute assurance. All Ministers in the Department of Social Security are conscious of the fact that in social security very little is for ever. Society changes and the social security system must change to reflect those changes. We will monitor the matter very carefully.

I must apologise for returning somewhat dryly to the procedural point that has been raised during the debate. I am puzzled by the widespread misunderstanding and the suggestion in certain quarters that the Government have tried to do something underhand. Nothing could be further from the truth.

We are debating seven sets of disability orders. Four sets, which come under the affirmative procedure, have been considered by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments and have all been declared intra vires. The three sets which have not been to the Joint Committee come under the negative procedure and are consequential upon the main affirmative orders. We would not have considered the orders today if the Opposition had not prayed against them and agreed that they should be debated with the main affirmative orders. Had the Opposition wished to debate the issues, they should have delayed their prayers until after today's debate and that debate could have been arranged through the usual channels. The Government have done nothing underhand. For the convenience of the House, we are discussing the motions together, and I understand that that has the agreement of the Opposition.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire made a plea for a comprehensive disability scheme. My hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) responded to that. I share many of the reservations expressed by my hon. Friend about the wisdom of that course of action—certainly in the short term. However, the practice of incremental change under this Government has led to a much more comprehensive coverage of meeting the needs of disabled people.

When we came to office, 300,000 people received help with the costs of their disabilities. The figure will now be 2 million. In that regard, the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire will be aware that since we took office in 1979 the expenditure has risen from £4·5 billion to more than £12 billion. We are moving to more comprehensive coverage. However, as we are using incremental change instead of wiping the slate clean and trying to move to a new system, we are avoiding huge extra costs at one fell swoop and also avoiding creating a system in which there would be many losers as well as gainers at the point of change.

Mr. Kirkwood: The Minister will acknowledge that I paid credit to the Government's work in respect of

disability. However, does the Minister of State accept the principle that a comprehensive disability benefit is the goal, or is he going to operate on a piecemeal basis in the short term?

Mr. Scott: I can simply call in aid the Government's record so far. We have steadily improved the coverage and generosity of the benefits system. I cannot commit myself or anyone else to what may happen in future. That will depend on the available resources and the needs that become evident. However, we have a first-class record of incremental change. Indeed, we have a much better record than that of any Labour Government. We can build on that in future.

The hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire also referred to cold weather payments. I wonder whether the news has reached him that the system has been triggered in one station in Scotland today. We will for the first time be able to see the new system work. It will be automatic and payable in advance. People will not need to make a claim. As we have made the choice of stations more sensitive, particularly in Scotland, the system itself will be more sensitive.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): How many people will benefit from what the Minister has just announced?

Mr. Scott: That depends on the weather. It is impossible to say how many until we know what the winter will be like. If we have the same amount of cold weather this winter as we had last winter, we will more or less double the coverage of the benefit as a result of the changes that I announced earlier this year.

Mr. Winnick: What would the Minister say to the pensioners outside that one area in Scotland who are suffering as a result of the bitterly cold weather and who cannot receive payment if they are on income support? Why should it be zero or below before they receive the small amount of assistance of £6 a week?

Mr. Scott: If the hon. Gentleman followed that matter with any care, he would know that over the past four or five years we have steadily improved and made more generous the cold weather payments. Indeed, we have very substantially improved them this year. My statement was widely welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

We will have to wait to see how the new system works. We increased the amount and introduced the automaticity principle—the lack of need to make a claim—and the ability to forecast cold weather in advance and the ability to pay in advance.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West asked about the housing benefit transitional payments. She will recall that last year we eroded those transitional payments by £3. We have decided that in April 1992 there will be a flat rate reduction of £2 rather than the £3 of last year. As a result, the majority of transitional payments recipients will gain overall in cash terms from next April's uprating.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Smith) vividly illustrated the performance of the Labour Government in respect of provision for pensioners. He referred to the retail prices index, the so-called pensioner index and the Rossi index. I am sure that we are right to stick to uprating the retirement pension in relation to RPI over the years as that has proved to be the most generous index available to us. The so-called pensioner index has risen more slowly than the RPI: Rossi exceptionally this year is ahead of RPI, but is normally significantly below it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield also said that the tax and contribution systems should stay as much in line as possible, particularly with regard to payments in kind. I understand his point. Because the tax and contribution systems serve different purposes, they may never be totally in alignment. However, I recognise my hon. Friend's point.

The hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) revealed his traditional obsession, not with the overall income of retirement pensioners, but with the level of the state pension. That is not what matters to pensioners in our society. What matters is the money in their pockets. The Opposition and the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire recognise that pensioners' average total net income grew by 34 per cent. between 1979 and 1988—an average of 3·3 per cent. each year compared with 3 per cent. overall between 1974 and 1979. That is to say, for each year of this Government, the increase in total pensioner incomes has been as much as was achieved over the whole period of the Labour Government. That is what matters in terms of the standard of living of pensioners.

Mr. Meacher: Those figures are continually bandied about, but they are absolute nonsense, for three reasons. First, the Minister was not comparing like with like. The majority of those who were pensioners in 1979 are unlikely still to have been alive in 1988—*[Interruption.]* We are talking about a completely different group of pensioners. If we are referring to the bottom 10 per cent., that 10 per cent. will not comprise the same people now as then. Secondly, in so far as there has been an increase, it is overwhelmingly because of SERPS, which was introduced by a Labour Government. Thirdly, the figures are available only until 1988. It will be interesting to have the figures for 1991. I suspect that they will show a very different picture.

Mr. Scott: Not only do I doubt that, but the hon. Gentleman's earlier point was totally ludicrous.

I had been about to say that, of course, the Government recognise that not all pensioners have benefited to that extent. We all know that some pensioners—perhaps those whose careers were interrupted by the war or whose savings were decimated by the inflation of the 1970s—are not in the position of the average pensioner these days. That is why, over the past three years, we have found an extra £330 million to help the poorer pensioners. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been particularly inventive at finding ways of making resources available to help those pensioners.—*[Interruption.]* I hope that the House will have the grace to acknowledge that we have recognised the problem of the poorer pensioners and have addressed it to the extent of providing an extra £330 million in the past three years.

Two hon. Members referred briefly to pensions and pension funds as a result of matters that have recently been in the news. Obviously, there is a limit to what I can say about that today, but we acknowledge that trustees have a clear duty to act at all times in the interests of the beneficiaries of the scheme. They are required by law to disclose certain facts to their pensioners, the trade unions and the members of their funds. The actuarial valuation of

[Mr. Scott]

the funds is an important part of that. When we have considered the outcome of the Maxwell situation, we shall consider whether any further changes to the law are needed. I am not prejudging that issue when I say that, if somebody deliberately sets out to commit fraud on a massive scale, there is precious little that the law or regulatory agencies can do to prevent it entirely.

I turn now to the issue of disability benefits which, as the House knows, are particularly close to my heart and which I want to see being introduced as effectively and as smoothly as possible. As there appears to be some misunderstanding, I advise the House that all those under 65 years of age who are currently receiving mobility and attendance allowances will be transferred automatically and will receive the new disability living allowance. There may be some misunderstanding at the point of change, but we shall do our best through advertising campaigns, mailshots and providing information to the organisations of and for disabled people, the welfare rights organisations, the citizens' advice bureaux and our own offices, to minimise possible misunderstandings. We want to ensure that the provisions are implemented smoothly.

I should like to make one or two things clear about claiming the new allowance. First, the claimants' pack for the disability working allowance—the new allowance—will be widely available from all the places that were listed in early-day motion 356, plus the citizens' advice bureaux and from any other organisation that asks for supplies of the claim forms.

The disability living allowance form will not be distributed so widely, not least because it is not an entirely new benefit; it is subsuming the mobility and attendance allowances. However, it will be widely advertised in leaflets with coupons attached so that people can send in for a claim form. When they send in their claim, the claim form will be date-stamped with the date of its despatch, which will normally be within 24 hours of the arrival of the leaflet, and the claim will be deemed to have been made from that date as long as the claim form is returned within six weeks of that date.

That will allow people to carry out their own self-assessment procedure and to have that self-assessment endorsed and reinforced by a professional, carer or general practitioner, according to their choice. The claim will be dated from the date on which the coupon is sent in. That is a sensible, flexible and fair way of handling the matter.

Mr. Allen: I thank the Minister of State for his helpful reply about the disability living allowance. Are there any reasons why the form for the disability working allowance cannot be made available to the interest groups that wish to help disabled people so that they can in fact help them? Is there any reason in the Department why the form cannot be made available?

Mr. Scott: The hon. Gentleman may not have heard what I said. The form will be available not only to all those who were mentioned in the early-day motion, but to the citizens advice bureaux and anybody else who helps, including many of the organisations of and for disabled people. We consulted widely on the claim forms for both benefits with a substantial cross-section of the disability organisations, and with an independent panel of disabled people. Both the consultation process and the final claim forms were widely welcomed.

Mr. Allen: I apologise if I misunderstood the Minister, but my understanding is that there are two separate forms, one for the DLA and one for the DWA, and that the Minister's remarks referred to the DLA forms. Is he now saying that the forms apply to both? If he is, many people who were extremely worried about the availability of the forms will feel reassured.

Mr. Scott: If the hon. Gentleman reads *Hansard*, he will see that I referred first to the DWA forms, which I said would be widely available, and that I then said that the DLA forms would not initially be distributed so widely but that they would be available to people who sent in the coupon from one of the leaflets. Those people will then receive a form that will be date-stamped.

I believe that we have met most of the concerns on that point. Of course, there will be visiting officers. In addition, help will be available from our district offices to enable people to fill in the forms. Inevitably, because we are moving towards self-assessment, the forms are now longer. We depend no longer on medical examinations but on self-assessment. That is why the forms are longer and may be daunting to some people. We will have a visiting facility and specialists in our district offices.

Above all, we will have a free benefits inquiry line that will be specially dedicated to those benefits and if people want, an operator in the centre will be able to complete a form on behalf of a claimant who is on the other end of the telephone. The form will then be sent to the claimant or the customer who will be asked to check the details and, if the details are correct, to sign it and send it in as a claim. We are doing everything in our power to ensure that the system is as friendly and helpful as possible to those who need the help of the disability benefits.

Mr. Kirkwood: The Minister is being helpful, and what he has said will be welcomed. However, I should like to ask him about the potential loss of additional benefits. It has been my experience in the past that, unless people specifically ask questions about their specific entitlement to other benefits, their claims for those other benefits are likely to be prejudiced. Will such questions be an integral part of the self-assessment procedure?

Mr. Scott: When the hon. Gentleman sees the forms and the advertising campaign, I am sure that he will be reassured on that matter. I have no doubt that the very fact that we are introducing a benefits line and running a greater awareness campaign will lead to a substantial number of new claims. We are geared up to cope with that.

I have been present on other occasions when the hon. Members for Oldham, West and for Nottingham, North have travelled around the country making commitments —sometimes "absolute commitments", sometimes just ordinary "commitments"; sometimes "absolute priorities", sometimes "high priorities", sometimes just plain "priorities" and sometimes "increasing priorities", which is a phrase that crept in earlier; and sometimes they have just plain "aims". But today we have had another nudge or wink or two from those hon. Gentlemen suggesting that various things might happen. When pressed, however, they were unable to make a firm commitment about exactly what they would do. I do not know whether the

hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs. Beckett) has a laptop computer, a pocket calculator or an abacus, but she must spend a lot of her time trying to keep up with the nudges, winks, priorities and commitments of the shadow social security team.

During the past year or so, those hon. Gentlemen have promised the earth to every pressure group in the country. One of two things is happening: either a cruel deception is being practised upon those pressure groups or the Opposition intend, if and when they come into office, to spread the available resources so thinly that they will not make a significant difference to anyone.

Mr. Allen: Will the Minister put on record one specific occasion when I personally made any pledge beyond the two which he already knows about?

Mr. Scott: The hon. Member for Oldham, West has made such a commitment.

Mr. Allen: What about the hon. Member for Nottingham, North?

Mr. Scott: I understand that it is a team. I thought that the hon. Gentleman, being a keen cricketer, was a great team player. I assumed, therefore, that he was part of the team.

In essence, Labour is promising the earth. What we have done in government is to deliver the goods—to pensioners, to families with children, and to disabled people and their carers. The two new benefits are a particular manifestation of that. We can continue to produce the goods for the people most in need in society, and we will continue to do so.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Social Security Benefits Up-rating (No. 2) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 4th December, be approved.

Resolved,

That the draft Social Security (Contributions) (Re-rating) (No. 2) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 4th December, be approved.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

PENSIONS

Resolved,

That the draft Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase (No. 2) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 4th December, be approved.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT

Resolved,

That the draft Statutory Sick Pay (Rate of Payment) (No. 2) Order 1991, which was laid before this House on 4th December, be approved.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

SOCIAL SECURITY

Resolved,

That the draft Social Security (Introduction of Disability Living Allowance) Regulations 1991, which were laid before this House on 26th November, be approved.

That the draft Disability Working Allowance (General) Regulations 1991, which were laid before this House on 26th November, be approved.

That the draft Social Security (Disability Living Allowance) Regulations 1991, which were laid before this House on 26th November, be approved.

That the draft Social Security (Adjudication) Amendment (No. 3) Regulations 1991, which were laid before this House on 26th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Newton.]*

European Community (Fisheries)

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) and his right hon. and hon. Friends.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It might assist hon. Members to know that the reports of the Select Committee on European Legislation relating directly to the debate could be deposited in the Vote Office only at 6 o'clock tonight. That was because the documents were capable of consideration by the Select Committee only at its meeting this afternoon. I have raised the point of order because the documents contained important information which I understand became available only at lunchtime today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The House will share my regret that the information was not available earlier, but the House is grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the information which he has now provided.

7.41 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 9134/91 and the Supplementary Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 27th November 1991, relating to guide prices for fishery products for 1992, the proposals described in the unnumbered Explanatory Memoranda submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 10th December 1991, relating to total allowable catches and quotas for 1992, the reciprocal Fisheries Agreement between the Community and Norway for 1992 and duties on certain fish imports for 1992 and of the Government's intention to negotiate the best possible fishing opportunities for the United Kingdom fishing industry for 1992 consistent with the requirement for conservation of fishing stocks.

I begin, as my right hon. Friend the Minister did last year, by reminding the House that fishing remains a dangerous and difficult industry. Last year we acknowledged that 30 lives had been lost in the industry; this year 31 lives have been lost. I am sure the whole House would wish to acknowledge the loss to the close-knit communities involved in fishing which that represents.

In response to the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Greenock and Port Glasgow (Dr. Godman), I am sorry that the documents were late. It was for the reason which he gave. We only had the preliminary documents over the weekend. They cannot be produced by the Commission until we have reached agreement with Norway because so many of the waters are jointly managed. We got the explanatory memorandum out as rapidly as we could. Even then, there were gaps, because the talks with Norway did not conclude until 7 December and the Commission had to make proposals consequent on those talks. Therefore, we produced a supplementary explanatory memorandum to fill the gaps. I signed that at lunchtime today, the earliest that I could do so. I acknowledge the problem, but we have done our best to surmount it.

Dr. Godman: I am grateful to the Minister. Will he give the House an assurance that the explanatory memoranda are a faithful replication of the proposals that will come from the European Commission some time in the future?

Mr. Curry: I give that undertaking to the hon. Gentleman. In the final stages of some of the working groups that will be meeting between now and the Council meeting, the Commission may come forward with new proposals on matters such as tariffs, but in regard to total allowable catches and quotas, I give the hon. Gentleman an undertaking that what is in the explanatory memorandum is the latest state of play. We put the information there in complete faith. I examined the memorandum line by line to make sure that it was as accurate and up to date as possible.

I will move directly to the package in front of us because many hon. Members wish to take part in this important debate. The guide prices for 1992 were agreed in November, with no major changes. The important point for the United Kingdom was the dual price system for herring. That is particularly important to the Scottish fleet. There is a lower price for August and September. We managed to maintain the dual price system. That part of the package was settled, as it always is, in November.

On the key issues facing the Council on TACs and quotas, the scientific advice is sombre, generally advocating no change or reductions. In the North sea no increases are proposed, except for haddock, where the total allowable catch is increased from 50,000 to 60,000 tonnes. The upturn, partly because of its rarity, is welcome to us.

On the west of Scotland, all stocks are under pressure, but the proposed reductions reflect a greater pessimism than they should. We will press for modest increases in the proposals within biologically safe limits.

In the Irish sea, a real problem area for fisheries, we acknowledge that the Northern Irish fleet, with its dependence upon whiting and its heavy dependence upon the nephrops fishery, and with the sensitivity of the Hague preference as it applies to Northern Ireland, finds itself in a difficult position. We recognise the difficulty. We believe that there can be an increase. Only a modest increase is needed to avert the triggering of the Hague preference. We will seek to increase to those levels. We are anxious to safeguard our position on nephrops, which is a particularly important species to the Northern Ireland fishery.

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): Can the Minister tell us what protection he is giving to the Northern Ireland fleet from others who are coming into those fishing grounds?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman will know that the Northern Irish fleet depends heavily on fishing in the Irish sea. In the past when the Hague preference has been triggered, that has led to a decline in the stocks available for Northern Ireland, and they have gone to the Republic. We have managed to correct that with swa – ps with the Irish Republic, to the benefit of the Northern Irish industry. This year we will seek to avoid the triggering of the Hague preference. If we can make up any shortfalls with swaps which will benefit the industry, we will undertake to try to do that.

In the Channel we think that there is an undue restriction on the cod and whiting TACs and on some of the flat fish. Our general position is to try to maximise the possibilities within safe biological limits.

As I have said, the proposals trigger the Hague preference for North sea haddock and North sea cod, although only by 500 tonnes. We will seek to get that TAC up to the level where it is not necessary to trigger. On the west coast, the Hague preference would be triggered for whiting and saithe, in the Irish sea for cod, whiting and plaice, and in the west of Scotland for cod, haddock, whiting and saithe.

We will seek TACs which would avoid triggering the Hague preference. We are sensitive to its problems. Certain communities benefit from it, but others feel that they are victims. We have always regarded the Hague preference as part of the fabric of relative stability. In the past we have succeeded in winning the Hague preference in respect of some of the quantities for which it was claimed. We shall seek to achieve an equitable balance if the problem presents itself at the Council.

Once again, we do not have mackerel flexibility in the proposals from the Commission. That is an important issue. It is essential to be able to take mackerel east of the 40 deg west line. The agreement with Norway allows the Norwegians some flexibility. We will seek to reinstate mackerel flexibility. I regard it as silly of the Commission to keep it out of the package every year. Clearly, the Commission wants to force us to fight to put it back. We will not disappoint it; we will fight to put it back in the package.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Will the Minister undertake that in seeking to reinstate the flexibility, it will be to the full extent of 62,000 tonnes?

Mr. Curry: I can give the assurance that we will aim to get the full 62,000 tonnes. As the hon. Gentleman knows, in trading in the Community we have to get a majority vote to do that. I am outlining a number of the things that we are asking from the package, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that it is our objective to get the full tonnage, because we regard it as justified. He will know that, during the past two years, we have not succeeded in getting the full tonnage. That is an important issue for the United Kingdom.

The most important issue—certainly the main preoccupation in the fishing industry—will be the effort control proposals in the package. As the House will know, at present there is an eight day tie-up. As the eight days are consecutive, it makes for an inflexible system and adds up to 96 days of tie-up during the year. The recommendation is for 200 days of tie-up a la carte—taken as the fishermen wish. There is no explicit gear option, but the language upon which we used to get a gear option last year is in the package this year. I am sorry to be slightly elliptical about that, but it is the situation.

The Commission is proposing that coverage should be the same—in other words it should be boats which catch 100 tonnes of cod and haddock, and those fish must represent 40 per cent. of the total catch. The twin criteria are the same as last year. It is also proposed that fishermen can fish under the whiting derogation during the period in which they are formally tied up, subject to a 90 mm, one-net rule.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Does the Minister accept that some of the real anger which greeted this proposal derives from the fact it will be directed against the same people who have been obliged to observe the eight day tie-up rule this year? There is considerable annoyance that, for example, Denmark and France appear to have got round it in some way. If it is a common fisheries policy, surely it should be common throughout.

Mr. Curry: I recognise that there are a number of reasons for the fishermen's objections. First, one cannot fish under that system—a 200 day tie-up means that one cannot fish economically. It is not a practical proposition and I must make it clear to the House that we shall oppose it.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is there not a question mark placed over the restrictions when we hear —as was reported last week—that some fishing boats are illegally landing fish late at night at ports in different parts of the country? Their landings are not being recorded. What will happen? What will the Government do about that? Do they intend to put in place sufficient enforcement officers to ensure that that does not happen, or will the Government ignore what is happening, in which case fishing communities will lose.

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman poses a real problem of enforcement. Our policy in the United Kingdom is to allow fishermen to land anywhere. Some fishermen have asked why we do not have designated landing ports. I can imagine the problem which would result if we did not designate every port where landing takes place. We would have a problem, especially in places with an irregular coastline, such as Scotland.

The enforcement problem is real—we cannot put an inspector on every boat all the time, and it is also a practical impossibility for there to be an inspector at every landing place all the time.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North) *rose*——

Mr. Curry: I shall give way once more during this section of my speech, as many hon. Members wish to speak. As the hon. Lady asked first, I shall give way to her and then I shall give the Floor to the hon. Gentleman.

Mrs. Ewing: The Minister has already said that the 200-day limit is unacceptable because of the devastating effect that it would have on the fishing community. Can he tell us what the Government's position will be on that, or will it be like last year when a 10 day tie-up was suggested and the Government came back with an eight day tie-up and claimed it as a victory? Will the Government come back with something less than 200 days and claim it as a victory?

Mr. Curry: I was about to come to that part of my remarks. I have taken two interventions since then on a slightly tangential question. I promised the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) that I would give way, but I am happy to plough on for a while.

Mr. Wilson: I sympathise with the Minister, but it is unreasonable to discuss the intervention about alleged illegal and unrecorded landings without establishing the factual basis. Without that it is a smear. Has the Minister any factual evidence for the allegation? Does it have any substance in fact?

Mr. Curry: We all know that the fishing industry is alive with reports of what other people do. Some of them are legal practices, some are illegal. I could not say that all fishermen are saints; nor do I wish to say that the fishing industry is an organised crime syndicate, because that is not the case. There is bound to be some infringement, as is the case throughout the Community. Our enforcement is by far the best. I should be glad if enforcement in other countries were a little more rigorous and were similar to the enforcement which we carry out at considerable cost.

There is no way that we can accept the proposed length of tie-up. It is anti-conservation, in the sense that it would be unenforceable if one tried to impose it on the industry. It would drive fishermen to precisely the sort of wholesale cheating which the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) spelled out. It is not the way to conserve stocks.

Two years ago, when I was first appointed, I said that the job was to conserve stocks and fishermen's livelihoods, and that there was a balance between the two. The proposal does not achieve the balance, any more than the equivalent propposal last year did—a 10 day tie-up and 120 mm square mesh. That was an opening bid which was wholly unrealistic in terms of what the industry would accept and what would deliver effective conservation.

I have said that we will not accept the present proposal. However, continuing effort control is necessary. We shall be seeking significantly fewer days and flexibility, so that there will not be eight consecutive days of tie-up—I accept the arguments against it. We are examining the possibility of a modification of the criteria to overcome some of the objections about categories of boats, and the equity of the boats caught in tie-up last year.

We are seeking a gear option, and it is important that there should be one. For example, the Humberside industry, which is a long-distance fishery, could not operate on the basis of tie-up. We are seeking that it should apply more widely in the Community fleet. One of the strong reasons for a sense of injustice in the fishing industry is that it was caught by the proposals, but there were means by which other people avoided being caught.

The hon. Member for Cunninghame, North asked whether we had up-to-date information. We understand that the Commission may propose a sliding scale to include partial exemptions for vessels taking certain gear options—for example, in respect of the part of the year that they spend fishing for pelagic species. We must wait to see what the Commission comes up with during the negotiations. Traditionally, the Council goes through the night, into a fairly tight clinch, and it is impossible to forecast what type of proposition will be on the table as it develops.

I must pay some attention to tariffs, because I am conscious of the needs of the people who work in processing as well as those whose job is catching fish. More than 22,000 people work in processing imported frozen fish material and it is an important source of employment. It would be wrong not to take account of their interests when we take the decisions.

The Commission has proposed a reduction in the tariffs on Alaskan pollock, from 10 to 5 per cent. There is no quota restriction on that fish, as it is a cod surrogate, as are

[Mr. Curry]

a number of species. The Commission has proposed duty cuts on fresh, chilled or frozen whole cod, saithe and Greenland halibut. There may be a proposal for some liberalisation on hoki, which is a New Zealand cod-type species, although I understand that, as there has been large-scale purchasing by the United States, there is no ready availability. We do not expect a proposal on hake because it is central to the negotiations with Argentina. The Commission is reserving hake as a fish to negotiate in the Argentine-Community agreement.

All the current concessions operate from April until December, so there is a moratorium on the first three months of the year. I accept that there is a case for some liberalisation, for the reasons that I have given and to ensure supplies to the consumer. We do not want the consumer to be driven out of the habit of consuming fish because of the price.

I shall balance those concessions against the needs of the catching industry, because I recognise that the maintenance of price levels has been important to the industry at a time of reduced supplies. We expect the Commission to present its paper on the state of the fisheries sector—that will form the basis of the mid-term review—in this Council.

There is no such thing as a homogeneous United Kingdom fishing interest. Different communities have different concerns and they are often competing concerns. I am often faced at one port or in one community by demands for protection against the activity of a different British community; so there is a balance to be struck. For example, in Scotland the interests of the white fish fishermen at the east coast ports, fishermen in the Clyde and the west coast, or the Shetlanders are not the same.

I have already mentioned the particular importance in Northern Ireland of whiting and nephrops and the difficulties of the Hague preference, and we shall seek to return to last year's position on that.

In England, there is no absolute homogeneity between the interests of Humberside's deep water fleet, which can fish with large-scale meshes, which has its interests in north Norway and which will benefit significantly from the EFTA concessions, and the interests of Fleetwood, where the fishermen are concerned with the activities of south-west beamers inside the 12-mile zone. Fishermen in Lowestoft are preoccupied with flat fish and with the sensitivities of the swap with the Dutch for some of their fish species. Fishermen in the south-west, who have a more mixed fishery, are preoccupied with the importance of a mackerel box, which has been made into a permanent instrument there.

If we satisfy one community totally, others will not be satisfied, so it is a difficult task. We must add to that the needs of the processors and consumers. If consumers go on strike, there will be no point in trying to preserve the industry for anyone. We must bear all that in mind.

We have had close contacts with the industry. I met members of the two principal fishing organisations—the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations and the Scottish Fishing Federation—last week. I shall meet the NFFO again at the beginning of next week to go over some of the ground in more detail. Both organisations are traditionally in Brussels and I have made arrangements to keep in contact with them during the negotiations. We already have two meetings planned with both organisations next year to discuss other relevant issues.

The negotiations will be difficult, as they always are. It will be difficult to satisfy everybody, but we shall argue the case of fishermen in all quarters of the United Kingdom. We shall do our best to come to a fair and equitable arrangement that gives them a reasonable prospect of a livelihood, which, given the difficulties of the industry, they certainly deserve.

8.2 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glandford and Scunthorpe) I beg to move, To leave out from "duties on certain fish imports for 1992, and" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

'condemns the Government for its failure to produce policies to bring stability to the United Kingdom fishing industry, including a decommissioning scheme to reduce fishing effort in order to conserve fishing stocks and guarantee a sustainable fishing industry.'

It is a great shame that, yet again, we are discussing further reductions in the total available catch of fish species for our fishermen. Every time we discuss that issue, there seems to be a lack of direction in the management of fisheries. There is crisis management in terms of the problems, pressures and changes in the industry and the ever-greater restrictions that are being placed on it. It is time that we came out of the negotiations with a consistent policy to introduce stability into the industry. We would then not have to stagger from crisis to crisis.

Will the Minister consider some of the following points in his discussions with the Commission? It is proposed to reduce the minimum landing size of whiting from 27 to 23 cm. That seems surprising, given that whiting is becoming an important fish species for human consumption. I suspect that the hand of the Danish industrial fisheries is involved, because they want to reduce the minimum landing size of whiting for their own reasons. I hope that the Minister will resist that reduction strongly in order to maintain that fishery. Indeed, there is a case for increasing the minimum landing size and my information is that the Scottish industry would support that.

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman raised a specific point to which I shall reply. As he knows, that reduction was one element which we did not like in the October package. I voted for the package as a whole because I thought that the other elements were satisfactory enough to make it sastisfactory overall, but I have never disguised the fact that we found that element objectionable: we agree entirely with the industry about it. If I get a chance to reverse it in Brussels, I shall do so. However, we shall consult the industry shortly on the possibility of introducing a unilateral measure that would increase the minimum landing size for whiting to 27cm—back to where it was—or to 30 cm if the industry wishes and on a one-net rule for the whiting derogation.

We shall issue papers shortly to consult the industry on whether the square mesh panels should remain compulsory when we adopt the new technical conservation measure in June. I hope that that information completes the picture.

Mr. Morley: I am grateful to the Minister for those assurances, and I am sure that the industry will welcome them.

The TAC in saithe is being cut drastically by 18 per cent. I do not see the scientific argument to back up a reduction on that scale. Saithe is an important fish species for east coast fishermen in particular and I hope that the Minister will try to justify that cut.

I welcome the increase in the haddock TAC and I am sure that it will be welcomed by our North sea fishermen. However, the cod TAC is to be reduced by what may seem a marginal 2 per cent.

The Minister mentioned the Hague preference, particularly as it applies to Ireland. I hope that in the negotations, cod quotas will be agreed which would remove the need for the Hague preference. If the Hague preference is implemented, it will tend to complicate matters, especially as in the Irish sea the cod quota allocated to the Republic of Ireland has not been totally taken up, so there is a distortion in the amount of cod available to our fishermen.

Mr. Curry: To ensure that the House is absolutely clear, may I explain that we shall try to get the TACs increased for the Irish sea so that the United Kingdom quota will be about the same as if no Hague preference had applied to the Commission's proposed TACs for 1992.

Mr. Morley: Again, I appreciate the Minister's assurance. We seem to be making a fair amount of progress.

I should appreciate an assurance from the Minister on the question of the 400 tonnes of cod which, for the past two years, have been given to the Danes as part of a swap. I realise that, in the cut and thrust of negotiations, there tends to be give and take, but the Danes appear to have been doing the taking in that negotiation and we appear to have been doing the giving. I do not see why we should give so much cod to the Danes at this stage in the negotiations. I strongly urge the Minister to resist that and I should appreciate an assurance that he will do so.

I hope that the Minister will maintain the status quo for English channel cod. I take his point about the importance of the processing industry. I understand that it currently employs some 22,500 people, many of whom work in my area. It is an important industry, which relies on stability of supply. There is no doubt that fish prices have been pushed up recently because of shortages and there is a danger that, if prices are pushed up too much, although it helps the fishing industry because it receives more money, consumers will resist buying fish.

The Minister will be aware—we have discussed it before—of what happened in Great Grimsby with the closure of Findus and a loss of 900 jobs, which was fiercely resisted by my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell). One reason claimed for that closure was the high price of fish and the fact that it was no longer economic to produce fillet fish products, so I recognise that there is a real problem. The scale of the problem illustrates the fact that there is a basic shortage of fish, which brings us back to the fact that Britain needs a basic stability of supply. Concessions are being made on tariffs and I suspect that they will continue to ensure a supply to the fishing industry.

The scale of the problem was illustrated by the UK Association of Frozen Fish Producers, which produced figures to show that imported fish account for 88 per cent. of fish used in the fish processing industry. That figure is depressingly high and I should like much more of our local fish to be used for the benefit of the fishing industry and the processing sector. To deal with the problem, we need more available fish and we must ensure that we achieve that aim through proper management schemes.

I was disappointed at the outcome of the EFTA and European economic area agreement which allowed tariff concessions to the EFTA countries, particularly Norway and Iceland, while we did not get much out of it. The Minister will have received representations from the industry, which has made clear its feelings on the issue. It is a shame that, when we had the opportunity to negotiate greater access to the fishing grounds of Iceland and Norway, we obtained little from Norway and virtually nothing from Iceland, other than a small quantity of red fish. I understand that the increase in Norwegian waters must be met by quota swaps, so the overall deal for our fishermen has been poor. I am sorry that that deal has been concluded, because it is unlikely that we shall have the opportunity to try to improve on it.

Mr. Curry: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that our success in ensuring that there was no tariff liberalisation on salmon, mackerel and herring was welcome, as it was important, particularly to the Scottish industry. He asked about the material advantage. He will know that the agreement was strongly in the national interest in that it created economic space. We succeeded in pushing up the Community share in Norwegian waters from 2·14 per cent. to 2·9 per cent. on the basis of an expanding TAC, which will mean an extra 10,000 tonnes of cod by 1997. Next year, when we shall be halfway towards the implementation of the agreement, we shall get 2·5 per cent. The tonnages are small, but well worth having in the context of the global amounts available. I still maintain that the United Kingdom achieved an acceptable deal in those negotiations, given that it was overwhelmingly in the national interest to conclude it.

Mr. Morley: I appreciate the Minister's position in the negotiations. However, I believe that those increases—which are, of course, welcome—could have been achieved through bilateral negotiations, without the deal having to include access to those waters for Portugal and Spain, which have no historical track record there. Therefore, I do not think that it was that great a deal.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): Would not the hon. Gentleman agree that we had a particularly strong claim in relation to Iceland as, historically, one of the main districts for fishing from the Humber ports were the cod fisheries around Iceland? The Humber ports were devastated when we lost those fisheries. Therefore, when we had a chance to regain a share, it was regrettable that we did not do better.

Mr. Morley: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman, who comes from Humberside and knows what happened to the Humberside fleet when it lost access to the Icelandic waters. Our fishing fleet paid a terrible price when it lost the Icelandic waters while Iceland received all the benefits. Iceland now wants the benefits from close relationships with the European Community and tariff advantages. It achieved those goals, while we received a paltry amount of red fish—not even a prime species. I thought that it was a poor deal for what is left of our long-distance fleet.

Everything that we have discussed so far has been underlined by the decline in fish stocks and the problems faced by the industry in meeting that crisis. Therefore, we

[Mr. Morley]

must consider our management and how it is guided. The cuts in the TACs are influenced by scientific advice and it is right that the Government and the Opposition should take note of it. I am worried at what happens to reports such as the east coast salmon review—a detailed report based on proper scientific advice. Not only were the report's findings delayed while it sat on a desk for a year and no action taken on it—because, I understand, the Scottish Office did not like its conclusions—but when the Government finally acted on the report, they ignored its main recommendations. They have decided to close the east coast salmon fishery and their only justification for that seems to lie in the fact that the Scottish landowners wanted the fishery closed.

I am extremely disappointed that the Government have caved in to a small pressure group and put at risk more than 1,000 jobs on the east coast. They have taken away an important traditional fishery and those people who have lost, or will lose, the opportunity of using that fishery are likely to turn their attention to other stocks such as crabs and inshore species. That will add to the fishery's problems, for no scientific reason.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): I do not know where the hon. Gentleman got the idea that there was no scientific justification. There is plenty of scientific evidence about the lack of salmon coming up the River Tay, in which I declare an interest as it runs through my constituency. To suggest that only landowners are interested in the well-being of fishing on the Tay is nonsense and the hon. Gentleman should not repeat it. Thousands of jobs in my constituency depend on tourism, an essential part of which is fishing on the River Tay and its tributaries. If the hon. Gentleman ignores that, he ignores the economic well-being of an essential part of the Scottish industry.

Mr. Morley: With respect, I think that the hon. Member is himself ignoring the findings of the report, which said that there was a limit to the amount of salmon that could be contained in a river. Even if the numbers of fish running are increased, that does not necessarily increase the escapement levels of fish. There has been an increase in the amount of salmon in some rivers that have traditionally had interceptory netting at their mouths. The jobs of constituents of the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) will not be under threat as the salmon will still be in the river, but the jobs of the people up and down the east coast will certainly be under threat and will be lost. Those were the report's findings.

The Opposition are prepared to support what might be difficult decisions in relation to fisheries management when scientific evidence justifies them, but how can we support a Government who ignore the findings of their own specialists and reports? That brings the process into disrepute.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The hon. Gentleman knows that my constituency will be the most affected. The Government did not merely ignore the scientific evidence: they even admitted that they were doing so when they said that they were going to close the fisheries.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right and many of his constituents will pay the price. The Government said that although the evidence was not there, they would still close the fishery. Such decisions do not give credibility to the management regime. The Government do not transmit the right signals to the industry when they are not prepared to follow proper scientific evidence, but give in to vested interests.

Another management issue involves the increase in mesh size. We recognise that there is an argument for the mesh size to be increased to 100 mm, but how does the Minister expect us to support what must have been a difficult decision when he does not support the salmon industry? The Opposition have mentioned square mesh panels in previous debates and certainly support those. We were greatly disappointed that the proposal was not adopted by all EC member states in previous Fisheries Councils. We hope that the Government and the Minister will press for that suggestion to be adopted.

The issue of black fish—illegal landings of fish—has already been mentioned. Everyone in the industry knows that there are large-scale landings of over-quota and undersized fish caught illegally. The Scottish *Sunday Post* contained an article which estimated that the scale of such landings amounted to about £100 million a year.

Every fisherman and fish merchant involved in such illegal landings is cutting the industry's throat. It is true that we need to know the precise scale of the problem and see the evidence, but I do not doubt that law-breaking on that scale is occurring. I hope that the Minister will give more attention to enforcement measures in our country. I hope that in the Fisheries Council he will discuss measures such as fitting satellite transponders to fishing vessels so that they can be tracked and encouraging the European Commission to carry out spot checks on member states to ensure that all of them are obeying the law. I accept that Britain is not the only country in which the law is broken in that respect and that other member states do not enforce the law as rigorously as they should. The Commission should introduce a spot check system to make sure that enforcement takes place throughout the Community.

Mr. Curry: I am slightly puzzled. A short time ago the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) said that such reports were a smear, but the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) validates them. We all agree that there is a problem, but at the end of the day it is the fishermen who will have to decide that they will not permit such things to happen. If people are determined to break the law, we cannot stop them. We cannot run a police state with an inspector in every boat. We might even need two inspectors, one to protect the other. It is not a practical proposition.

Mr. Morley: We do not know the scale of such law-breaking, but there are allegations and smears for all sorts of reasons. People in the industry are pointing fingers at each other. Everyone knows that illegal fishing takes place and it must be stamped out. People in the industry who are engaged in such fishing are doing themselves and fishermen and processors who are abiding by the law and playing by the rules no good whatever.

Unlicensed vessels also contribute to fraud and in that context I know that the Minister is discussing the extension of licensing. I encourage him in those discussions. The central theme of any package of

management and change is decommissioning. The Minister met some of his hon. Friends recently in a delegation of which I was a member. I thank him for doing that and for the constructive and positive way in which the problems of decommissioning were discussed. He said that decommissioning was not ruled out as part of an overall package. Will he say in the near future whether he will introduce decommissioning as part of that overall package?

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): I am in favour of a decommissioning scheme, but can the hon. Gentleman say how that would reduce the effort rather than simply leaving it as it is and removing some vessels from the fleet?

Mr. Morley: I shall come shortly to that important issue, which is the main theme of one of the Government's arguments against decommissioning. They say that if the fleet is reduced, the boats that are left will simply increase their efforts and the fish stocks will not be any better off.

I hope that the Minister will discuss with the Council the proposal by the Advisory Committee on Fisheries Management for a 30 per cent. reduction of effort in the North sea. That is linked to the proposal for a 200-day effort limitation which, it is suggested, will be a days-in-port restriction. A 200-day limitation is better than an eight-day consecutive restriction, but I am concerned about fisheries management that is simply based on tying up boats in port. It is wasteful and difficult for the industry and presents grat problems for the fishermen. It is not efficient fisheries management.

Mr. Curry: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that a 200-day tie-up is better than the current 96 days of consecutive restriction periods of eight days?

Mr. Morley: I am grateful to the Minister for his assistance. Any sort of effort limitation based on a number of days rather than on consecutive days tied up in port every month, such as the eight-day consecutive tie-up, is certainly an improvement.

I am not arguing for a 200-day tie-up, because that would be unsatisfactory. If the European Community went down that road, the Council would throw in the Minister's face the fact that this country does not have a decommissioning scheme. If we start arguing for a reduction of the number of days in port, the Council will oppose it on the grounds that we have not made a move on decommissioning to reduce fleet capacity. That would make it harder for the Minister to get concessions and would impose a heavy burden on the fleet.

In terms of the Government's attitude, it is an insult to suggest that fishermen who have to meet fixed costs and pay off loans are not fishing to capacity. Given our fishing patterns and the fact that I have talked to fishermen about this issue, there is not much scope for fishermen to make a great deal of extra effort. The Minister has not advanced any arguments to back the allegation that fishermen are working below capacity.

If the Commission introduces a days-in-port scheme, it should pay compensation to the fishermen who are forced to tie up, because that is the equivalent of a set-aside scheme. Farmers who take land out of production are paid, sometimes quite handsomely, for doing so. I do not want to be controversial, but many Conservative Members have taken up set-aside payments and have received many thousands of pounds of public money. If some Conservative Members owned fishing boats we might see more sympathy and more support for compensation for taking those boats out of production.

Mr. Salmond: I saw some signs from the Treasury Bench indicating that Ministers do not agree with the proposal for a comprehensive lay-up scheme. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that, in the three years up to 1989, some 86 million ecu was paid by the Commission to other countries for such a lay-up scheme in certain fisheries that were under preasure.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman is correct. Other countries have made use of that fund. However, payments for tying up are not a good use of money. Problems of over-capacity should be solved by using the money for a decommissioning scheme. That is better than spending it on tying-up grants.

If there is to be any such restriction, there must be a gear option. It has been alleged that previous gear options have been abused, but it can be enforced. People who take a gear option and abuse it should suffer substantial penalties, including a possible suspension of their fishing licence. People who break the law in that way undermine the industry's future and the Minister would be quite right to take strong action against them.

I hope that we can have a rolling reference period for the calculation for restricted fishing boats to take into account boats that have switched their fishing patterns over the previous year. I agree that any restriction or scheme must apply to all member states. The previous days-in-port regulation did not apply to one or two member states' fleets and there can be no justification for this country abiding by such restrictions when other countries do not.

The Government pay lip service to conservation through their conservation policies, but they have not been prepared to introduce a definitive policy for fisheries management and control. The hands-off policy that the Government have pursued for so long is not working and even peripheral policies, such as the privatisation of the trust ports and of Associated British Ports, have been damaging the industry.

Fishing fleets have many problems apart from fish stocks. The fishing fleet in Whitehaven faces severe problems because of the recession and the fall of trade in the port. My hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) is actively pressing that case, but reduced prosperity for the industry means that fleets such as that one which are based in small ports can barely afford the dredging fees that are needed to keep those ports open. I hope that the Minister will bear such issues in mind when he considers an overall strategy for the fishing industry.

I hope that the Minister will take up the points that I have made about the TAC. I thank him for the assurances that he has given. However, the time has come for the Government to make a statement on a decommissioning scheme. We know that, on its own, this is not the answer to the problems of the industry, but, given the pressures, difficulties and restrictions that the Government are putting on the fishing industry, it may help. It is curious that the Government seem to think that it is all right to limit fishing days—the amount of time that people spend fishing—but do not think that it is all right that the European Community should limit working hours. There is a contradition in their approach.

[Mr. Morley]

In any sort of restructuring or management, a decommissioning scheme is essential. It will assist those who want to get out of the industry and reduce effort. It should be allied to the social fund so as to take into account the effect on local communities and those who earn their livelihood on the ships.

Mr. Mans: I am interested in what the hon. Gentleman said about the social chapter. How does he feel that the 48-hour rule, which I understand that his party supports, would apply to the fishing industry?

Mr. Morley: The 48-hour rule would not apply to the fishing industry because of the pattern of its work and because many in it are self-employed, and therefore free to work for as long as they want. The question is not relevant.

We cannot have the two approaches. The days-in-port scheme is a restriction on people's livelihood. There is no sign of any compensation for those who are affected. There are European Community funds available for this, but, above all, decommissioning must be used as part of restructuring. The social fund will assist the communities as well as the individuals. The resources are there, the structures are there and it is time that the Government took up this opportunity.

8.31 pm

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) is a fair man, but he was a little harsh on my hon. Friend the Minister towards the end of his speech.

Mr. Morley: Never.

Mr. Harris: I thought that the the hon. Gentleman was. My hon. Friend the Minister has worked tirelessly for the fishing industry. He has a thankless job.

Mr. Wilson: But the hon. Gentleman would still like it.

Mr. Harris: I am sure my hon. Friend likes his job, but it is a thankless task. On behalf of the industry, he has to deal with an impossible situation. We all know what it is —the dreadful task of trying to match the ever-increasing catching capacity with ever-decreasing fish stocks. It is as simple and difficult as that. He is to be commended for his hard work on behalf of the industry and for the great courtesy with which he receives every hon. Member who represents a fishing constituency and who therefore has great problems. His door is always open to us, as it is to the fishing industry and its organisations. I am sure that the whole House will thank him for that.

It was my sad duty and privilege once again in the past year to visit the relatives of fishermen lost at sea—in this case the two men lost in the Margaret and William II. I mention that partly because I know that all hon. Members who represent coastline constituencies are increasingly concerned by the number of hit and run accidents. Responsibility in such matters is split between Government Departments. The Department of Transport takes the lead in maritime safety matters, but I know that my hon. Friend the Minister is concerned as well.

I hope that the one message that will go out from this debate—a united one from those of us who represent fishermen—is that we are alarmed at the number of these accidents. Many of them can be prevented by better watch-keeping on merchant ships. Earlier this week, I saw hon. Members, mainly from Scotland, who are concerned about another aspect—the loss of fishing boats in accidents involving submarines. That is extremely worrying, and I hope that, while we concentrate on the financial and conservation aspects, we never lose sight of the dangers that our fishermen face at sea.

The debate is primarily a review of the fishing industry in preparation for the Fisheries Council meeting next week. Once again, that is being dominated by the ever-downward pressure on quotas for many species. Looking at this problem from the south-west of England perspective, the aspect that I find most worrying is the pressure on quotas in area VII for plaice and sole.

I pay tribute to the work that the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations does for the industry and in briefing Members of Parliament for debates such as this. Its chief executive estimates, for example, that the proposed cut in quota for flat fish in area VII could reduce the income of the entire European Community fleet by as much as £15 million. If those figures are accurate, a large proportion of that loss of income will be borne by United Kingdom fishermen and in particular fishermen from Cornwall and Devon. The ports of Newlyn and Brixham stand to be hit considerably by such cuts in TACs.

If one measures not TACs but the proposed reductions in quotas, the most startling example is that for plaice in area VIIf and VIIg. I know that you are familiar, Madam Deputy Speaker, with such technicalities, but just in case you are not, that is the Bristol channel and Celtic sea. That reduction is a startling 27 per cent. Those waters are very important for south-west fishermen and the consequences of such a reduction, if that is what it turns out to be and it is not mitigated by other measures to offset it, would be serious.

That is why I urge my hon. Friend the Minister not just to look closely at those figures but to negotiate strongly on them. Again, I share the view of the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe that many of these proposals are not based on sound scientific advice. To put it mildly, there is room for argument on the views put forward by the scientists. I also press my hon. Friend to try to offset the damage caused by such drastic reductions by arranging swaps with other countries. I see that he is nodding with agreement on that.

Another feature of next week's meeting of Fisheries Ministers will be the review of the mackerel box—a matter of great importance to the south-west fishermen. I have always been in favour of the mackerel box, and I played some part, both as a Member of the European Parliament and as a Westminster Member of Parliament, in getting it in place. Dreadful harm was being done to juvenile stocks by the gross overfishing of those waters several years ago. I have always recognised that the box is a blunt instrument. It has certain advantages, but it has disadvantages, and some people have suffered as a result.

The most worrying aspect of the box has been the way in which, unlike some of the boats specialising in pelagic fishery—I am thinking particularly of one example in my constituency—the south-west fishery has been unable to build up a track record, and has therefore found great difficulty in obtaining quotas.

The difficulty of obtaining a reasonable quota also applies to the hand liners. My hon. Friend the Minister and his officials have spent many hours on that problem and I thank them for it, but the situation is still worrying.

The hand liners pose no threat to fish stocks. Most have small boats going out from the Cornish coast and I hope that some way can be found to ensure that they can continue on a reasonably sound basis. I ask my hon. Friend to look at the matter again.

Reference has already been made to the Hague preference. I regarded it as a scandal that the south-west was not granted such preference when the agreement was struck. It was a political deal before the common fisheries policy. I believe that it was the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) who signed that agreement when he was a Foreign Office Minister in the Labour Government. I am not sure whether he foresaw then what the consequences would be for the south-west fishery, but he represents a south-west constituency.

Mr. Salmond: Before the hon. Gentleman gives the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) the credit for the Hague preference, I should tell him that the initiative was taken by Garret FitzGerald, the then Irish Foreign Minister.

Mr. Harris: I was not giving the right hon. Member for Devonport the credit or the blame; I was simply pointing out that I think—I am open to correction—that he signed the agreement as a Foreign Office Minister. In those days, negotiations with Europe were carried out by the Foreign Office. Thank goodness that that situation has changed. I speak as a former Parliamentary Private Secretary to a Foreign Secretary.

The Hague agreement has done terrible damage to the south-west fishery and its shadow is cast forward in so many ways. If some regions or other countries in the current round of negotiations are given additional quota as a result of the Hague preference, those who stand to lose will be those who do not enjoy that status, and that includes the south-west, even though parts of it are dependent on fishing. Again, the ports of Newlyn and Brixham will be particularly affected, but so will a number of other ports in Cornwall and Devon. I was heartened by what my hon. Friend the Minister said on that, but the Hague preference is a dangerous area.

As the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) said, my hon. Friend the Minister received a delegation—it was meant to be an all-party delegation, but for reasons which we understand, the Liberal Democrats were unable to come along—*[Interruption.]* I hear someone say "cheap", but that is no reflection on the hon. Members concerned, one of whom was giving evidence to a Select Committee. I am in no way blaming the Liberal Democrats.

Those of us who did see the Minister were somewhat heartened by what he said. All of us who keep a close eye on the fishing industry have noticed the Government's considerable move away from their previous position; we all welcome that. The Government are seriously considering decommissioning. However, we all understand that a price will have to be paid if a decommissioning scheme is brought in. Technical measures will not be such a controversial element, but, again, as the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe said, the question of effort control will undoubtedly be a controversial aspect if that forms part of a wider conservation package. Fishermen will rightly need to look with great care at what is being proposed.

Sometimes we use euphemisms in the Chamber and perhaps instead of talking about "effort control" we should be talking about "tying up". That, as we know from experience in the north and in Scotland, has been a hot issue. I welcome my hon. Friend the Minister's opposition to a 200 day tying-up proposal. My guess is that we shall probably see moves towards greater tying-up, but I hope there will be greater flexibility. At the moment, the boats in the south-west are not affected and I hope that they will not be, but I hope that when my hon. Friend replies he will confirm that the Commission's proposals apply to the areas which are at present covered.

Mr. Curry *indicated assent.*

Mr. Harris: In conclusion, we all wish my hon. Friend well in the horrendously difficult task that he faces week in week out, month in month out. I hope that there will not be a Division tonight, but I suspect that that is wishful thinking. We need to back him strongly on a united basis as he defends United Kingdom interests in the negotiations next week.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. If those hon. Members seeking to speak were each to take about 10 to 12 minutes each, it would be possible to call them all in this timed debate.

8.46 pm

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, South): I shall endeavour to comply, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I congratulate the Minister, not so much on what he said because there was not much of surprise and much was unwelcome—we have become used to the standard opposition to decommissioning schemes—as on the way in which it was said. I have been involved in about a dozen fishing debates since I entered the House in 1987, and they have all been characterised by bad temper. I appreciated the much more humble tone adopted by the Minister today. He showed much less aggression than he adopted in the corresponding debate last year, when in one fell swoop he alienated the north-east fishing establishment.

It is worth emphasising the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) and in the Opposition's amendment, that the Government have no apparent strategy for the fishing industry. That was shown again by the Minister's statement tonight. There was no sign of anything other than crisis management and no sign that the Government had any particular direction in which they wanted to travel.

My particular concern is the fish processing industry, because any decisions made as a result of the negotiations in Europe will affect that industry, of which I heard no mention by the Minister tonight. That reflects the lack of strategy and an apparent lack of concern for the industry, which is certainly felt by the industry.

There are 4,500 jobs in fish processing in the Grampian region in 148 businesses, which makes it a significant and important employer, particularly in the rural areas and the smaller communities. They have faced massive problems as a result of the rundown in stocks and the lower TACs. That has given rise to considerable problems, not the least of which was the announcement of the closure of a fish

[Mr. Frank Doran]

transport business, Charles Alexander and Company, in my constituency, which will result in the loss of about 300 jobs.

The problems facing the processing industry are different from those facing the catching industry. At least the fish catching industry has been somewhat compensated, in that, with the shortage of fish, the prices have been higher. It is a simple law of the market. However, someone has had to pay the higher prices, and they have been paid by the fish processing industry.

The industry has tried to pass on the price increases to the consumer, but it has not worked. It has been impossible for the industry to recover all the increases that it has had to face. Last week, the Sea Fish Industry Authority produced its first assessment of consumers' response to higher prices. The SFIA carries out a regular survey. It says that the fishing industry is now meeting real consumer resistance to the high price that the consumer is having to pay for the product in supermarkets and fish shops. It is a serious problem, not only because fish, particularly in my part of the country, has been a staple part of the diet for as many years as anybody can remember, but also because it is being forced into the luxury price bracket. Haddock is now more expensive in many areas than prime steak. That is appalling.

The Government ritually suggest that the industry should solve the problem by importing fish. I visited a factory recently, together with my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), where we saw the effects of that advice. It is a modern, highly automated factory. It has the best machinery, and it follows good hygiene practices. However, it has been forced to import about 75 per cent. of its fish, most of which comes from Canada and Newfoundland. I do not know what the implications are for the balance of trade, but it is a serious problem for all of us.

Not every fish processing company has the appropriate technology. They do not have the freezing capacity, or the capacity to process and then re-freeze fish. The bulk of the businesses in my area are small, so many of them do not have access to it. For them, such a possibility is unrealistic.

The trends are worrying. The capacity to process fish is being reduced. That happened 10 years ago when herring stocks were so badly devastated that the industry had a nil total allowable catch. The processing capacity was therefore completely lost to the industry. At one time, Aberdeen had a huge herring processing industry, but now it has none. Yesterday I checked the position with the local fish merchants and found that some 12,000 boxes were available in the three main Grampian markets. That was a glut on the market, compared with the usual 5,000 or 6,000 boxes during the summer.

Most of the fish were very small, at the lower end of the market. The majority were unsold because nobody had the capacity to process them. That fish was wasted. It ended up in the fish meal factory rather than on the consumer's plate, where it should have been. We are losing our capacity as a result of the problems faced by the industry. If things go on as they are, we shall be unable to cope with any upturn in the industry, and that will affect many other businesses.

There is great uncertainty about the hygiene regulations. When he winds up I should appreciate it if the Minister would say something to dispel some of the uncertainty. We were told initially that the regulations would come into force in 1992. We have seen drafts; we know what we shall be required to do. However, it is not clear whether the regulations will be applied with immediate effect or whether they are to be phased in. I hear that there is the possibility of 1995 being the final date for implementation. The industry is very concerned. It faces considerable investment if it is to get itself up to standard to meet the hygiene regulations.

Last week, it was announced that just over £2 million in European Community grants is to be made available to fish processors in the Grampian region. That represents about 30 per cent. of the investment that will be necessary by the group of processors who have been lucky enough to win these grants. They will have to provide 65 per cent. of the investment. The Government are providing only 5 per cent. That gives some idea of the scale of the investment that is necessary—some £10 million for a very small group of processors.

It is a tremendous achievement that Grampian regional council, Aberdeen district council, Grampian Enterprise and its predecessor, the Scottish Development Agency, as well as local industry have been able to secure these grants. The industry has planned ahead, mainly through the Aberdeen sea food project, and is in the forefront of technology. At the same time, however, it is faced with this difficult squeeze: the question of supplies, the problem of the price of the product, consumer resistance and the very high levels of investment that are necessary. However, it is struggling through.

The industry faces a number of difficulties. One of the major problems is the very strong feeling that it is not allowed to operate on a level playing field. For example, Aberdeen district council is keen to enforce the hygiene regulations. It rigorously enforces the current regulations and wants to do the same with the new regulations. However, the regulations are less rigorously imposed in other parts of the country. I have heard tales of some local authorities that allow fish processing to take place in the open air. That has all sorts of hygiene implications. It means that the processor who does not invest, who takes a backward view of the industry, who does not have the overheads that those who adopt a much more enlightened attitude incur can easily undercut those in my constituency, and others, who have taken on this massive investment burden.

I return to my original point—the lack of a Government strategy for the industry. All that is obvious about the Government's strategy is its absence. Fish is an important and healthy food. It is important to our local and national economies. There is no sign, however, that the Government recognise that fact.

The aims must be very clear to the Government. They are clear to the Opposition. We need to slim down our catching capacity for traditional species. We also need to modernise the processing industry and to market fish once more as an attractive and affordable food. However, the Government seem to have opted out of decision making. They refuse to give a lead over the decommissioning scheme. They seek to push that responsibility on to the fishing industry instead of putting forward a positive scheme of their own.

The fragile sensibilities of the Secretary of State for Scotland and his embarrassment over the previous scheme are much more important to him than the future of the

fishing industry. His actions have affected the election results. Before the 1983 election the Conservative party held five out of six seats in Grampian. The most recent by-election has resulted in the Conservative party holding no seats in the Grampian region. The tragedy is that——

Mr. Wilson: —it has no more to lose.

Mr. Doran: Certainly. It has more seats to lose in other parts of the country, but I take my hon. Friend's point.

The tragedy is that the industry is paying the price for this Government's incompetence.

8.58 pm

Mr. Neville Trotter (Tynemouth): It is interesting to reflect, particularly today, that we are considering an industry that is more controlled by Europe than perhaps any other. It is hardly an example of a well-managed industry. I appreciate the problems. It is sometimes difficult to achieve international co-operation—even at times between Scotland and England. Something as complex as the fishing industry is bound to present difficulties. There is some good news, with the best haddock stocks for 12 years. That shows what has been achieved with a restriction of effort in the past.

A 200 day tie-up would be disastrous. I was encouraged to hear my hon. Friend the Minister suggest that that was simply an opening gambit in Brussels. It would be quite unacceptable to go for such a tie-up. I do not regard tie-up as a solution. It is a ridiculous misuse of assets to have capital tied up in a boat that is not being used. The answer must be to bring the capacity of the fleet into line with the stocks available.

Like the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) I welcomed the way in which my hon. Friend the Minister met myself and colleagues from both sides of the House and showed that he does not have a closed mind on decommissioning. I accept that decommissioning is not in itself a solution, but it is an essential part of a package to deal with the serious problem facing the industry. I was encouraged by my hon. Friend's remarks on that occasion and I believe that we shall see such a scheme introduced in due course.

I should like to deal with some technical points. The twin trawl rig is highly detrimental to the stocks of prawns on the north-east coast of England and I hope that we shall see a ban on that. It is self-evident that there is a need for a one-net rule, as the opportunities for cheating and the difficulties of enforcement are obvious. I am told that there is now a device for heat sealing around the knots of larger mesh nets which reduces their aperture. Apparently, that is legal, but I suggest that it needs attention.

Some people in the fishing industry are concerned solely with the short term and, with the financial pressures upon them, they have no regard to the future and will take whatever they can. That could result in black landings, to which Opposition Members have referred. Most fishermen are sensible people. They think of the future and have sons to follow them. They wish to see stocks preserved. It is important that the restrictions put before them are acceptable. That is the key to the success of whatever proposals we make.

The point about sons following their fathers leads me on to the future of the north coast commercial salmon fishery. It is a traditional industry that goes back at least 100 years. The first record of licensing that I can find occurred in 1867. That industry is now threatened with being phased out, with no new licences being granted and fathers no longer being able to hand on their licences to their sons.

I have read the report on the review of salmon fishing. It is a thick document of well over 100 pages. However, having read it from cover to cover, I have found no scientific evidence to support the proposals being made by Ministers. Those proposals are of great consequence to local fishing on the north-east coast of England. It will have consequences far beyond the catch of salmon. The pattern of fishing on the north-east coast is one of intermingling of fishing from season to season. The refusal to allow salmon fishing would have a detrimental effect on the livelihood of many people who are traditionally dependent on that industry.

It is hard to explain why there is no proposal for a similar phasing out of the Scottish commercial fishery. I know that that has been reduced and that the fishery has been bought out to some extent. Why is there commercial buying out of fisheries in Scotland, but no similar proposal in England?

Mr. Bill Walker: Drift netting in Scotland has been banned for years.

Mr. Trotter: I know that, but there are other methods of commercial fishing. On the Tay, which is the local river of my hon. Friend the Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker), over 75 per cent. of salmon are caught by commercial fishermen and only 25 per cent. are caught by anglers. If anything is to be done to deal with commercial fishing, my hon. Friend should start by looking on his doorstep at his local river and not down the coast at us.

Mr. Walker: While my hon. Friend is being so complimentary, he might say who stocks the river with salmon.

Mr. Trotter: I am not sure whether some of the 250,000 salmon that are put into the Tyne eventually find their way into the Tay. I am not sufficiently au fait with the migratory habits of that fish.

The salmon is not a factory product; it depends on nature. The research that I have seen shows that the climate, the problems of temperature and the movement of natural foodstocks in the sea are important factors in deciding the quantity of salmon available.

I have referred to stocking on the Tyne. I am not sure to what extent that method is followed in other rivers. It seems an excellent idea that all rivers where there is angling should be required to produce their own stocks in the way that we do. It is fallacious to suggest that reducing commercial fishing would necessarily increase the number of young salmon breeding on the rivers. If the river is already sufficiently stocked, that will not increase its stock because there is only a certain amount of breeding material available in the natural environment. Therefore, however many more mature fish come into the river, that will not lead to a significant increase in the number of young fish. The subject is complex, but I do not believe that there is evidence in the report from which the conclusion can be drawn that commercial fishing should be phased out.

Other major issues affecting salmon have not been referred to, such as the effect of seals. It is said that each seal eats two tonnes of fish a year. I do not suppose that seals eat only salmon, but in the north-east of England

[Mr. Trotter]

many of their meals are salmon. Why is it not being suggested that something should be done to prevent this misuse of salmon? I suppose that if a fish is caught by an angler or a commercial fisherman, at least it is a good human use, but that cannot be said of the fish that are wasted in the stomachs of seals.

The report does not mention poaching. It is suggested by other sources that poaching on some rivers in Scotland is higher than their total declared catch. What is being done about that?

Mr. Wilson: That is an interesting point, but there is more than one kind of poacher. Does the hon. Gentleman share my view that it is absurd that there is no legal obligation on the owners of rivers to declare their catches, far less to declare them accurately, to the Scottish Office?

Mr. Trotter: I was intrigued to find that more than 3,000 tickets were issued to anglers on one river, but not one catch was recorded. They must have been pretty inefficient fishermen. I take the hon. Gentleman's point, which he made well.

One of the effects of a licensed industry off our coast is an effective system of policing. The National Rivers Authority's boats regularly patrol the coast, but there is no better policeman than the fisherman, who will report any infringement. We have far less poaching in our area than is to be found in other areas.

The industry is closely controlled, well managed and limited. There are restrictions on weekends, on hours and days and on night-time fishing and the number of licences has been significantly reduced. It is interesting that netting does not start until May, unlike angling, which starts in February. Angling goes on while the spawning season is at its height, whereas netting does not start until the spawning season is over. That point should be considered by the inquiry.

The effects of north coast fishing on the Scottish catch is estimated to be only 7 per cent. In other words, if there were no netting off the north-east coast of England, there would be an increase of 7 per cent. in salmon in Scotland, which is not a significant increase. The argument about who has the best right to the salmon is interesting. Why should an angler have a better right to catch it than a commercial fisherman? The salmon is dead whoever catches it. I cannot agree that it is better that the salmon should be caught in one way rather than the other, and the effects on Scottish rivers are in any case insignificant.

Much could be done to improve stocks. River quality could be improved, obstacles could be removed from rivers, more fish could be inserted from local breeding, effective limits could be placed on poaching and commercial fishing at the mouths of Scottish rivers could be reduced, in the same way as is mistakenly proposed for my area. The National Rivers Authority has been asked to phase out the industry over a period of years. The authority should carry out its own research and reach its own conclusions on the basis of its own judgment. I hope that it will take that advice.

I ask my hon. Friend whether he can clarify the position for next year. It is physically and practically impossible to start phasing out by them. I do not want a phasing out and I hope that we shall resist it successfully. Will my hon. Friend assure me that a net limitation order will be introduced for next year so that there can be some understanding as soon as possible about what the position will be? I suggest that there should be a delay of perhaps five years while the NRA produces its own evidence and arrives at its own conclusion.

9.9 pm

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): As the Parliamentary Secretary suggested, the nature of these debates is that we rightly consider the impact of European Community proposals on various fishing communities around our coast. The hon. Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter), although talking about measures that did not arise out of the EC documents, raised an important issue for the north of England. The hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) rightly drew attention to the difficulties that fishermen in his area have had in trying to encourage the Government to give more help to the hand-line fishermen. My hon. Friend the Member for Truro (Mr. Taylor) has bent my ear about that issue and he has pointed out that it is a conservation-friendly method which probably deserves greater support from the Government.

Various total allowable catches are subjects for discussion this evening. We welcomed the fact that, in several respects, the Parliamentary Secretary said that he and his colleagues would go to Brussels to try to negotiate improvements. I draw his attention especially to the TACs for cod, haddock, whiting and saithe in the west of Scotland where there appears to be increasing pressure to reduce the TACs. Some emphasis must be given to an increase in those TACs

The nephrops TAC in the North sea, if it is to be introduced at all, would be better applied on a geographically sectoral basis rather than as a TAC for the whole of the North sea. For the channel stocks of cod and whiting, there is a proposed reduction in an essentially precautionary TAC. The industry would very much welcome efforts made at this stage to increase that to the 1991 levels so that it does not face again the problem of recent years when Ministers have had to go back for a half-yearly review.

Many hon. Members have expressed considerable alarm and concern about the proposal that there should be what is effectively a 200 day tie-up. The hon. Member for St. Ives euphemistically referred to it as effort limitation. I welcomed the fact that the Minister said that the Government would not accept the proposal and that they would negotiate it downwards at the Council of Ministers meeting next week.

As the hon. Member for Tynemouth said, it is perfectly clear that the proposal would tie up working capital for a substantial part of the year. It would be almost impossible for anyone to suggest such a proposal for any other industry. It is a staggering proposal, especially as many of the fishermen concerned have laid out or borrowed substantial sums to invest in their boats and in their gear. They need adequate opportunities to fish if they are to be able to meet their financial commitments. There will have to be rigorous negotiations. We look to Ministers to show as much enthusiasm in negotiating against the proposal as the Prime Minister showed in negotiating against the social chapter yesterday at Maastricht.

Ministers can put forward several arguments. The scientific evidence suggests that this year's tie-up of eight days for each of 11 months—88 days in total—was not

especially effective in conservation. An increase in the TAC for North sea haddock is proposed for 1992 and that may suggest that there is less need for a tie-up in 1992 than there has been in 1991.

We also have a compulsory 90 mm square mesh—it has been unilaterally imposed by the United Kingdom since July. From the middle of next year, the minimum mesh size will be 100 mm. Those limits are imposed in an effort to reduce landings of small cod and haddock.

One hopes that that will lead to an improvement in stocks. It reinforces the argument that there will be less need for effort limitation in the forthcoming year. There are arguments that Ministers can marshall on the subject —we wish them every success in trying to negotiate against the proposal.

If we are realistic it may dawn on us that some measure of effort limitation in the final package is inevitable, and that we must face the idea of a gear option. I realise that that idea is not universally popular in the industry, but the precedent for a gear option was set in 1991.

If we wish to divert activity away from the traditional north seas fisheries of cod and haddock to new species —for example, monkfish, ling and redfish—a gear option would allow such diversification, while putting less strain on the North sea species whose stocks are pressurised.

In developing alternative fisheries, much will have to be done to develop a market for new species—to encourage consumer demand for them. Ultimately, that would lead to greater consumer choice, but marketing will be necessary to introduce the new species; furthermore, there will be an incentive for fishermen to use larger mesh sizes if they are allowed a derogation from any tie-up rules.

Perhaps the strongest opposition to a gear option has come from the Scottish White Fish Producers Organisation. If that organisation said that it was against the option because it did not want a loophole in the law, I would agree. It would be wrong, and would defeat the purpose of allowing a gear option, if it was intended simply to provide a loophole, but I know that in some cases south of the border this year, as a result of the gear option there have been landings of larger sizes in certain categories and classes of fish. That seems to suggest that in 1991 the gear option has had at least some effect.

If the Commission and the Government propose a concession, it is not unreasonable to attach strings to it to ensure that it is not a loophole but a genuine means of conservation. It could be tied to higher minimum landing sizes, or we could insist that vessels undertaking the option may be allowed to land only certain class sizes of haddock and cod.

I welcome the Minister's reassurance about his intention to negotiate against the 200 day tie-up. Perhaps the Minister of State, Scottish Office could say more about the Government's position on gear options when he replies.

This is an opportunity to examine the technical conservation measures suggested and implemented at the Council of Ministers meeting in October. The 100 mm mesh size has attracted considerable criticism. There is disapointment that in the negotiations it was not possible to incorporate into the EC requirements any reference to square mesh panels. Many people who at the outset were sceptical about their use have found that the trials have proved them to be an effective means of eliminating the smaller fish.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House agree that one sure way of assisting conservation is to reduce the number of discards. The wastefulness of discards strikes all of us. We do not claim that the square mesh panel is the ultimate solution, but those who have used and tested it agree that it can make a worthwhile contribution. It would perhaps have been useful to have had the option of the 100 mm diamond and the 90 mm square mesh panel. I hope that the Government have not lost sight of that and will be prepared to argue for it in future.

Linked to the proposals put forward in October, there has been considerable dismay about the derogation for the whiting fishery. Many people feel that it is unenforceable to have a separate 90 mm mesh size for whiting as long as one does not have a one-net rule. The arrangements are open to abuse, as is widely recognised. I accept, however, that some communities depend heavily on a whiting fishery. If there is to be a derogation on net size, it should perhaps be linked to size of vessel—for example, one might specify vessels of under 400. That would give greater control than the proposal on the table.

It has been said in every fisheries debate in the past three or four years that everything comes back to why the Government have not introduced a decommissioning system. It can be argued with considerable force that the debates that we had last year on the eight day tie-up and the debates this year on the proposed 200 day tie-up would not have taken place—and certainly would not have engendered the same passion and anger in the industry —if, two or three years ago, the Government had grasped the nettle and introduced a well-targeted and well-funded decommissioning scheme.

The hon. Member for Tynemouth blamed the European Community for much of the crisis in the European fishing industry. It is fair to say that, in this case, the EC has made available the funds to finance a decommissioning scheme: it is the British Government who have not been prepared to take advantage of that scheme and implement it for our United Kingdom fishermen. Instead of a permanent reduction in the size and capacity of the fleet, we have had what might be termed a temporary reduction through various ad hoc tie-up schemes. That cannot be good for the long-term stability of the fleet and, in many cases, leads to working capital being tied up in a most unacceptable way.

We have heard the argument again tonight that decommissioning would not enhance conservation, but one argument in favour of decommissioning is that those who are left in the industry have a better opportunity to make a worthwhile living. That fact should not be overlooked. With decommissioning, one is not—as is the case with the eight day tie-up rule—forcing people to go out and fish in circumstances that are often hazardous and constitute a danger to their well-being.

As has already been hinted in the debate, many of us feel that the blind spot really lies with the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who had his fingers burnt when the last decommissioning scheme was introduced and was rapped on the knuckles by the Public Accounts Committee. It should not be forgotten, however, that, in its report, the PAC did not dismiss decommissioning schemes altogether—it merely dismissed that introduced by the right hon. Gentleman. I hope that he will be able to overcome that inhibition.

One can only speculate, but it would appear that the right hon. Gentleman alone is the block on the road to a

[Mr. James Wallace]

decommissioning scheme, which is widely recognised throughout the industry and on both sides of the House as necessary. On more than one occasion, the fishing industry has indicated its willingness to sit down with the Government to discuss how such a scheme might be targeted. I hope that, in the new year, the Government will take up the industry's offer. If the lead Ministry had been the Scottish Office rather than the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, that might have happened.

We are all very conscious that the 1992 review is upon us. It may well be concluded during the British presidency of the Community in the second half of next year. This is the first fisheries debate since the sad death of Alick Buchanan-Smith, who always made a valuable contribution to such debates. In the Scottish Grand Committee on 13 July 1989, he said that he began

"to wonder, where the preponderance of the industry is north of the border, whether, in the same way as forestry, the Secretary of State for Scotland ought not to consider taking the lead."—[*Official Report, Scottish Grand Committee*, 13 July 1989; c. 62-63.]

That was a considered view from someone who had held office in MAFF and was part of the negotiations in respect of the common fisheries policy in 1983. The Government should take that view to heart.

Having said that, I want to compliment the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) on the conciliatory way in which he opened the debate. Obviously a lesson has been learnt from previous occasions. I place on record my thanks to him for the vigour with which he pursued the minimum import price for farmed salmon after representations from me and my constituents in September. That may not be the complete answer, but the move was welcome. I am aware of the vigour with which the Minister pursued that policy.

Continuing this congratulatory vein, in respect of the pelagic side and the negotiations with Norway on mackerel, it appears that the year-by-year encroachment of the Norwegians into the share of North sea mackerel has been halted. Perhaps that can form the basis for a longer-term arrangement on mackerel.

As Norway has agreed to flexibility west of 4 deg west, I hope, as in previous years, that the Minister will be able to negotiate that flexibility with the Council, perhaps up to the 62,000 tonnes allowed. The decision taken earlier this year to allow 45,000 tonnes of mackerel to be klondyked in Lerwick has benefited my constituents. I have pressed for that, together with the local industry, for some time and I give credit where credit is due.

While I am prepared to offer congratulations this evening, real congratulations would be in order when a Minister announces at the Dispatch Box that at long last the Government have seen sense and are prepared to embark on a decommissioning scheme for the fishing industry.

9.26 pm

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): The suggestion of the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) that the Scottish Office should have more influence on fishing policy will not be welcomed by English fishermen. The feeling is that the Scots have had too big a slice of the cake so far.

The fishermen of Bridlington are dependent on one species—North sea cod. The fisherman's lot is not a happy one. The common fisheries policy has been a complete failure. It has been a disaster for the country, for the fishing industry and for conservation. Those Opposition Members who talk about increasing EC competence should consider carefully the record of the fishing industry.

For 15 years the industry has had its fishing restricted by quotas which were supposedly based on scientific evidence. If the policy had worked, we should have been able progressively to increase those quotas and stocks should have increased. The reverse has happened. Stocks have grown smaller and quotas have been reduced progressively year after year.

If quotas worked and were an effective way of conserving stocks, why must we consider tying up boats? For a long time the industry has claimed that quotas are inefficient because of the effect of discards and because many foreign Governments do not ensure that their fishermen abide by the quotas. I have to say that some fishermen in the United Kingdom do not always abide by those quotas.

As a method of management, we do not need quotas; we need effective conservation. The Bridlington fishermen have for many years been calling for smaller mesh sizes. At long last we have a 100 mm mesh size, but that is too little, too late. Even now, it is left to Britain unilaterally to require square mesh panels to be fitted to certain nets. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) that a one-net rule is long overdue.

Industrial fishing should be banned completely. I cannot understand why the Community has never agreed to banning fishing in breeding grounds while the fish are spawning. I was pleased to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth refer to seals in connection with Scotch salmon. It is a fact that seals eat an enormous amount of fish. The Norwegians are worried about the effect of seals on their fish stocks in the Baring sea. We should seriously consider reducing the number of seals in the North sea.

Regrettably, the EEC is still concentrating on restricting fishing rather than on conserving fish. I agree with hon. Members of all parties who have said that the current proposal to force boats to tie up for 200 days a year is ridiculous. How can any business survive if it does not use its capital assets for more than half the year? If a factory owner was required to do that, the receivers would be in before one would have a chance to say Jack Robinson——

Mr. Harris: Or Robert Maxwell.

Mr. Townend: Absolutely.

Although we have had some reassurance from the Minister, this proposal is made worse because there is no specific provision for the gear option. I am pleased that the Government have said that they will oppose those proposals, but I fear that we face the same prospect as last year of having our ships tied up.

The Government must also fight to keep the total allowable catch for cod above the Hague preference in the interests of English fishermen. I agree with the suggestion that the Government should stop our annual gift of 400 tonnes of cod a year to the Danes. I know that we get a swap—I believe that we receive haddock in return—*[Interruption.]* Well, I am told by my fishermen that we

do, but the benefit of the haddock goes to the Scots. If we had not given away those 400 tonnes this year, the fishermen of Bridlington would probably have been able to fish until the end of the year.

My next question to the Minister again reveals the nonsense of the EEC's fisheries policy. I refer to the case of the Spanish trawlers which we lost in the European Court. Their actions have been confirmed as legal, but the court's decision undermined the Merchant Shipping Act 1988, which was passed by this House specifically to protect British fishermen. I presume that what the Spanish are doing, the French, Italians and Portuguese could do also. I should be grateful if the Minister would tell the House what he intends to do about that serious and appalling threat to the British fishing industry.

I should like to add my thanks to those of my colleagues for the efforts of the Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry). Throughout his period of office, he has taken more cognisance of the interests of English fishermen than any other Minister for some years. Since the decline of the Humber ports, the English fishing industry has been the poor relation of the fishing industry. The interests of the Scots fishermen tend to be given preference. Therefore, we welcome my hon. Friend's support, and long may it continue.

I am also pleased that the Government are now seriously considering decommissioning grants. I believe them when they say that. That is important. My fishermen also feel that boats of less than 10m should be licensed. I am pleased to learn that the Government are paying serious attention to that matter also.

I began by saying that a fisherman's lot is not a happy one. We must pay serious consideration to the future of our fishing industry. It is not unfair for our fishermen to comment on the amount of help that farming receives. Farming and fisheries are looked after by the same Ministry. The industry is suffering and fishermen deserve more consideration than they are getting relative to farmers.

9.34 pm

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): I was disappointed that the Parliamentary Secretary did not refer to the shellfish ban that hit the Scottish industry over the weekend. Although it was lifted after only a day, the ban sent a nasty shiver down the spine of the industry in Scotland. It could have had devastating implications if it had remained in place. I hope that we shall hear something about it in the reply to the debate.

The ban is over, but it generated much bad publicity. We need to know urgently what lay behind it. Where did the confusion arise? Was it in Brussels or at the Scottish Office? We need answers from the Department. It reinforces the call made repeatedly by my hon. Friend the Member for Cunningham, North (Mr. Wilson) for monitoring to be tightened. The ban should be a lesson to us.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Doran) mentioned the impact of the hygiene regulations on processors throughout Scotland. The regulations emanate not just from the Community but from national legislation. The Government's food hygiene regulations have potential consequences, particularly for small processors who will have to spend much money to bring their facilities up to the required standards.

The regulations particularly affect small processors on the west coast. Their smallness of scale does not exempt them from any of the regulations, because, generally, their business is export-oriented. I understand that Highlands and Islands Enterprise is undertaking a survey of the processing industry to find out the full financial impact. I hope that, when that survey is completed, the Scottish Office will come forward with the assistance and funding which will be required by smaller processors who are already under-capitalised. They will need help to get them through the transition period into the new conditions set by the much more stringent hygiene regulations.

On the west coast there has been a failure over the years to add to the value of the primary product—the fish caught off the coast. It is crucial to maintain the processing outlets and the facilities that we already have if the communities there are to derive full benefit from the natural resources that lie on their doorstep.

The development of the fishery industry on the west coast is vital for a region that has few other resources and sources of income. The local authority in my constituency has recently suffered the devastating impact of the collapse of BCCI, which will affect the economy of the whole area. It makes it all the more important that we maximise the value of those few industries, such as fishing, which are already there.

A recent report by the Fraser of Allander Institute, commissioned by the Western Isles council and partly financed by the Scottish Office, stressed the future potential of west coast fisheries, especially those further off the west coast of the Hebrides. It is vital that communities on the west coast should be capable of taking advantage of that potential. A number of measures have to be put in place if that is to happen.

The west coast fleet has to be renovated—it is aging, and the fishing community generally lacks the capital resources which would enable it to renovate the fleet by itself. One of the consequences of the Government's failure to tackle the gross over-tonnage in the United Kingdom fishing industry is that the opportunity to renovate the west coast fleet has been missed.

The European Community identified the west coast as a vital area for the provision of such support and was prepared to give preferential support to the west coast fishing industries. That support has dried up because of the Government's failure to establish control over the size of the United Kingdom fleet. Wherever else the overcapacity in the United Kingdom fishing fleet, it is surely not on the west coast. Therefore, it is unjust that the west coast should have been caught up in the problem in that way.

The west coast has a strong interest in the Government's introducing, as a matter of urgency, a decommissioning scheme, which will help to reduce the over-tonnage and thus begin to release funds for the desperately needed renovation of the industry on the west coast. If the decommissioning scheme is not to compound the way in which the west coast has been caught up in the problem, it must be finely targeted to ensure that larger, and not smaller, ships come out of the United Kingdom fleet.

Another plank in the development of the west coast industry has to be a comprehensive programme to develop infrastructure there, especially pier infrastructure. The examples of Kallin and Berneray in my constituency, which have received funding—especially from the

[Mr. Calum Macdonald]

Community—in the recent past, show what can be done with proper pier development. The piers have provided a shot in the arm for the fishing industry in those areas. The same could happen throughout the Western Isles, provided the Scottish Office was prepared to put its weight behind that sort of infrastructure programme.

The Western Isles council has already made a submission to the Scottish Office, asking for specific help to develop at least four new piers in the Hebrides. That is exactly the type of programme that the Scottish Office should urgently consider, especially in the context of the troubles which are affecting the Hebrides economy because of the collapse of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International.

Funding is also urgently needed to develop the processing sector on the west coast, especially in the Hebrides. If the islands and fishing communities are to derive maximum benefit from the natural resources on their doorstep, they must be able to add more value to the product.

Neither an infrastructure programme, nor the renovation of the fleet will be effective unless there are fish to be caught. Therefore the third, and perhaps the most important, element of a development strategy must be timely conservation measures.

I welcome the new consultation document on shellfish issued by the Scottish Office. Once the consultations have been concluded, I urge the Minister to act quickly on the recommendations. I particularly favour the concept of a ban on twin rig trawling on the west coast, and increasing minimum landing sizes, both of which would find favour among fishermen on the west coast.

However, I am disappointed that the consultation document did not put sufficient emphasis on the possibility of a weekend ban. I urge the Scottish Office yet again to consider that, because a weekend ban would be effective, would be supported by all fishermen on the west coast and would cost no money to introduce or enforce. A further potential advantage would be to help solve some of the problems caused by submarine activity on the west coast, which is causing the Ministry of Defence such a headache, as well as being a hazard to fishermen working off the west coast. A weekend ban may allow some submarine activity to be targeted into weekends, thereby avoiding conflict and collisions.

With the prospect of a 200 day tie-up and a massive shift of shipping effort from the east to the west coast, the need for conservation measures on the west coast becomes all the greater. I urge the Scottish Office to look again at the case for a weekend ban, to listen to the ideas put forward by the industry, and to introduce a ban as quickly as possible.

9.46 pm

Mr. David Porter (Waveney): Although things change in fishing, as in any other industry, I feel that we are travelling familiar waters tonight. We are gathered here a little before Christmas to perform our annual fishing industry pre-ministerial Council season's service—that litany of woe from every corner of the kingdom—telling of sad tidings of discomfort and no joy in the industry. In fact, the position is not as bad as in the recent past, but we are still not there yet, because there is no question but that any extra cuts in quotas must mean hardship.

I suspect that we all know our lines—we have heard several of them repeated tonight—and, like a pantomime by a well-loved local drama group, we fishing industry Members of Parliament will perform well in this packed House. I am sorry that that old favourite, the very nauseating tie usually worn by the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), is not with us, although the hon. Gentleman has just arrived. The band of bleating chorus from Scotland is present, with its regular melody, played on the strings of our hearts, about how bad things are north of the border. It gives Conservative Members the occasional chance to shout a seasonal "humbug" or two.

All may be well in the Chamber because we are on familiar ground, but outside in the real world of fish markets and the North sea, all is not fully well. For the past year or so, all hon. Members except my hon. Friends on the Front Bench have sung from the same hymn book about decommissioning. This year, I am delighted that my hon. Friends have at least found the same page of the hymn book.

In Lowestoft and elsewhere, the industry wants a voluntary decommissioning scheme. Those who choose to risk their lives earning a living at sea do not want to be forced to give up, but they are realists and they do not want to go bankrupt either. They want an effective, properly policed scheme for the whole industry which compensates enough to pay off debts and is still worth while.

Equally, nobody to whom I have spoken thinks that decommissioning is a magic wand. We have all mouthed the phrase, "It must be part of a package of conservation measures." Let us remember that everything for which we legislate is for worse cases and blanket rules. There are enormous regional differences in the fishing industry and they must be recognised. So we should extend licensing and do all that is necessary to reduce the fleet enough to start to modernise it before it is too late.

There have been some welcome additions to the Lowestoft fleet. It is a supreme act of faith by Colne Shipping of Lowestoft, but the additional boats are secondhand rather than new-built. The safety implications of an aging English fleet are frightening. A 200 day tie-up, even when fishermen can take the days when they want, totally ignores the issue of how they are supposed to live and make all that investment worth while. Therefore, I wish my hon. Friend well in reducing the 200-day period.

The horse trading, or rather fish trading, that takes place at the Council meetings and other times—the talks with EFTA and the quota swaps—are all very well and sometimes seem to work to our advantage. The EFTA deal, which includes extra tonnage of north-east arctic cod, seems to do so, but there is a fear that, when the common fisheries policy comes up for review and renewal, the wheeling and dealing over fish then will make Maastricht this week look like a teddy bears' picnic. The fear is that we as a country in general, and Lowestoft in particular, will lose on quota swaps, as my hon. Friend the Minister acknowledged.

The package that the Fisheries Ministers will hammer out next week is just one more step on the way to that review. Perhaps next year or the year after we shall consider abandoning minimum sizes, landing everything and taking everything off catch quotas for each boat in

order to abolish discards. Each boat would then be licensed by horsepower for a set number of days at sea based on a three-year track record.

Perhaps next year we shall discuss flagship problems and decide that each boat must belong to a producers' or other organisation, which is then allocated a quota from the United Kingdom TAC. That would mean, to quote one of my fishermen who suggested the proposal, "Johnny foreigner cannot get any more of our British quota." Perhaps we shall be saying that Brussels should operate a scrapping scheme, with Her Majesty's Government as local agents.

We cannot know what we shall be discussing next year or the year after at this time. However, we know that tonight's motion, which has produced some disappointingly negative amendments from the Opposition, should be approved to give my hon. Friend the Minister a good send-off to Brussels, with the motion ringing in his ears. Whether we should send him off with a shove in his rear and a pair of boxed ears does not matter. He knows that he has to return with a deal, a scheme, a package that treats the scientific advice seriously but can also be swallowed by the industry. It must be even-handed in the way in which it reduces effort, understandable, believeable and flexible enough to be realistic.

I know that that is a tall order, but my hon. Friend the Minister knows that, whatever he returns with from Brussels, on 1 January the fishing industry—with its quotas, effort curbs, mesh reductions, days at sea, inspections, boardings, paperwork, Health and Safety Executive rules, fuel bills, interest rates and mortgages to meet—will still be the most regulated industry in this country. In addition, it has to cope with a basic shortage of fish. It is even more regulated than the nuclear industry, at a time when all that fishermen want to do, and all that they ask to do, is catch and sell fish. I wish my hon. Friend the Minister good luck next week.

9.53 pm

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): This is always an important debate, coming as it does a week or so before the Fisheries Council meeting in Brussels. I speak on behalf of the fishermen at Portavogie in my constituency. Northern Ireland has a sizeable fishing industry that employs over 2,500 people—more than 1,000 on the boats and 1,000 in the processing plants. There are nearly 250 boats in the three harbours of Portavogie, Ardglass and Kilkeel. The industry is worth about £25 million to our rural economy. I stress that it is a "rural" economy as there are few alternatives for employment in the regions of the fishing ports.

Earlier the Minister mentioned the deaths that have occurred in the fishing industry during the past year. We in the Ulster Unionist party agree with what he said. While on the subject of fatalities in the fishing industry, I mention the problem of submarines, which has attracted the attention of many of our Scottish colleagues in the House. There have been gestures towards solving the problem in the Clyde. We in Northern Ireland want the problem in the Irish sea to be tackled. It is not sufficient to stop at the Clyde as the problem exists in the Irish sea. There has been contact between our fishing boats and—if one may use the word these days—Soviet, American and our own Royal Navy submarines.

Quotas are hurtful. When I participated in this debate a year ago I stressed that quotas in 1991 would be disastrous for the Northern Ireland fishing industry—regrettably, that has proved absolutely true. However, fishermen are responsible. I have had recent meetings with my fishermen in Portavogie and they certainly accept the need for quotas, as long as they are reasonable and based on the real situation in the waters. Sometimes they find that their views are totally at variance with scientific evidence upon which the quotas have been decided.

This year, as a result of the quotas, there has been a decline in the tonnage landed in Northern Ireland and the value of the fish. There was even a fall in the price of nephrops because boats from other areas began to concentrate on catching nephrops and transferred from their previous catch. That created greater competition for our fishing industry whose main catch is nephrops. We accept that the fleet must be reduced, but it must be assisted to reduce.

I was pleased to hear the Minister say that he was concerned at the effect of last year's quotas and the introduction of the Hague preference on the Northern Ireland fishing industry. On behalf of Northern Ireland's fishermen, may I say that we respect what he said in that context? The Hague preference worked badly against Northern Ireland fishermen. I heard it explained in the debate that the Hague preference was introduced by Mr. Garret FitzGerald. That means that we dislike it even more in Northern Ireland and now realise why it worked so much to the advantage of southern Irish fishermen during 1991.

It is important to note how that preference worked. The Republic of Ireland was given a cod quota of 5,450 tonnes and used only 1,500 tonnes. Its quota for whiting was 4,700 tonnes and it used only 1,600 tonnes. The same applied to nephrops, which, as I said, are very important for Northern Ireland. The Republic of Ireland got a much bigger quota than it needed and kindly transferred tonnes to Northern Ireland. When we were running out of our quota in October, some of us wrote to the Minister for the Marine, Mr. John Wilson, in Dublin and I subsequently spoke to him on the telephone. As a result of those representations, the Republic of Ireland swapped 400 tones of its nephrops quota to Northern Ireland fishermen. That was equivalent to a month's work in Northern Ireland and we greatly appreciate that gesture by Dublin. That is what we want to see in the island of Ireland—co-operation, not interference.

We in Northern Ireland are already worried about the 1992 quotas, because the quota for cod is 10,000 tonnes, the quantity that we were allocated for 1991. There is no change at present. For whiting, the news is even worse. We are being offered 9,300 tonnes, a drop of 300 tonnes. The quota for plaice is 3,000 tonnes, a drop of 1,500 tonnes. If the quotas for 1991 were disastrous, those proposed for 1992 are criminal for Portavogie, Ardglass and Kilkeel. I have met fishermen in Portavogie who had to sell their boats this year. I have met others who could not pay their mortgages and had their houses repossessed. I had to help them move from their houses into rented accommodation. That is the sort of situation that is developing in our fishing areas.

I know from what the Minister said that he has taken on board the problem in Northern Ireland. I hope that,

[Mr. John D. Taylor]

when he goes to Brussels, he will be successful in getting the suggested quotas increased for 1992 for area VIIa in the Irish sea which affects Northern Ireland fishermen.

I see that the Minister of State, Scottish Office, is beside the Minister on the Treasury Bench. It is a pity that once again there is no Northern Ireland Minister there. Are we to have yet another year during which the United Kingdom delegation to Brussels will have no Northern Ireland Office Minister representing us? How are we to have our view fully represented in Brussels if Northern Ireland Ministers do not take enough interest to be present in debates on fisheries and will not attend this quite important meeting in Brussels to decide the quotas for the coming year?

I have four small points about nephrops, which are our main catch in Northern Ireland. First, we want a ban on twin rig trawlers. We have had a consultation paper about the future of the nephrops fishery. I agree with much that was said by the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald), but the ban must be introduced as quickly as possible. Secondly, like him, many of the fishermen in Portavogie would give sympathetic and favourable consideration to a weekend closure for the nephrops fisheries.

Thirdly, we want a decommissioning scheme. That is one way forward and the Ulster Unionist party will be joining Her Majesty's official Opposition in the Lobby on that point. We need such a scheme to be introduced throughout the fishing industry in the United Kingdom. I am glad that, in the past six months, the Minister has made it clear that he no longer has a closed mind on the subject.

Finally, I make an appeal to the absent Minister with responsibility for fisheries in Northern Ireland. There is a new European Community scheme for rural areas, called the leader scheme, the purpose of which is to stimulate a Community-driven rural development programme in agricultural areas that are in decline. I should like to see some of the £4 million that has been allocated for the leader initiative used in Northern Ireland, not just where farming is in decline, but, by extending the scheme, to set up a pilot scheme for the fisheries industry. Naturally, I would recommend that the small town of Portavogie, where the fishing industry is in decline, be used as the centre for a trial of whether we can further inspire community development and create jobs in such an area.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It may help the House if I say that I understand that the first Front-Bench spokesman wishes to rise at 10.20 pm, so five-minute speeches would enable all hon. Members who wish to speak to do so.

10.1 pm

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Over the past year, fishing in the Irish sea has not been good. My port at Fleetwood has suffered quota restrictions, tie-ups and swaps. Most significant of all, it has suffered from over-fishing of some of the juvenile stock, within the 12-mile limit along the coast, from vessels that do not come from the local area. That has not been good for fishing in the north-west.

We must look closely at what we wish to do to ensure the level of fishing off the west coast that we have enjoyed in the past few years. Although that level was a decline over that of previous years, it has since been relatively static, and I for one would not wish it to decline any further. We must find some way over the medium term to increase the size of the stocks—that is, the size of biomass—and reduce the percentage of the stocks caught in a year. That has to be done by ensuring that we catch fewer juvenile fish and, at the same time, as several hon. Members have said, reduce the numbers of discards, which are an awful waste. We must continue to try to find ways to diminish the problem.

If we are to be successful, the first thing that we must do is improve the scientific information available. At the moment, much of the fishing community does not have a great deal of confidence in the scientific information that is provided. Often, quotas are restricted in an area one year, only to be increased the following year when, at sea, fishermen do not see the evidence to make them believe the figures coming from scientists. We have to find new ways to provide more accurate information on which we can do the calculations and, from those calculations, come up with better ways to ensure that we have a clearer run at fishing year by year and to make certain that we do not have such large variations.

On the preservation of stocks, which is the crux of the matter, we need to consider effort control. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to reject the idea of a 200 day tie-up. As other hon. Members have said, that is an incredibly inefficient form of effort control.

Like many hon. Members, I am pleased that the Government have not shut their mind to the idea of decommissioning. However, that must be part of a much wider attempt to reduce the amount of effort in fishing. We must consider net sizes and licensing boats below 10 m. However, I understand that there are significant administrative problems in making that work effectively.

Decommissioning should be part of a much wider conservation effort which we must consider. Decommissioning is a complicated subject. I was not being unduly critical of the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) when I asked how he considered a decommissioning scheme should work. There is a balance to be struck here. We do not want a lot of modern vessels to be taken out, because, in many ways, that would put our industry at a significant disadvantage compared with the more modern fleets around Europe, but at the same time, we must ensure that a decommissioning scheme reduces the effort. That is a difficult problem which needs to be addressed if it is to operate effectively rather than be characterised by the mistakes that were made last time around.

Part of the problem is the way in which we police the fishing that takes place. I like the idea of introducing satellite transponders. In the coming years, there may even be an increased role for the Royal Air Force which has a number of aircraft with a considerable ability to detect vessels that are fishing where they ought not to be. However, the fishing industry should not have to bear the full cost of such an operation as has been the case in the past. There may well be an opportunity to ensure that in the future. Most important of all—and this has been emphasised by several hon. Members, the enforcement has to be EC-wide. There is little point in our having efficient enforcement methods for our own vessels if many other countries have a less efficient method.

The fishing industry must have a viable future. We need to consider ways of increasing the amount of fish that we

land. Fish has a market in Britain and in Europe. Therefore, I hope that when my hon. Friend goes to Brussels he will bear those points in mind so that we can look towards 1992 being a better year for fishing, particularly off the north-west coast, than the past 12 months have been.

10.8 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I understand your strictures on time, Mr. Speaker, but I would be a great deal more sympathetic to them if the Front-Bench spokesman had not taken 50 minutes to open the debate.

I shall restrict myself to three points. The International Council for the Exploration of the Seas' advisory committee on fisheries management confirms that the eight-day tie-up has been completely ineffective in reducing fishing effort. That lesson should be well learned by the Government who, only a year ago, were extremely confident that it would provide a solution.

I well remember that in the corresponding debate on 13 December last year, at column 1223, the Secretary of State for Scotland called the eight-day tie-up a "sensible measure". On 5 March this year, at column 238, the Parliamentary Secretary said that he was confident that there would be a significant reduction of effort from the tie-up scheme. The Minister of State, Scottish Office achieve the notoriety of not just lounging and sniggering his way through that debate, but also being the only Scottish Member to vote for the implementation of the tie-up scheme. The scientists now say that the eight-day tie-up was ineffective. Therefore, the analysis of all these right hon. and hon. Members was wrong. They should listen to the views of Members of Parliament with fishing constituencies. The anxiety, fear and danger that the eight-day tie-up produced over the last year was all for nothing. I hope that, given its track record, the fisheries team approach the current proposals with some humility.

I noticed that the Minister with responsibility for fisheries was careful not to put a figure on what he would find acceptable when the 200-day suggestion was made. That underlines part of the underlying difficulty over fisheries management. Of course the 200-day suggestion is absolutely unacceptable. Equally unacceptable is the Minister's unwillingness to recognise that the directed whiting fishery drives a coach and horses through any form of effort limitation or any form of mesh size formulation.

It is all very well for the Minister with responsibility for fisheries to say that he intends unilaterally to introduce a one-net rule and an increase in the minimum landing size of whiting, but he does not go on to say that the whiting derogation on current terms will be available to the rest of the European Community. He is in severe danger of devising a system that may be logical for the United Kingdom but of allowing the rest of the European Community to drive a coach and horses through all conservation measures.

The reduction in the minimum landing size of whiting is a disaster for conservation policies. The lack of a one-net rule makes a joke of conservation when people can fish with a 90 mm net, claim that they are fishing for whiting, and discard other species in order to qualify under the whiting fishery directive. It is the most anti-conservation measure that one can imagine.

The Minister has managed to allow the Danish fleet in particular to introduce into fishing for human consumption practices that that fleet has long followed in industrial fishing. Aficionados of these debates will know that each year I have remarked on the increase in industrial fishing when fishing for human consumption has been reduced year after year. In the period from 1987 to 1989, industrial fishing increased to 1,483,000 tonnes while fishing for human consumption was reduced to a residual level. I should like the Minister of State, Scottish Office to say what will be done to bring industrial fishing under control. Do not the Government understand that the whiting derogation undermines the conservation proposals?

Reference has already been made to the shock to the shellfish sector for the second time in two years, due to the virtual ban over the weekend. What guarantee can the Minister give that a test on one particular species of shellfish from one area of Scotland that goes wrong does not again result in a ban that affects virtually the whole fishery? Can he give an undertaking that there has not been a succession of letters from the European Commission to the Scottish Office during the past few months asking, in particular, for area testing results? Can he provide a guarantee that what has happened will not be repeated? The shellfish processing sector cannot afford yet another health scare over the next few months and years.

The capacity of the fish processing industry has been substantially reduced. In my constituency the result has been that, in Peterhead, on Monday fish were offered for withdrawal because the fish processors did not have the capacity to take up a reasonable landing for that day. As the industry cuts its capacity, the problems faced by the industry are compounded. What support will the processing sector get so that the hygiene regulations can be implemented? What assurances can the Government give that there will be access to European funding, which the Commission says will be available on a large scale, to restructure the industry?

I hope that we shall have an assurance that the president of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation will not again have to write the sort of letter that was published in *Scottish Fishing Weekly* on 22 November. He wrote to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food complaining of fishing industry leaders being dismissed like school-children. The letter also noted the childish outbursts of the right hon. Gentleman. The Government should mend their ways towards fishermen and have effective and proper consultation. There should be effective representation for the industry within the counsels of Europe. If the Government put into representing the fishing industry a fraction of the effort that they use to try to prevent the extension of workers' rights across the Community, the industry in Scotland would have a much brighter future.

10.15 pm

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): My hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) drew attention to the concern in his constituency over the phasing out of licences for drift-netting of salmon. He said that it was sad because the industry had been in business for 100 years. Everyone understands that, and appreciates the problems created. The difficulties would not arise if they were using the equipment of 100 years ago, because the industry would not take as much salmon. I draw hon. Members' attention to the fact that the fresh water laboratory at

[Mr. Bill Walker]

Pitlochry in my constituency can provide useful and interesting statistics. I recommend that anyone with a real interest in salmon should visit that laboratory.

Those who fish on the river—those who take salmon out from the estuarial nets or those who fish it because they have broad fishing beats—all contribute in different ways to the stocking of the river. That is an important part of the total balance. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth was right to say that the estuarial nets have to be dealt with in the same way as drift nets. Attempts have been made to buy them out, and I hope that that will be successful. It has been successful on some rivers.

It is a recognition of changing times and circumstances and a recognition that the salmon belong in the river, although they spend a great deal of time at sea. The salmon could create employment prospects that would go on for ever if it could be guaranteed that they could get back up the river. It may come as a surprise to some people that we count the salmon going up the river. That is done at Pitlochry, where there is a ladder at which it is possible to measure the number of salmon going beyond the dam.

I want to draw the Minister's attention to matters affecting deep sea and other fishing. What consideration has been given to the decommissioning schemes that have been suggested and to the impact that any such schemes would have on jobs? Has that aspect been looked at and does it mean a form of enforced unemployment? If that is the case, it must be stated. There is little point in using grand slogans if one does not spell out exactly what is meant. That is one of the great problems. I am not unsympathetic to the views that have been expressed, but I like to have the facts so that I can make an objective assessment.

The alleged illegal fishing received considerable prominence in one of the Scottish Sunday papers. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on the selection of fishery protection aircraft. The Cessna aircraft is particularly suitable for the task. With the equipment that will be on board, one hopes that it will provide a deterrent to those fishing illegally and that such people will be caught. The best deterrent is to catch people at it—*[Interruption.]* It may surprise hon. Members but I have been airborne in aircraft carrying out such tasks. That is one of the advantages of having served in the Royal Air Force for many years. Aerial surveillance has been perfected in Hong Kong, where I spent some time flying with the Royal Hong Kong auxiliary air force. It used Cessna aircraft, which were effective and successful and were ideal for the job. I look forward to aircraft performing the same policing operation as the Royal Hong Kong auxiliary air force, which is very effective.

10.20 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I shall be very brief. In several years of speaking in fishing debates, I have not known the situation to be as bleak as it is now. The bleakness of the situation means that we should emphasise to the Minister that, if he had introduced a decommissioning scheme last year, the Community would not now be considering daft schemes such as a 200 day lay-up. He said that he opposed that, but did not give his preference. It is essential that he introduces a decommissioning scheme.

I shall make three points about North sea stocks. The first is that it is vital for Grimsby's interests—and, I think, for the national interest now—that the Minister keeps the cod total allowable catch above the level at which the Hague preference will be invoked. I should like him to reconsider the Hague preference, because the net losses will outweigh the net gains for the country. It would certainly damage Grimsby's interests if that preference were invoked, so I hope that he will keep it above that level.

Secondly, I emphasise that the North sea and west Scotland saithe TAC, which is down, should be increased. The scientific advice is shaky, and there is certainly a strong case for increasing it.

Thirdly, Grimsby has diversified into plaice and sole tremendously in the past five years. This year has been our best for sole fishing. That quota should be kept at its present level, and to stop the increase in the beamer fleet, which is increasing by one or two vessels a month and much of it with Dutch money, it is essential that the Minister should introduce a pressure stock licensing scheme for North sea beamers. That growing beamer fleet is taking fish away from Grimsby vessels.

I should like to make many more points, such as those made by the hon. Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) about a ban on industrial fishing, but I conclude by saying that it is essential that the Minister takes urgent action to prevent the disastrous situation that we are drifting into.

10.22 pm

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunninghame, North): I was persuaded by a comment made earlier in the debate to fetch a quote with which to begin. It reads:

"Unless someone in the Scottish Tory Party can quickly devise a credible, vote-winning policy for Scottish fisheries during the coming months, their total elimination at the poll in all Scottish fishing constituencies is certain."

One might wonder what political partisan said that. Those words were written by the co-editor of *The Salmon Net*, Rhoddy Macleod, the brother of the late Iain Macleod, a distinguished Member of the House. He wrote that his late brother

"was attacked by the right wing of the Tory Party as being 'too clever by half'."

He added:

"The problem facing the Tory Party in Scotland now is exactly the opposite one—they are not nearly clever enough."

Listening to the hon. Member for Tayside, North (Mr. Walker) this evening, I could only think how very true that was.

Mr. Macleod was writing about the vendetta that had been conducted against the salmon netting industry in Scotland. In that context, I would say to the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and to Opposition Members from the north-east who have spoken that we have absolutely no truck with what is being done to the salmon industry or to the salmon netting industry in Scotland—a fine traditional industry for which I have much respect. I give the commitment that the pendulum will swing back in favour of that industry and away from the vested interests that have dominated the debate in recent years.

We noted the absence from the Minister's speech of any reference to a decommissioning scheme, which is the key to so much else. That point has been well covered by my hon. Friends and by others. The 200-day a la carte, table d'hote, or whatever other description is used, is not acceptable.

We remember the arrogance with which the eight day tie-up was presented a year ago. We recall the certainties that were expressed that it would be the solution to conservation issues and over-catching. As the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) rightly said, we find that the scientific evidence contradicts all of it.

We do not want the Minister to come back in a few weeks' time proclaiming triumph. We know today that there is no shortage of newspapers to proclaim triumph on behalf of any Tory Minister who comes back from Europe. However, if the Minister comes back and says that 150 days has been agreed and that a wonderful compromise has been achieved, he will get an even bigger raspberry this year than he did last year.

There are serious questions to be asked about the recent shellfish scare in Scotland. If the scare did nothing else, it highlighted the fact that the shellfish fishery, including the prawn fishery, is now the second biggest fishery in Scotland. It is an important and major industry in Scotland and in other parts of the country. Important and fundamental questions arise out of the events of the past week.

I pay tribute to the civil servants in the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland who, when alerted of the urgency and the seriousness of the problem, went off to Brussels and got a solution. That was excellent and exceeded the short-term expectations of the industry.

It seems that a specific consignment of scallops from Orkney had been tested at Ostend and had been found to contain toxins which made them unfit for human consumption. That was the root of the problem. I want the Minister to answer three questions on the matter, either tonight or subsequently.

First, how did the delay arise between identification of the defective samples at Ostend and the matter being drawn to the attention, I believe as late as last Wednesday night, of officials of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and of the Department? How did communications break down in that period?

Secondly, will the monitoring of shellfish at Torry and elsewhere in Britain be brought into line with continental practice? That means testing the organs as well as the meat of the shellfish. If we are selling in continental markets, there is no point in our having different standards of testing from those on the continent. There must be standardisation if such incidents are not to happen again.

Thirdly, going back to the matter that my hon. Friend the Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) rightly said I raised in Committee earlier this year, will the Department now introduce far more localised monitoring of shellfish to avoid a general ban such as the one imposed last week? Those are three questions that are relevant for the Scottish shellfish industry and for the shellfish industry throughout Britain. Such problems could arise elsewhere so we wait anxiously for the answers.

It is regrettable that we could not have had at least a whole day's debate on fishing. It is also regrettable that we always debate the subject entirely from the point of view of the catching industry. We should debate it from the points of view of the consumer and of the food industry. We never recognise sufficiently that fish is not just a source of income to fishermen. It is a source of protein which may be superior to all others and it is a source of good health to our people, if they have access to fish and to fish products.

The problem at present is that fish is being priced out of the reach of many people in British society who are precisely those who most need that source of protein. Fishermen's incomes can be protected to some extent by ever-increasing landing prices for smaller volumes, but that does no favour to the consumer who is being priced out of the market.

I understand that the Ministry has recommended that the sea fish advertising budget, which promotes fish as a product, should be discontinued at the end of its present period. I should like that proposal withdrawn. I believe that the pressure for it is coming from the big companies such as Findus and Bird's Eye, which object to paying the levy for seafish. We need fish to be advertised and promoted, and the proposal points up the danger of leaving the promotion of an industry to those who have a financial interest in it. There is also a social interest in the promotion of fish as a food and a source of protein.

The clock is against me, so I shall not go into further detail, although I should like to refer to a matter affecting my own area—the Clyde herring quota, which, as we have heard, has been decimated. Even now the herring caught and landed in the Clyde does not have a market because the processing industry has been clawed away from under it. Herring is one of the healthiest and best species of fish for consumption, yet its market has been removed. Perhaps the herring industry board should be brought back to promote herring and its virtues to the wider community.

I ask all hon. Members on both sides of the House who have been critical of the Government's record and performance and who have expressed their doubts and fears about the current negotiations to consider carefully the reasoned amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. I do not think that they will find anything to disagree with in the amendment, and I suggest that they consider carefully the reaction in their own constituencies all around the British coast before voting against it.

10.31 pm

The Minister of State, Scottish Office (Mr. Michael Forsyth): We have had an excellent debate and I am glad that all those who wished to speak had an opportunity to do so. We have heard excellent contributions—with the possible exception of that from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond).

I shall try to cover the points that have been made, and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary has kindly undertaken to write to hon. Members about those that I do not cover. In reply to the right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor), I should explain that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland regrets the fact that he could not be here; he wished to attend the debate, but I understand that his duties in Northern Ireland prevented him from doing so.

The hon. Members for Banff and Buchan and for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) suggested that the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea had advised that the eight-day tie-up had been ineffective. That is another example of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan trying to put a particular gloss on something to suit his own conclusions. The ICES said not that the eight-day tie-up had not been effective, but that it had not been effective enough in securing the recommended

[Mr. Michael Forsyth]

objective of achieving a 30 per cent. reduction in fishing effort by comparison with that for 1989. That is a rather different statement from the one that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan gave the House.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) and my hon. Friends the Members for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) and for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) suggested that we needed to have a one-net rule to prevent cheating. I entirely agree that a one-net rule is required, and we have convinced the Commission of the need for one. The problem has been that we have not secured the required qualified majority in the Council of Ministers, but I assure my hon. Friends and the hon. Gentleman that we shall continue to press for it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth spoke about the east coast review. As my hon. Friend knows, it is the drift net fishery that is to be phased out. The use of T nets closer inshore will continue and the intention is to encourage drift net licensees to move to T nets which are closer inshore and which should catch fish from local rivers.

My hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) asked about the position of mackerel handliners in the south-west. The fact that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is very much aware of the problem of the south-west handliners is in no small part due to the efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives and he is always ready to explore the issues with them. We were pleased that it was possible to give them a reallocation of an extra 100 tonnes from a Scottish producer organisation this year and the handliners will also benefit from the increase in the mackerel TAC next year.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland expressed his preference for TACs for nephrops by stock rather than for the North sea as a whole. I assume that the Commission had made that proposal on the basis that a global TAC for the North sea would be more readily enforceable. We will consider that, but the key must be the right level of TAC and a satisfactory allocation for the United Kingdom.

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Forsyth: No, I do not have much time left.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington (Mr. Townend) asked about the Factortame position and the European Court of Justice ruling in July. That was unwelcome, but the Government will have to comply. We can however insist that vessels are genuinely managed and controlled from this country, and we shall use the licensing system to ensure a genuine economic link. There is no sign of a rush to re-register. The total number eligible as a result of the judgment is only 65, many of which have sunk, been scrapped or reflagged or are now pursuing non-fishing activities. I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Bridlington that we will do what we can to ensure that the Commission proceeds against other member states if they impose restrictions of the sort that we have been forced to drop.

The hon. Members for Cunninghame, North and for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) referred to paralytic shellfish poisoning and the apparent ban on Scottish exports imposed by the Commission last Thursday.

As I think is now well known, that decision was taken by the Commission's standing veterinary committee with very little notice to the United Kingdom Government before the meeting and with no preliminary bilateral contact such as we might reasonably have expected. The action was taken following a complaint by the Belgian authorities, which claimed to have detected a high incidence of PSP in two batches of scallops imported from Scotland and originating, so far as we are aware, from Orkney. It is the case that PSP, although mainly a summer phenomenon, was continuing to be detected in certain Orkney crabs, and the fishing and sale of green and velvet crabs in certain Orkney waters is still banned, under the United Kingdom's own long-standing arrangements.

I emphasise that the Government have well-established arrangements, which we think are fully adequate, for sampling shellfish species and keeping these off the market where there is a PSP problem. Those arrangements, which operate during the appropriate time of the year, involve regular sampling from 46 sites in Scottish waters, with intensified sampling then being triggered as soon as low levels of PSP are detected. Those arrangements, as hon. Members from Scottish coastal constituencies will be aware, have led to numerous closures of fisheries in the last two summers.

The Commission has sought to explain the decision taken last Thursday on the grounds that individual member states would otherwise have taken unilateral measures which might have disadvantaged our industry more. It also felt under an obligation to act quickly, in the light of the alleged threat to public health, but it is clearly unsatisfactory that such an important industry and confidence in it should be put at risk by such sudden action, without proper consultation with the United Kingdom first and indeed without any consultation at all in this case. Apart from the lack of consultation, a ban or an apparent ban arising from an alleged problem concerning only scallops and only waters around Orkney, but extending to all shellfish species and all Scottish waters, was clearly absurdly disproportionate.

My noble Friend Lord Strathclyde has made clear our dissatisfaction at this turn of events and on his instructions officials met Commission representatives in Brussels on Monday, when I am very glad to say that the matter was satisfactorily resolved. The Commission, having heard the details of our monitoring procedures, was satisfied as to their adequacy, and the export of Scottish shellfish can now proceed as before, on the basis of the existing United Kingdom arrangements.

We are naturally instituting further sampling to make sure that there is no problem, but there is no sign of it, and I should say that samples from Orkney tested in Aberdeen last weekend, in the light of the Belgian complaint and with the tests being carried out according to what we understood to be Belgian testing methods, produced nothing like the results alleged by the Belgian Government. We have, however, offered to have bilateral contracts with the Belgians to ensure that we understand their worries fully and take them properly into account in future sampling and testing.

A central problem for the fishing industry is that it harvests a renewable—but also exhaustible—natural resource. The industry has to be regulated, and, not least because of its fragmented nature, it cannot do that itself. It is then hardly surprising that, particularly given the

present state of stocks, the industry and Government find it hard to agree on the right balance to be struck between the industry's short-term needs and its long-term interests.

The Government want the industry to survive and to have a healthy and secure future. We do not want a one-generation industry. We have to remember that many fishing communities are relatively isolated and highly dependent on fish-related employment. They could not readily adapt to an economy without the fishing industry. My hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) and my noble Friend Lord Strathclyde will be fighting strongly for the United Kingdom's interests next week, and will be aiming to secure the best available deal for our industry. But they will also be looking for the right deal that will provide the industry with its livelihood for next year, while also contributing to the stabilising and rebuilding of fish stocks.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 136, Noes 186.

Division No. 25] **[10.40 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley, N.)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bellotti, David
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Blunkett, David
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Carr, Michael
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clelland, David
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Bob
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dewar, Donald
Dixon, Don
Doran, Frank
Dunwoody, Hon Mrs Gwyneth
Edwards, Huw
Enright, Derek
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Godman, Dr Norman A.
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Haynes, Frank
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Illsley, Eric
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamond, James
Litherland, Robert
Livsey, Richard
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCrea, Rev William
Macdonald, Calum A.
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McKelvey, William
McMaster, Gordon
McNamara, Kevin
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Quin, Ms Joyce
Redmond, Martin
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terence
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Snape, Peter
Spearing, Nigel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stephen, Nicol
Strang, Gavin
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Trimble, David
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Mike *(Glasgow, C)*
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ken Eastham and
Mr. Allen McKay.

NOES

Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Ashby, David
Atkins, Robert
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Botlomley, Peter
Bowden, A. *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & C'l't's)*
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Cash, William
Chalker, Rt Hon Mrs Lynda
Chapman, Sydney
Clark, Rt Hon Alan *(Plymouth)*
Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Cran, James
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Sir Anthony
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Gale, Roger
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodlad, Alastair
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Gregory, Conal
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayward, Robert
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Gwilym *(Cardiff N)*
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Knapman, [illegible]ger
Knight, G[illegible] *(Derby North)*
Knight, D[illegible]e Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, [illegible]ichael
Knox, D[illegible]d
Lang, R[illegible]ion Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lightbown, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lord, Michael
Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Moate, Roger
Monro, Sir Hector
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Neale, Sir Gerrard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Sir Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley

Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Raison, Rt Hon Sir Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Sir Robert
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rowe, Andrew
Ryder, Rt Hon Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Smith, Tim *(Beaconsfield)*
Speed, Keith
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Viggers, Peter
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Waller, Gary
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Irvine Patnick and
Mr. Timothy Kirkhope.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Document No. 9134/91 and the Supplementary Explanatory Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 27th November 1991, relating to guide prices for fishery products for 1992, the proposals described in the unnumbered Explanatory Memoranda submitted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on 10th December 1991, relating to total allowable catches and quotas for 1992, the reciprocal Fisheries Agreement between the Community and Norway for 1992 and duties on certain fish imports for 1992 and of the Government's intention to negotiate the best possible fishing opportunities for the United Kingdom fishing industry for 1992 consistent with the requirement for conservation of fishing stocks.

PETITION

Human Rights (Kashmir)

10.53 pm

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North): I wish to present a petition signed by about 2,055 residents of Bradford, North who originate from Kashmir and who still have relatives there concerning current injustices and human rights abuses. Wherefore your petitioners pray that

your honourable House will condemn the systematic mass murders, torture, arson and rape by the Indian forces of occupation in Kashmir; promote international efforts to help refugees fleeing Kashmir and to relieve the hardship and suffering of the people who remain in the territory; demand that India permit Amnesty International and other international human rights agencies to enter Kashmir, with a view to investigating and reporting on human rights violations; and calls for the withdrawal of India's armed forces and their replacement by an interim United Nations Administration with the task of restoring law and order, and as soon as practicable, conducting the said plebiscite.

To lie upon the Table.

Daresbury (Nuclear Structure Facilities)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Chapman.]*

10.54 pm

Mr. Chris Butler (Warrington, South): The former Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), visited the Daresbury laboratory in July 1990. Afterwards, she wrote:

"It was clear that the Laboratory is at the frontiers of research in several fundamental areas, and I do hope that this will receive the international recognition it deserves."

Little did she know that, within a few months, the Government—not hers—would rip the heart out of that laboratory by closing the nuclear structure facility, which President Bush's scientific adviser called an absolute leader in nuclear physics. Even Sir Mark Richmond, the axeman himself, called the NSF "a world class facility".

In 1991 prices, the NSF cost £40 million to build. The manpower costs were £70 million and, since 1982, the operating costs are £65 million. The linear accelerator—LINAC—cost a further £3·7 million, making the total taxpayers' investment in the facility £179 million.

Months after the closure decision, the Science and Engineering Research Council issued a report showing how that investment would pay off, but, strangely, the report assumed that the NSF would continue to operate. I suspect that somebody in SERC has a very red face. It was issued in June 1991 and said:

"The main element in the plan is to maintain the . . . NSF at the forefront of low-energy nuclear physics worldwide . . . The NSF has a clear place in the plans of the Nuclear Structure Committee over the next seven to eight years and Daresbury will play a pivotal role in co-ordinating and organising the efforts of the UK community . . . The mix of people needed may change but they will continue to play an essential part in the UK's programme of nuclear physics research."

In November 1990, Sir Mark Richmond opened and commissioned the LINAC with flattering words. Only months later, in February 1991, he announced the possible closure of the NSF. The LINAC was unused and will remain unused. Can it be the same man who is committed to honesty and integrity in public life?

On 8 February, my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Howarth) answered a written question from me, saying:

"As part of a review of all its future activities, the council decided on 6 February to make plans for the possible closure of the nuclear structure facility. To assist its further consideration of this issue"—

that is, possible closure—

"the council is establishing a study to assess the importance of the nuclear structure science in the context of the council's work as a whole."—[*Official Report,* 8 February 1991; Vol. 185, c. 257.]

Those reporting on the issue—me, the staff at Daresbury and the Institute of Physics—all assumed that that would mean that the NSF would gain a peer review. That would have been the normal scientific practice and the just way to proceed, for a condemned facility—like a condemned man—deserves to be heard. But that promise was broken. Not only was there no peer review, but there was no review of the possibility of keeping the NSF open. Perhaps the authorities feared the result of such a review, but that is not an ethical way to conduct public life.

A review was set up—the Fender committee—whose remit was to consider support for nuclear physics in the light of the closure of the NFS. Herman Feshbach of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who was on the committee, said:

"To make such a decision and follow it up with a review seems a peculiar way of doing business."

That is true.

On 24 March 1991, the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology said:

"It is incomprehensible to us that a whole area of United Kingdom Science should have to be precipitately abandoned as part of a series of crisis measures and we roundly condemn the practices and policies which have put so much at risk—whatever the excuse."

On 2 June 1991, giving evidence to the Fender committee, Sir Michael Atiyah, president of the Royal Society, said:

"There appears to have been little attempt to assess the case for closing NSF against closing some other SERC facility or reducing staff numbers in the (SERC) establishments. No comparison has been made of value-for-money produced by the NSF as opposed to other expensive facilities. As it is, the decision to close the NSF comes across as somewhat arbitrary and high-handed."

On 7 July 1991, Fender reported—he broke his remit to criticise the closure decision:

"Panel members are struck by the widespread international criticism of this decision and the share planning notice given to the community. The panel sympathises with these comments."

Feshbach went a little further, and said:

"There is, in my opinion, no financial constraint that requires the closure of the Nuclear Structure Facility . . . This is an example of egregious mismanagement . . . To shut down this successful and relatively inexpensive facility, with its admirable past record and exciting future promise, cannot be justified".

Fender recommended that £3·7 million per annum should be added to the nuclear physics programme in order to make it credible. That amount would be enough to continue funding the NSF. Perhaps that is why SERC decided not to accept the verdict of its own committee. It might have been embarrassed at the thought that it had closed a first-class British facility years ahead of its productive life, and may have made no savings and transferred abroad a compartment of excellent British science.

What savings are there likely to be? If the LINAC is not to be thrown away, it will cost £1 million to move, 155 people will be made redundant costing £5 million in redundancy payments, and, as a result, there will be on-going costs of £1 million per year in pension enhancements. If the redundancies had been phased, it would have been possible to save quite a lot of money through the transfer of personnel to other facilities and natural wastage.

The NSF bears a significant share of the overheads of Daresbury laboratory, and £1 million extra per year will have to be shared by the rest of the laboratory facilities. Postgraduates and scientists who use the facility at present will have to be sent abroad, at an extra cost of £600,000 a year. The premature dismantling of the NSF will cost £2 million. That cost would have come eventually, but bringing it forward is a cost in itself. Therefore, we face £8 million of one-off costs of decommissioning, plus extra annual costs of £2·6 million. That underlines the scandal of the misuse of the taxpayer's investment of £179 million. We are being charged for wasting that investment—£8 million up front and £2·6 million per annum thereafter.

The cost of closure could be even higher if the Europeans start to charge for access to their facilities. A 1991 booklet called "An introduction to Daresbury

[Mr. Chris Butler]

laboratory" mentions a quid pro quo by which foreign scientists would use our facility in exchange for the use of overseas accelerators by United Kingdom scientists. That quid pro quo will have gone. We will be unable to exchange access facilities, because we will not have a facility to extend. This country will continue to expect free access abroad, but I understand that we intend to start charging foreign scientists for access to facilities in other areas of science. The German Ministry of Research and Technology has protested that that breaks the unwritten rules of the scientific community.

If we are forced to pay, there may be no savings at all from this closure. The Minister may say that he will not interfere in the decision of his quango. He may say that he is there to uphold the arm's-length principle. The House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology would disagree. It said:

"Research councils are now being asked to make choices which are too big to be left to councils alone without political guidance."

Ministers should not use the arm's-length principle as an escape clause from their stewardship of public money. In the face of a decision to close years ahead of schedule for paltry real savings a facility in which the taxpayer has invested £179 million and virtually to abolish a whole compartment of world class science in the United Kingdom and saying, "It is not my fault, guv," lacks a certain credibility. I wonder what the Public Accounts Committee will think of that.

11.6 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Alan Howarth): I have listened very carefully to my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Butler). He has raised for debate a subject in which, I know, he has been closely involved for many months and on which he has been strenuous in representing the interests of his constituents who work at the Daresbury laboratory.

I was grateful to my hon. Friend for joining me during my visit to the Daresbury laboratory earlier in the year. As well as seeing the nuclear structure facility, the subject of this debate, and talking to some of the staff involved, we visited the synchrotron radiation source and heard about the work of the central computer facility, which are also based at the laboratory. My hon. Friend is right to be proud of the science at Daresbury.

It is right that an hon. Member should make the best possible case for the interests of his constituents. However, the decision by the Science and Engineering Research Council to close the nuclear structure facility at Daresbury in order to concentrate on other areas of scientific research is not one in which it would be right for me or my colleagues in Government to intervene. My hon. Friend has persistently sought, as in this debate, to persuade us to do so, and I have repeatedly explained to him why it would be improper for us to do so.

I shall come to the specific points that my hon. Friend raises in a moment, but first it is important to set this decision in the context of the way in which we organise public expenditure on basic science. I will do so very briefly, as the general principles are well known to the House.

Governments of both political complexions have long adhered to the arm's-length principle for public expenditure on science. There is, I think, no serious quarrel that that is the best way to reconcile two considerations: that if basic scientific research is to be done, the taxpayer must make a significant contribution to the cost of it; and the principle that the people best placed to judge how to spend public money for science are the scientists themselves, not the Government. That is why we have research councils, and why my right hon. and learned Friend appoints people of the highest calibre to those councils to make the expert judgments that they do.

I very much regret that my hon. Friend has chosen to cast aspersions on the competence and integrity of Sir Mark Richmond and his colleagues on the council. Such aspersions are wholly unjustified and I hope that my hon. Friend will withdraw them. Moreover, no one could be a more determined advocate for science than Sir Mark, and my hon. Friend would do well to recognise that.

As my hon. Friend knows, I made a point of meeting and hearing the views of, nuclear structure scientists and others who wanted to put their concerns to me. He will recall a meeting in which he introduced me to Professor Twin of Liverpool university. It is right that, as Minister, I should listen to and understand the concerns of scientists and I was pleased to respond to his suggestion.

The decisions that research councils are called on to take are by no means easy ones. In the end, they come down to questions of priorities and this in turn depends on questions of scientific judgments. Science is not, of course, unique in this. In many areas of public provision, we have to ask not only, "Would expenditure on this project in itself be good?" but, "Is this particular project of higher priority than the various other projects in competition with it?" Those who take these decisions, and take them courageously, deserve our respect and support.

In the case of science, there is the added complication that the priorities change over time as new areas of research open up. The more successful we are in science, the less feasible it becomes to support all the work that is possible. That is as true in Japan and the United States and the other leading scientific nations as it is in the United Kingdom. It would be true whatever the level of funding provided.

It is for this reason that the research councils need to take a radical look at their forward programmes from time to time and make a careful reassessment of them against a background of changing scientific opportunities. This is what the Science and Engineering Research Council, under its chairman, Sir Mark Richmond, has been engaged in over the past 12 months or so. I fully support it in this. It has meant some tough decision making and has, inevitably, caused some controversy. I understand that and, equally, I understand the disappointment felt by those whose work is affected. They are entitled to argue strongly for the importance of their areas of research. I would not expect anything else.

Let me move on to the particular case of the nuclear structure facility and some of the points that my hon. Friend made. There are two closely related issues here. First, there is the maintenance by the SERC of a significant piece of scientific equipment—the nuclear structure facility at Daresbury laboratory—used by United Kingdom and also by foreign nuclear structure physics researchers. Secondly, there is the funding by the

SERC of programmes of research into nuclear structure physics which, in the absence of the facility at Daresbury, would depend on the use of equipment elsewhere.

The SERC concluded, as part of the wide-ranging review that I have mentioned, that the facility should be closed in 1993, which is earlier than had previously been envisaged. That gave a period of 18 months or so for the rundown to be achieved in an orderly manner. It also, as my hon. Friend will know, allows the SERC to fulfil its agreement with France to develop and run the Eurogam detector in its first stage. That is a gamma ray detection instrument which will operate at Daresbury before moving to the new facility that the French are building at Strasbourg.

My hon. Friend referred to the review of nuclear structure physics commissioned by the SERC from a panel under the chairmanship of Professor Brian Fender, vice-chancellor of Keele university. The purpose of that review was to help the council to reach decisions on the scale of support for nuclear structure physics after the closure of the nuclear structure facility.

My hon. Friend has argued before, and continues to hold the view, that, in setting up this review in the way that it did, the SERC went back on an earlier undertaking to review this area of physics before making a final decision on whether to close the facility. I have checked with the SERC on this and that is not the case. I can only agree that there was indeed some misunderstanding about this at the time; but the SERC clarified the position in a press release of 13 March announcing Professor Fender's review; and indeed Sir Mark Richmond made the position quite clear in a letter in the *New Scientist* of 27 April responding to one from my hon. Friend. As my hon. Friend has raised the issue again tonight, I must ask him to accept that, while there was some confusion about that at the time, there was no bad faith on the part of the SERC as he has implied.

As I said, the purpose of the Fender review was to inform the discussion within the SERC about the appropriate level of support for that area of science after the closure of the nuclear structure facility. The review made a number of recommendations to the council about what sort of programme would be possible and desirable in the new situation, and the cost.

What such a review did not and could not realistically do, given that it was essentially looking at one area of science, was to make the strategic judgments involved in balancing the importance of nuclear structure physics against other research priorities. That decision had to be for the council itself to make.

The SERC has now considered the Fender recommendations. With the agreement of the chairman of the SERC, I can tell the House that the council has decided to fund a nuclear structure physics programme at a level of some £4 million a year from the financial year 1993-94 through to the end of the current planning period. The SERC will be providing further details of the programme in due course.

My hon. Friend has been critical this evening of the SERC's decisions on the nuclear structure facility. I hope that what I have said will show that here we have a research council doing what it is inescapably necessary to do from time to time and conciuding that an area of science now has a lower relative priority than it had in the past and that it does not believe that the costs of maintaining a particular facility are justifiable when set against the alternative scientific programmes forgone.

The SERC is currently spending some £8 to £9 million a year on nuclear physics and will continue to do so until the closure of the facility in 1993. There will of course be transitional costs associated with the closure itself, as my hon. Friend rightly says. Those include the decommissioning of the facility and possibly some redundancy payments, although the SERC is committed to making every effort to keep compulsory redundancy to the minimum. Beyond that, the SERC will in future be spending some £4 million a year on this subject, with £5 million a year released to other areas of science.

The decisions have undoubtedly been difficult, but they have been based upon scientific judgments and taken by those best placed to take them.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seventeen minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 12 December 1991

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON DOCKLANDS RAILWAY BILL

Lords amendments agreed to.

KING'S CROSS RAILWAYS BILL

Order for consideration read.

To be considered on Thursday 19 December.

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

Administration of Justice

1. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on his plans to heighten confidence in the administration of justice.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Peter Brooke): The Government's strategy is to provide a criminal justice system which maintains the rule of law and creates in Northern Ireland the conditions for a fair and just administration.

Mr. McAvoy: That answer smacks of nothing less than smug complacency. If everything is for the best in Castlereagh, why are there so many out-of-court settlements in actions for damages brought by former detainees?

Mr. Brooke: Many factors enter into account when the police authority needs to respond to complaints of that sort. The decisions taken are taken on legal advice.

Mr. Peter Robinson: Did the Secretary of State read in the memoirs of Dr. Garrett FitzGerald that during the negotiations on the Anglo-Irish Agreement the Government had been prepared to allow judges from the courts in the Irish Republic to sit on the Bench in Northern Ireland as part of what are described as mixed courts, but that that was stopped because of the resistance of then then Lord Chief Justice, Lord Lowry? Is the view expressed then to Dr. FitzGerald—that this was a matter which could be considered as soon as Lord Lowry passed on—being considered by the Government now?

Mr. Brooke: The nature of my duties both in the Province and in this House means that I have not yet had the pleasure and privilege of reading Dr. FitzGerald's book, but I shall take on hearsay what the hon. Gentleman says about this entry. The issue has not been discussed with me during my time as Secretary of State at any conference under the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and I am perfectly clear about what response I would give if it were raised.

Mr. Trimble: The primary function of the administration of justice is to apprehend and punish the guilty. Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that, contrary to statements made from time to time by Northern Ireland Ministers, the administration of justice in Northern Ireland is signally failing to do that? In 1985 there were 24 convictions for murder, but there were only eight in 1990. Moreover, the people being convicted are very much from the second and third XI. Does the Secretary of State not realise that that conspicuous failure, which is clear to the people of Northern Ireland, is undermining the confidence of the great majority, and that that is pregnant with considerable consequences?

Mr. Brooke: I understand what the hon. Gentleman says about the nature of the charge laid against certain people and the roles that they may have played in particular crimes. That is, I fear, testimony to the experience of terrorists in making certain that the people who commit the crimes are protected by their colleagues. But I am delighted to tell the hon. Gentleman and the House that 112 people have been charged with murder or attempted murder in the course of this year. That is an advance on the previous year and a testimony to the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

Mr. Stanbrook: Would it not be helpful if we used existing machinery more effectively? For example, the reciprocal legislation providing for extraterritorial jurisdiction does not seem much used. In the 16 years in which we have had our part of the legislation, we have applied for only 31 people to be tried in the Republic, of whom only 16 were convicted and the Irish Republic has not applied for any such cases at all. Surely there is a lot of ground here to make up if we are to make the machinery of justice as between the two countries more effective.

Mr. Brooke: The particular question that my hon. Friend raises is for my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General, but I am grateful to him for reminding me of the precise statistics with which it is always sensible to be armed in any conference on the agreement.

Mr. McNamara: Will the Secretary of State explain why the Government are still being so stubborn about the video recording of interrogation procedures at Castlereagh and elsewhere? Is he aware of the concern expressed by Amnesty International and the United Nations committee on torture, and that it was recommended by Lord Colville, the Government's own adviser, and by the independent police complaints body and the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights? It is important that the Royal Ulster Constabulary should be seen to be in the forefront of the fight against terrorism with the support and confidence of the whole community. This is one important way in which that could be achieved. Will the Government now reconsider their decision not to introduce video recording of interrogation procedures?

Mr. Brooke: No matter what arrangements were to be made, the Government believe that the introduction of video recording of interviews with terrorists suspects could seriously jeopardise the process of investigating crime. However, that was a matter which SACHR raised with me

only this week and made it clear that it was a subject to which it would return. It is therefore a subject on which I expect to be in continuing dialogue.

Mr. Kilfedder: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that an essential element of the administration of justice is police primacy? If so, will he ensure that a police officer accompanies every military patrol whenever humanly possible? Will he also consider, as a provisional measure, initiating steps which would enable a magistrate or judge to supervise the interrogation of a defendant charged with a terrorist offence?

Mr. Brooke: The Government, police and military authorities are committed to ensure that, where feasible and sensible—the hon. Gentleman will know what those words mean in the context of the Province—Army patrols likely to come into contact with the public are accompanied by an RUC officer. That reflects the policy that the RUC is in the lead in the fight against terrorism. However, it must be recognised that at the current level of terrorist threat, full accompaniment of all patrols could be achieved only at the expense of aborting necessary anti-terrorist operations with a consequent increase in terrorist activity.

On the the hon. Gentleman's second question, he will know that work is proceeding on a statutory code under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1991.

Shipbuilding

2. **Mr. Loyden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has on the number of orders, and for what types of vessels, held by shipbuilders in Northern Ireland.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Richard Needham): Harland and Wolff Shipbuilding and Heavy Industries Limited currently has orders for 12 vessels—an auxiliary oiler replenishment vessel for the Ministry of Defence, five Suezmax type tankers and six Capesize bulk carriers, for which three contracts have already been signed, with a further three to be completed shortly.

Mr. Loyden: The Minister will be aware that, with the exception of the MOD vessel, only three of the 11 ships now on order at Harland and Wolff are United Kingdom registered and owned. We welcome the security that the present orders offer to 1994-95, but would not Harland and Wolff's future, as well as that of other British shipyards, be better secured if we were to adopt the policy of new build for Britain's merchant fleet and thus ensure that shipyards throughout the United Kingdom employ our people and that our seamen have jobs to go to?

Mr. Needham: I am delighted that the recently privatised Harland and Wolff now has the longest order book in its history, with £565 million worth of orders, that it is competing successfully with the Koreans and the Japanese, that the future of 2,500 of its people is assured and that it is the premier shipyard in the United Kingdom.

Rev. Ian Paisley: In view of the long list of orders that Harland and Wolff has procured—I welcome that, and wholly endorse what the Minister has said—the recent large pay-offs in the island are alarming. Could not something be done to obtain some repair jobs to hold those workers so that they will not have to be laid off for a considerable time?

Mr. Needham: I fully understand the hon. Gentleman's concern. It was always apparent that as the AOR was completed many jobs and skills would not be required in the new orders that have come through. However, the hon. Gentleman rightly refers to the other businesses which Harland and Wolff is now expanding and building up, and I am sure that its success, which I believe is assured under privatisation, offers the best hope for those men in the future.

Dr. Godman: May I say how thrilled I am that that United Kingdom shipyard has such a healthy order book? However, I regret that there is no expansion in the recruitment of workers to that shipyard. How much money has been received by way of those orders from the seventh directive of the European Community's shipbuilding intervention fund, and how much of that money will be used to purchase from United Kingdom manufacturers the goods and services required for the vessels?

Mr. Needham: Clearly, it is for United Kingdom manufacturers to compete as subcontractors for the work that will be placed out by Harland and Wolff. I am sure that a large proportion will be placed with subcontractors. The percentage of aid given under the EC assistance programme was 13 per cent. last year, and it is being renegotiated this year. However, Harland and Wolff is continuing to compete and to be profitable, even though that intervention assistance is being reduced.

Schools (Integration)

3. **Mr. Cyril D. Townsend:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the integration of schools in Northern Ireland.

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Dr. Brian Mawhinney): The Department of Education has, so far, approved 15 proposals for integrated status made under the integrated schools provisions of the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989.

Mr. Townsend: I welcome the work that the Government have done in that important respect. Is my hon. Friend the Minister aware of a recent report suggesting that pupils from such schools are most likely to take a particularly dim view of all paramilitary organisations? Is he further aware that a problem exists in finding suitable financial resources for nursery education? Will he see what can be done about that?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. It is certainly encouraging that parents, not government, are choosing to expand the number of integrated schools in the Province. I am sure that my hon. Friend is right, in that it makes sense to believe that if young people from both sides of the community are taught together in the same classrooms, they will value equally both traditions and will be more likely than some others to find common ground in later life. I will bring my hon. Friend's point about nursery education to the attention of my right hon. and noble Friend the Paymaster General.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Will the Minister commend Lagan college in my constituency for the progress that it has made

in the past 10 years? Can he confirm that there will be no discrimination against state schools, for which the majority of parents still exercise a preference, or in favour of the segregated education system that the Roman Catholic Church and most Catholic parents want to maintain? Will the Minister assure the House that there will be no barrier to those who oppose integrated schools serving on the boards of governors of integrated schools?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am happy to join the right hon. Gentleman in commending Lagan college's achievements. He and I were present at the recent opening of its new school building, for which I had the pleasure of being the Minister responsible for making available the necessary resources. I certainly assure the right hon. Gentleman that there is no sense in which the Government want positively to discriminate in favour of one type of schooling over others, because parents have a right to choose. The Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 put integrated schools alongside two other alternatives from which parents could choose. As to the right hon. Gentleman's last point, there will be no bar to any governor being appointed to the board of an integrated school, provided that the appointment complies with the provisions laid down in the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989.

Pupil-Teacher Ratio

4. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the current pupil-teacher ratio; what the comparable figures were in May 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The pupil-teacher ratio at January 1991, the latest date for which figures are available, was 18·2. The figure for January 1979 was 19·1.

Mr. Greenway: Will my hon. Friend pass on my congratulations to all who were involved in that improvement? Pupils will benefit, and that must be the object of the exercise. Has not the time come, however, to evaluate the optimum pupil-teacher ratio for pupils at any given age, with a view to establishing it? As I have said before, there are those who cannot teach one pupil, and others who can teach a hundred with great facility.

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind comments, and for the continuing interest that he takes in this subject. I am sure that he is right in saying that the reduced pupil-teacher ratio provides children with an advantage, and also in pointing out that the quality of teaching and the ability of teachers is at least as important.

The idea of trying to work out an optimum ratio is interesting, and we should like to think about it further.

Mr. McGrady: I hope that the Minister is more successful with his new portfolio than his predecessors were and I wish him all the best in the difficult task that lies ahead of him.

Now that the education and library boards independently assess the formula according to which they delegate budgets to schools, does not the Minister fear that a great disparity in provision will result—not only in regard to pupil-teacher ratios, but in regard to every other aspect of provision across the different area boards?

Dr. Mawhinney: I am grateful to the hon. Member for his kind personal remarks, although I enter a caveat in regard to what he said about my predecessors.

Part of the purpose of education reform was to delegate downwards from the Department of Education, closer to the chalk face, tasks such as determining the necessary budgets, teacher numbers, and so forth. I suspect that the hon. Gentleman may have in mind some initial teething troubles that were experienced this year in connection with local management of primary schools. The Department is examining that issue closely, in conjunction with the boards.

Mr. Beggs: Was the significant increase in the number of temporary and part-time teachers included in the calculation of pupil-teacher ratios? Many parents feel that the speed of education reform and curriculum change has caused their children to suffer because their usual classroom or subject teachers are often taken out of the classroom to undergo courses related specifically to those changes.

Dr. Mawhinney: As the Minister responsible at the time, let me tell the hon. Gentleman that we went to great lengths to minimise the disruption caused in classrooms by the provision of necessary training related to the introduction of education reforms. The hon. Gentleman will recall that, on some exceptional days, schools were closed so that teachers could be trained.

Year in, year out, there is always an element of disruption, which is unconnected with education reform, as teachers undergo various courses to upgrade their skills. That is an essential part of the education process, and I do not believe that it was greatly exacerbated by the introduction of reforms.

Security

5. **Mr. Molyneaux:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: Since I answered a similar question on 14 November, seven people have been killed as a result of the security situation, of whom six were civilians and one was a member of the Ulster Defence Regiment.

The Government remain entirely committed to bringing terrorism to an end through the vigorous and impartial actions of the police and the Army. They have succeeded in bringing suspected terrorists to justice. Up to the end of November this year, 367 people had been charged with terrorist offences, including 37 with murder and 75 with attempted murder.

Mr. Molyneaux: The Secretary of State will be aware from his own sources of the vast array of weapons being assembled and stored as far south as Limerick for transport to Northern Ireland. Is there not now a good case for strengthening the frontier wire, as a matter of urgency?

Mr. Brooke: The right hon. Gentleman knows, as does the House, the scale of the shipments from Libya before the Eksund was apprehended by the French customs. It is known that a substantial part of that weaponry is in the Republic of Ireland. Of course, I am delighted that from time to time the Garda find some of it.

Rev. William McCrea: I am sure that the Secretary of State will join me in expressing in the House sympathy for my constituent's family on the murder of Mr. Newell, a member of the Ulster Defence Regiment. Does the right hon. Gentleman appreciate the tremendous fear felt throughout the Province as we face the Christmas period, bearing in mind both the warning given by the security forces of an impending IRA outrage near Christmas and the signal given by the nationalist community in the result of a by-election at Magherafelt today, where there was a 43 per cent. increase in the Sinn Fein vote and a 34 per cent. decrease in the SDLP vote?

Mr. Brooke: Of course I share the hon. Gentleman's sympathy in the case of Mr. Newell. All terrorist crimes are horrible, but I find those which follow the pattern of Mr. Newell's death especially horrible. The hon. Gentleman is right, too, to tell the House of the warning that the Chief Constable of the RUC gave at the end of last week about the potential level of terrorist violence in the run-up to Christmas.

As for the pattern of voting in the by-election in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, there may be others besides myself to whom he might address that question.

Sir Patrick Duffy: May I draw the attention of the Secretary of State to the report in *The Irish Times* yesterday week about the recent meeting of the British-Irish parliamentary group in Dublin, and the contribution of his hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) about the security situation in proximity to the border? Were the reported remarks of his parliamentary private secretary in accordance with an official departmental brief?

Mr. Brooke: Necessarily, as my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) is my parliamentary private secretary, he will have taken advantage of the opportunity of briefing. With regard to security at the border, I have consistently said in the aftermath of conferences under the Anglo-Irish Agreement that, although we are delighted that good co-operation exists, it can always be better, and I am confident that we can make it so.

Commercial Investment

6. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the amount of new investment in commercial buildings and shopping facilities in Belfast.

Mr. Needham: I am pleased to report that in recent years commercial and retail development in Belfast have reached unprecedented levels. In total, some £290 million of private investment is being spent or is programmed. In order to undermine the enormous resurgence of confidence, the IRA has planted 400 incendiary devices, of which approximately 100 have exploded, and five car bombs, of which three have exploded. The damage has been and is being made good. All the stores and the vast majority of commercial buildings are back at work. Business performance in the city centre is very little different from last year.

Mrs. Gorman: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply, and I commend him and his colleagues on their splendid work in restoring the centre of Belfast, especially the excellent shopping facilities. I am sure that my hon. Friend wishes to condemn the outrage last week when not only stores but the opera house were bombed, making the children's pantomime and all the other treats that normal families in the rest of Britain have at Christmas, such as shopping, Father Christmas and the Christmas lights, inaccessible to many families. The IRA is again undermining normal decent family life in the Province.

Mr. Needham: I am sure that all the people of Belfast would like to thank my hon. Friend for her comments. As the IRA's Libyan bombs explode, Sinn Fein and the Member for Belfast, West (Mr. Adams) remain strongly and strangely silent. The fact is that 1991 has been an unprecedented year of success for Belfast. Anyone who went to the tall ships race in Belfast and saw 500,000 people thronging through the city centre day after day could see the determination of the people of Belfast to lead their lives normally. It will take more than Mr. Gaddafi's guns and the IRA to undermine the spirit of the people of Belfast.

Mr. Clifford Forsythe: I congratulate the Minister on the urban renewal and commercial development in the centre of Belfast. We utterly condemn all the IRA's cynical attempts to bomb the heart out of Belfast. However, is the Minister aware that the main concern of business people in Belfast is that they should have adequate security so that they can run their businesses properly? Great efforts should be made to bring tenants into the new office and shop premises that are still empty. Does the Minister agree that instead of freezing the outlay of public money, the Government should hurry on public development to enable those shops to be let?

Mr. Needham: Over 90 per cent. of the two biggest shopping developments in Belfast are let, which is an extraordinary figure in comparison with other new developments in the rest of the country. Of 720,000 sq ft of office space that has been completed this year, 350,000 sq ft has been let. Some 95 per cent. of prime retail space in Belfast is let.

The hon. Gentleman is right to refer to security, although he will not expect me to spell out what is happening in the city at present. Belfast is a city of 500,000 people and for its business and commerce to thrive, it must be an open city and people must be able to get into and out of it. Finding that balance is absolutely crucial. There can be no question but that the people of Belfast are showing, by returning day after day to work, to shop and to enjoy themselves in Belfast, that they are the people who are succeeding.

Rev. Ian Paisley: Does the Minister agree that the confidence of the people has been even more shaken by the tragedy in the prison at which a bomb went off, killing two remand prisoners? Is not that comment on security even more staggering than the bombs that go off in the city, although all such bombings are to be condemned and deplored?

Will the Minister comment on the question that was sidestepped by the Secretary of State? Does he agree that the nationalists in Mid-Ulster have given a warning to the House by the way in which they voted, with a colossal rise in the Sinn Fein vote and a colossal drop in the SDLP vote?

Mr. Needham: As the hon. Gentleman is well aware, his first question is a matter for my hon. Friend the Minister of State and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State who have, no doubt, listened to him carefully.

On the second question, I am a great believer in the common sense and balance of all the people of Ulster. I will not comment on a particular by-election. I will comment, as I repeatedly do, on the determination of everyone in Ulster to end violence and to ensure that they can get back to living normal lives. That is exactly what most of them are showing in Belfast at present.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Marshall.

Mr. John Marshall: Question No. 7, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Sorry, the hon. Gentleman is the wrong Mr. Marshall.

Mr. Jim Marshall: Perhaps I should ask the question of the hon. Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) instead of my own.

With regard to the commercial activity in Belfast, I join the Minister in condemning the terrorist attacks in commercial Belfast. Those attacks are clearly designed to undermine business confidence and the economic well-being of both communities. I join the Minister in saying that we are all resolved to ensure that that does not succeed. While I pay tribute to the Government's success in attracting commercial business to Belfast, I remind the Minister that Belfast is only one part of the Province. What plans do the Government have to introduce a more balanced development throughout the Province?

Mr. Needham: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's opening comments, but not very grateful for his latter comments. He has been on the Opposition Front Bench for long enough to have seen and understood the redevelopment work that is currently being undertaken in Londonderry and which is being carried out in the county towns throughout the length and breadth of Northern Ireland. There is a feeling of partnership and a commitment to partnership that I have not seen before. I have undertaken missions with the hon. Members for Foyle (Mr. Hume), for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) and for South Down (Mr. McGrady) in an attempt to get more business and development in their areas. If the hon. Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall) would like to accompany me in the new year, I should be only too happy to take him on a tour and show him just how much is happening outside Belfast as well as in it.

Sunday Trading

7. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent representations he has received about Sunday trading.

Mr. Brooke: The only representation that my ministerial colleagues and I have recently received was a resolution of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

Mr. Marshall: Does my right hon. Friend agree that recent developments have underlined the fact that the Shops Act 1950 is illogical, out of date, rarely enforced and out of touch with the reality of the 1990s? However, does he agree that as part of the process of reform, those who have a conscientious objection to working on Sunday should be given the statutory right not to do so?

Mr. Brooke: The most recent relevant development has been the decision by the House of Lords and a lower court to refer the relevant questions of Community law to the European Court. We must now await the European Court's decision.

Mr. Trimble: Will the Secretary of State confirm that the recent statement by the Attorney-General about his reluctance to exercise his discretion applies only to the civil action of injunction; that the Shops Act 1950 is not suspended; that the reference to the European Court on the issue does not prevent or place any obstacle in the way of criminal proceedings for breach of that Act; and that it is perfectly open to the responsible bodies to bring such proceedings?

Mr. Brooke: My right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General has made it clear that the law is not suspended and therefore it would remain a matter for local authorities if they wished to bring actions.

Mr. Bill Walker: While awaiting the views of the European Court, will my right hon. Friend bear in mind the fact that Presbyterians in Scotland enjoy shopping on Sundays and that has not been detrimental to those who wish to attend church?

Mr. Brooke: I have continuously taken the view during the time that I have held my present office that it is a great privilege to be Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. However, to ask me to take responsibility for Scotland as well would be too much.

Hazardous Waste

8. **Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to deal with hazardous and toxic waste in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: Hazardous and toxic waste not suitable for landfill in existing sites will continue to be transported for disposal at facilities in Great Britain. The hon. Gentleman will be aware, however, that Du Pont Ltd. is to conduct a study into a proposed incinerator facility.

Mr. Ross: My constituents are well informed of moves in that direction. However, does the Minister accept that it is absolutely vital that disposal of such waste should be carried out in the safest possible way? Do the Government accept that disposal of such waste must be overseen constantly by the Government and that all those who oversee should be properly qualified, preferably to degree standard? Does the Minister agree that such waste should be treated or disposed of not by the producers of that waste, but by some other body which may be more independent with regard to financial considerations?

Mr. Needham: The answer to three of the hon. Gentleman's questions is yes. In answer to his last question, I do not believe that it necessarily makes sense for those who may not be fully qualified or experienced to get rid of such waste when those who are involved in a similar business are much better qualified to do so. However, we will certainly look very carefully indeed at

the qualifications and at the control of any potential incinerator and where it is to go, should one come forward in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Skinner: Will the Minister bear it in mind that if he wants to get rid of toxic waste in Northern Ireland, he had better not employ the services of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food? When they tried to get rid of toxic waste in Bolsover, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food had it sent to Severn Trent in the west midlands. It was not incinerated properly, and the result was that the west midlands was polluted with dioxine——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is a bit wide of the question. *[Interruption.]* It is.

Mr. Skinner: I am in order——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is wide of the question.

Mr. Skinner: I am talking about Northern Ireland.

Mr. Speaker: Sit down, please.

Mr. Skinner: In Northern Ireland——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is an abuse.

Mr. Skinner: In Northern Ireland——

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is an abuse.

Mr. Needham: The hon. Gentleman's question has nothing to do with Northern Ireland.

Castlereagh Interrogation Centre

9. **Mr. A. Cecil Walker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement concerning proposals to appoint a commissioner to oversee interrogations at Castlereagh police office.

Dr. Mawhinney: I can confirm that the appointment of a commissioner to monitor procedures at Castlereagh, and the two other police holding centres where terrorist suspects are interviewed, is under consideration. My right hon. Friend hopes that he will be in a position to make a firm announcement early next year.

Mr. Walker: Is the Minister aware that there is a perception in Northern Ireland that that appointment emanated from the Anglo-Irish Conference? In those circumstances, will the Minister please confirm that that appointment will have southern Irish connotations?

Dr. Mawhinney: The announcement was first made by my right hon. Friend in the House of Lords during consideration of the emergency provisions Bill—as it then was—I am speaking from memory, but I believe that it was last May. The decision will be taken by this Government whenever it has to be taken. The Government of the Irish Republic and anyone else who wishes to make their views known to us before we make a judgment are, of course, entirely free to do so.

Mr. Mullin: May I say that it seems incredible that, in the light of all that is known about the unreliability of uncorroborated confessions in police custody, there should be those in Northern Ireland who are attempting to defend that practice in relation to the notorious Castlereagh? May I also say that the Department's concern would be taken more seriously if it did not take over three months to get replies from the Secretary of State to hon. Members who draw his attention to accusations that have been made in relation to what goes on in Castlereagh?

Dr. Mawhinney: Castlereagh is not notorious, and most people in Northern Ireland will join me in objecting to the hon. Gentleman's use of that word. Whenever allegations are made about Castlereagh, they are, of course, carefully considered.

Local Government

10. **Sir Michael McNair-Wilson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will set up an inquiry into the structure of local government in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: No, Sir. Issues relating to Northern Ireland local government would, however, be an entirely appropriate issue for discussion in any fresh political talks.

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, as the all-party talks on the future administration of the Province are stalled, probably until after the general election, and as the previous review of local government in Northern Ireland took place more than 20 years ago, this is an ideal moment for an independent body to be asked to consider the structure and limited powers of present local authorities in terms of whether they meet the contemporary aspirations of people in Northern Ireland?

Mr. Brooke: All the constitutional political parties in Northern Ireland have, in recent weeks, given encouraging signs that they would wish to return to talks or to start fresh talks prior to the general election. If we were to do that, I would not rule out any particular proposed change to the role and structure of the district councils, but proposals for change would need to be likely to command widespread support and to provide an appropriate and fair role for both sides of the community.

Inward Investment

11. **Mr. Stevens:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the current levels of inward investment into Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: During the past financial year, the Industrial Development Board for Northern Ireland secured 13 inward investment projects, representing an investment of £9·9 million. Those projects are expected to create 1,294 jobs.

Mr. Stevens: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply. I know that he appreciates the importance of infrastructure improvements to stimulate and encourage inward investment. Now that European Community funds are available to assist in that process, what success did our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State have in his dealings with Commissioner Millan over his request for support for the gas and electricity interconnectors from the mainland to Northern Ireland, which would reduce energy costs in the Province?

Mr. Needham: As my hon. Friend would expect, my right hon. Friend had considerable success in his negotiations with Commissioner Millan, who agreed in principle to help to fund those two crucially important infrastructure developments. I am delighted that, as a

result of the Government's privatisation proposals, the outlook for Northern Ireland's electricity consumers is better than ever.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 12 December.

The Prime Minister (Mr. John Major): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Butler: Will my right hon. Friend reassure the House that, by rejecting the social chapter, he is rejecting the strikers' friend and the creep of socialism?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. At the end of the 1970s, 29 million days were lost in strikes whereas only 2 million days were lost in strikes last year. I have no enthusiasm for returning to the sort of legislation that applied at that time.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the Prime Minister tell us why Chancellor Kohl and his fellow Conservative Heads of Government do not agree with him that, by adopting the social chapter, they will jeopardise jobs?

The Prime Minister: Because they do not have the trade union structure that we have in this country or the record of trade union militancy that so damaged this country in the 1970s and to which we have no intention whatsoever of returning. If the right hon. Gentleman begins to listen to what many employers elsewhere in Europe are saying, he will learn that they recognise that we made the right decisions.

Mr. Kinnock: What those Heads of Government do not have is a record of losing 768,000 jobs in their countries in the past 12 months. Four out of every five of the jobs that have been lost in the European Community in the past year have been lost in Britain because of the right hon. Gentleman's policies. He is the last person to be entitled to think of himself as a protector of jobs; he is the destroyer of jobs.

Mr. Major: Throughout the 1980s as a whole, more jobs were created in this country than in any other European country. Indeed, nearly as many jobs were created in this country as in the whole of the European Community. I need no lectures from the right hon. Gentleman about the social dimension. The social dimension to Europe was part of the Single European Act, against which the right hon. Gentleman voted.

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on that record? Is he aware that Britain receives almost half the total investment coming into Europe from the United States of America and Japan and that many of the companies involved have the good sense to choose Wolverhampton and the rest of the west midlands? Does he agree that those companies choose to come to Britain because our taxes are low, our industrial relations are good and, most of all, our Government understand business? Does he agree that none of that would be the case if the Labour party was in charge?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right in that diagnosis. She may have read the remarks made yesterday by the Association of British Chambers of Commerce, which made its position perfectly clear on the agreement at Maastricht. It said:

"There will be many continental businesses today envying their competitors in the United Kingdom."

That is because they understand that the decisions that we have taken are in the interests of British industry, British commerce and jobs for British workers.

Q2. **Mr. Patchett:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 12 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Patchett: Given the decision to opt out of the social charter in Europe—[HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."]— can the Prime Minister confirm that he is planning—[HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."]—to fight the next general election on the slogan "Vote Tory for the lowest wages, least consultation and worst employment protection in Europe"?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman—[HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."]—is in no position to talk about opt-outs, considering that his party has opted out of every necessary decision to assist this country in the past 10 years and has backed every inflationary wage claim, every piece of trade union militancy and every policy that would do damage to Britain and its future.

Mr. Wilkinson: Could my right hon. Friend find time today to think again about the significance of an historic referendum which took place in the Ukraine on 1 December, in which the people of Ukraine freely and democratically voted for their sovereignty and independence? Will Her Majesty's Government recognise the Government of Ukraine and show that they are on the side of democracy and freedom?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend said, the referendum in Ukraine showed overwhelming support for the independence of Ukraine. [HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."] The Foreign Affairs Committee statement on 2 December gave the initial response from the European Community. We shall continue to consult——

Hon. Members: "Reading."

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House well knows the conventions here. It has always been in order for Ministers on the Front Bench to read their answers and it has never been in order for hon. Members to read their questions.

The Prime Minister: Most people would have regarded what is happening in the Soviet Union as a matter of some importance, not a matter for the fourth-form behaviour that we see on the Opposition Benches.

Q3. **Mr. O'Brien:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 12 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. O'Brien: Will the Prime Minister confirm that because of his decision to opt out of the social charter— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot hear everything down here. Perhaps it is just as well.

Mr. O'Brien: Will the Prime Minister confirm that because of his decision to opt out of the social charter——

Hon. Members: He has said that. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Does the hon. Gentleman want to ask a question or not? Please get on with it.

Mr. O'Brien *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is intolerable. Will the hon. Gentleman please ask his question.

Mr. O'Brien: Will the Prime Minister confirm that because of his action in opting out of the social charter, Great Britain will be the only country in Europe that will deny its people the legal right to paid holidays? Does not he feel ashamed of that?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman can know what we have agreed not to join. What we have agreed not to accept are the sort of damaging laws that nearly brought this country to its knees when we last had a Labour Government. That is what we are not prepared to accept. Matters such as the hon. Gentleman raised can be dealt with at present under the social dimension to which the British Government subscribe and against which the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) voted.

Q4. **Mr. Hannam:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 12 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hannam: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on helping to create a more outward-looking Europe. In that connection, and in view of the impending serious food shortages in the Soviet Union, may I ask whether he was able to take any initiatives at Maastricht to help move foodstuffs from the Community to the Russian people?

The Prime Minister: Yes, we were able to take such initiatives. The European Council reaffirmed its determination to act quickly to help the people of the Soviet Union and in particular those who live in the heavily populated areas of Moscow and St. Petersburg. A substantial package of help for the Soviet Union, totalling over $11 billion worth of emergency aid in 1991, has now been put in place by the Group of Seven, under my chairmanship, and the European Community. That includes new commitments of food and medical aid of over $4 billion. Logistical experts will be meeting shortly to ensure that that aid gets swiftly to those in need. I am pleased also to tell the House that the United Kingdom is sending £20 million worth of animal feed aid to St. Petersburg so that livestock need not be slaughtered this winter.

Mr. Ashdown: Is the Prime Minister aware that the Government's decision to pay the mortgage element of income support direct to lenders is a welcome but wholly insufficient response to the crisis facing thousands of families in Britain because of home repossessions? Does he not realise that unless he is prepared to be more imaginative—for instance, with schemes for converting mortgages to rents—we shall not avoid in the new year thousands of families facing misery, a further plunge in house prices and serious damage to the economy?

The Prime Minister: The Government are providing substantial help to those who risk losing their homes when they lose their jobs. As the right hon. Gentleman pointed out, we made new arrangements on 5 November to ensure that income support payments can be paid directly to the lender. The right hon. Gentleman may be interested to know that the Government are looking urgently with mortgage lenders at what further measures might be taken to protect those faced with repossession.

Sir Teddy Taylor: As one who joined the Leader of the Opposition in voting against the Single European Act, before the right hon. Gentleman became a Euro-fanatic, may I appeal to my right hon. Friend to warn the voters about the huge dangers to the much-improved labour relations of Britain if they were to vote into power any Government who were prepared to pass over the power to wreck our trade union reforms by majority vote in Brussels? Will he warn the British people of the damage that could be done to them and the danger to their way of life and democracy?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that if my hon. Friend maintains his position with his normal consistency, the day will come when the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) will join him yet again in that view. On the substantive point, my hon. Friend will know that I agree with him, for I refused earlier this week to agree in Europe to the sort of laws that would have had the effect my hon. Friend sets out.

Q5. **Mr. Livingstone** to ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 12 December.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Livingstone: Will the Prime Minister take time today to meet the Home Secretary to discuss how the Government should respond to the letter they have received from the mayor of Conservative-controlled Bexley drawing attention to the 140 per cent. increase in racist attacks in the area since the British National party moved its headquarters into the area? One of those attacks involved the stabbing to death of Rolan Adams by a racist mob. How does the Prime Minister think that the Government can respond to the Mayor's request that Bexley council be given the power to close that fascist headquarters before more lives are lost?

The Prime Minister: I was not aware of that incident, but I deplore such racist attacks without any reservation whatsoever. I will certainly discuss that incident with my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Rowe: The channel tunnel is about to become a major part of the United Kingdom infrastructure. Will my right hon. Friend look with his Cabinet colleagues at the fact that Kent is receiving considerable capital-infrastructure funds but virtually all of that money is going on projects linked to the channel tunnel, to the great detriment of Kent's other needs?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is a powerful advocate for his constituency and for Kent generally. I will certainly examine the point that he raises.

Business of the House

3.31 pm

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Will the Leader of the House please tell us the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 16 DECEMBER and TUESDAY 17 DECEMBER—Remaining stages of the Local Government Finance Bill.

WEDNESDAY 18 DECEMBER and THURSDAY 19 DECEMBER—Debate on the outcome of the European Council at Maastricht on a Government motion.

FRIDAY 20 DECEMBER—Debates on the Adjournment.

The House will also wish to know that European Standing Commitee B will meet at 10.30 am on Wednesday 18 December to consider the unnumbered explanatory memorandum relating to the dignity of women and men at work.

[Relevant report of European Legislation Committee HC 24-iii (1991-92)]

Mr. Grocott: Is the Leader of the House aware that we are not at all happy about the way in which time is being allocated for debates which the Opposition choose? We had an Opposition day last Thursday, on 5 December. There is none this week, there will be none next week, and we then have the three-week Christmas recess, so the earliest possible date for a debate will be the second week in January. We fully understand that the Government will not want us to pick subjects for debate in the run-up to the general election. Perhaps the Government are beginning to clear the decks for the general election, which of course we would warmly welcome. However, we should not be deprived of our time meanwhile.

Can the right hon. Gentleman give us an absolute assurance that there will be an Opposition day in the first week of our return, when we can have a debate on a subject of our choosing?

In view of yesterday's figures on homelessness, showing that no fewer than 60,000 people are in temporary accommodation and will be, presumably, throughout the Christmas period—an increase of 33 per cent. on last year—can the right hon. Gentleman undertake to arrange for a Cabinet Minister to make a statement on the crisis of homelessness one day next week? We know that there is to be a debate later tonight, but that is not enough.

May we have a specific day on which we can debate conditions of employment throughout Europe, not as part of the European debate on Wednesday and Thursday next week? Now that we know that the Government's platform is to argue that British working conditions should be the worst in Europe, we want an opportunity to discuss—*[Interruption.]* Tory Members do not like this, but they will hear a lot of it before the general election. We want an opportunity to demonstrate our agreement with virtually all other informed public opinion in Europe that good working conditions lead to efficiency and higher productivity. Until the Government understand this, we shall keep pressing it.

Mr. MacGregor: On the first point, we are very happy to have Opposition days, when we can exploit all the divisions and difficulties in Opposition policies. However, this week, with the agreement, I think, of the whole House, we are anxious to get the Aggravated Vehicle-Taking Bill through. Then there are all the various debates which we are obliged to have before Christmas and which have to be taken this week. That is why I was unable to suggest a Suppy day this week.

I believe that the House regards it important to have two days next week on Maastricht. It is also very important to get the Local Government Finance Bill through the House before Christmas. That is why we have to deal with it next week. It is a question for the usual channels, but I shall certainly bear in mind the hon. Gentleman's request for a Supply day fairly soon after we get back.

On homelessness, the hon. Gentleman will know well that the Government have taken many initiatives. Over three years, about £100 million is being spent on providing accommodation for the homeless in London where there is a heavy concentration of the problem because many people come to London. The hon. Gentleman will know that that initiative is having substantial and beneficial effects. I cannot promise him a debate next week, for the reasons which I have already given.

Conditions of employment throughout Europe can certainly be debated next Wednesday and Thursday. All my right hon. and hon. Friends will be happy to have that topic debated next week, when we can draw attention to the British conditions and traditions and the dangers of militant union leadership which we saw so clearly throughout the 1970s. The employment aspects of the social chapter could be very damaging to conditions of employment here. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that lost jobs are the thing most of all that people in this country would not wish to see. That could well follow from some aspects of the social chapter. I would be happy for the matter to be debated next week.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that this is a private Members' day, with an Adjournment motion and a number of important subjects to be debated under the Consolidated Fund Bill. I ask hon. Members to confine their questions to business next week and not to refer to general matters which may be raised later.

Mr. Norman Tebbit (Chingford): Will my right hon. Friend resist the claim for a separate debate in the House about conditions of employment on the continent of Europe? Surely that is not within the sovereign control of the House. Would it not be odd to accede to the request of the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott) since he wishes to give control over these matters to another assembly and to take it away from the House? Is not my right hon. Friend right to say that those matters can be referred to peripherally in the very welcome debate which we shall have next Wednesday and Thursday?

Mr. MacGregor: I agree entirely with my right hon. Friend except on one point: I do not think that the matter would necessarily be peripheral to the debate next week because it is an important aspect of the successful conclusion to the negotiations which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister achieved. I agree entirely with my right hon. Friend on his other points, which is why I have resisted the request from the Opposition for a separate debate.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): The Leader of the House will be aware that last night there was an extensive debate on the fishing industry. In the busy schedule for next week, will he be able to ensure that there will be a report back from the Fisheries Council, because the matter is of such great importance to many of our constituents?

Mr. MacGregor: I fully understand the point that the hon. Lady makes. She is right about the importance of the matter. I hope that we will be able to have a statement on the outcome of the Fisheries Council. I warn her, however, that it may be late in the week.

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): May I agree with the request of the deputy shadow Leader of the House for a debate on social chapter style costs of employment? As we saw yesterday, there is a fundamental misunderstanding of what is going on in Europe. It is only in recent years that French and German employment creators have started to complain bitterly about the loss of competitiveness which they are suffering as a result of social chapter style reforms in their countries. As the matter is so key to the European debate, surely we should have a separate debate next week, preceding the full debate on Europe.

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that is possible. I am sure my hon. Friend agrees with me that we want to get the Local Government Finance Bill through on Monday and Tuesday. The point that he is making is very important. I hope to allow extended time for the debate on Wednesday to enable the social chapter and other points relating to the Maastricht outcome to be discussed by as many hon. Members as possible.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): As there will almost certainly be a challenge to the European Court of Justice over Britain's opting out of the social charter, will one of the Law Officers be present during next week's two-day debate? This is an important matter and a Law Officer should be given an opportunity to assess the challenge that will almost certainly be made to the European Court.

Mr. MacGregor: I do not agree with the premise, so it will not be necessary for a Law Officer to be present. However, if the point is raised, one of my right hon. Friends will be perfectly happy to respond to it.

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): I thank my right hon. Friend for agreeing to extend the debate on Wednesday night. Will he take this opportunity to confirm that it is not compulsory for Privy Councillors to speak in the debate, particularly not those who spoke last time?

Mr. MacGregor: That is a matter for my right hon. Friends and for you, Mr. Speaker. I am very sympathetic to the matter, however, and understand the great importance of the two-day debate next week. That is why I propose that the debate on the first day should continue until 2 am.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a debate next week on the important celebration that will take place on 1 January, when badges such as the one I am wearing manufactured from discarded Soviet and American missiles will be sold to raise money for world disaster relief? Should not that cause be highlighted and debated in the House?

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot give Government time for that matter next week, beyond what I have offered.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): My I direct the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 365?

[That this House notes the role of Robert Maxwell in providing employment, funds or both to officials and associates of the Labour Party, including Sir Tom McCaffrey, Joe Haines, Nick Grant and Helen Liddell; observes that, had Labour won a General Election, they would doubtless have transferred their skills from running one man's rickety empire to running the country; notes further that contributions in cash and kind have been made from this source towards running the Labour Party; and calls for full explanations, appropriate disgorgement and compensation to the unfortunate pensioners of the Maxwell organisation.]

Will it be possible to fit in a debate next week on links between the Labour party and the late Robert Maxwell? That would prove to the country that there is no difference between them, in the sense that they both like to spend other people's money.

Mr. MacGregor: I have noted the early-day motion. I shall not comment on the first part of my hon. Friend's question, but there will be plenty of opportunities in tomorrow's debate for the second part to be raised. I suspect that it will also be in order to raise various aspects of the Mirrior Group affair. I draw attention to the point that my hon. Friend rightly raises about the willingness of the Labour party to spend other people's money on every problem, which is why it is now saddled with such a high expenditure commitment. I agree with my hon. Friend that that could be raised tomorrow.

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): Will the Leader of the House find time next week to allow the Secretary of State for Transport to make a statement on the deplorable service in the north-east of England on the InterCity east coast line? Millions of pounds have been spent on electrification and the service is appalling. People are waiting 11 hours for trains to reach their destinations and trains are being cancelled. Will the Secretary of State for Transport make a statement on what he intends to do about the problem?

Mr. MacGregor: I understand the recent difficulties. As the hon. Gentleman says, there has been a substantial capital investment programme. I shall draw the matter to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, but I cannot promise a statement because the House will be anxious to spend as much time as possible next week on the Local Government Finance Bill, which has a timetable, and on the important two-day debate on European matters on Wednesday and Thursday.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): Is the Leader of the House aware that hon. Members were grateful for the speed with which the original Maastricht text and the amendments thereto were made available yesterday? When will the consolidated text be made available?

Mr. MacGregor: I understand the point that my hon. Friend makes and I am grateful for his acknowledgment of the speed with which the latest texts were placed in the Vote Office and the Library. I hope and am informed that the consolidated texts on both the political and monetary

union aspects—they will not be consolidated together but a text will be consolidated for each—will be available on Monday. We shall ensure that they are in the Vote Office and Library as soon as possible.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): Is the Leader of the House aware that no statement has been made in the past week by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland about the fact that all capital expenditure in Northern Ireland has been frozen for the rest of the financial year? No statement has been made to the House, no information has been given to hon. Members from Northern Ireland, and no debate has yet taken place on the appropriations. The measure affects housing, hospital, health and education programmes. If the capital expenditure is to be suspended until 1 April, will the Leader of the House, as a matter of grave urgency, give at least an hour next week for a statement or a debate on this important matter, which is affecting every aspect of life in Northern Ireland?

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot promise Government time on that matter next week. As I was not present earlier, I do not know whether the issue was raised during questions. However, I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's point to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): Will my right hon. Friend find time next week for a debate on the responsibilities of non-executive directors? Does he recall the debate in another place on 31 January last, in which Lord Williams of Elvel and Lord Donoughue lectured the Government on that subject——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is out of order.

Mr. Wardle: I simply wish to say that both those Lords have been directors of Maxwell companies which filched their——

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): What about Lord Rippon and Lord Havers?

Mr. Speaker: Order. Leave it to me, please. If hon. Members wish to criticise Members of the other place, it must be done by a motion.

Mr. Wardle: I wonder whether my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will find time next week for a debate so that those subjects may be aired in this House in the interests of the pensioners of the Maxwell companies whose funds have been filched?

Mr. MacGregor: As you, Mr. Speaker, have already said, there will be opportunities this afternoon and during the Consolidated Fund debates this evening for those matters to be raised.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you ask the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) to withdraw the comment that he made at the end of his question? Will the hon. Gentleman repeat what he said?

Mr. Speaker: I am not asking the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) to do that. I understood him to say that funds had been "filched"—not a word that I would use. The hon. Gentleman did not imply that the noble Lords had done it.

Mr. Wardle: If I did, Mr. Speaker, I withdraw that. I simply wished to say that they were directors of the companies from which those funds disappeared.

Mr. Speaker: That is nearly as bad. I think that I had better call Mr. Nellist.

Mr. Dave Nellist (Coventry, South-East): Will the Leader of the House find time for a full debate on early-day motion 352?

[That this House recognises that this year's Christmas bonus, first paid to pensioners in 1972, would need to be £82·20 to match the increase in earnings since then; and calls for its immediate increase to restore its original value.]

Is he aware of figures given to me recently by the Department of Social Security that show that, if the conditions of 1989 are repeated this year, the number of pensioners who die this month, compared to the average number who die in July, will be 31,000? Why is it that, after 12 years of the Conservative Government and their economic policies, so many pensioners have to choose between food and fuel? If last night's temperatures are repeated, 1,000 of them a night will lose that battle.

Mr. MacGregor: Unless I am misinformed, I think that early-day motion 352 relates to the Christmas bonus. The hon. Gentleman will know that the Government have paid the Christmas bonus throughout their years of office, unlike the Labour party when it was in government.

On the hon. Gentleman's wider point, there have been substantial improvements in the vast majority of pensioners' living standards in the past decade or more. On the issue of meeting fuel costs, he will know that the schemes that we have introduced have been extended, which will be of great benefit to many people if we have cold weather.

Mr. Steve Norris (Epping Forest): Having chided my right hon. Friend for the inadequacy of time available for the European debate before the Maastricht settlement, may I warn him that, despite the additional hours that he has allowed, there is likely to be even more dissatisfaction on this occasion, as the overwhelming majority of my right hon. and hon. Friends will wish to participate in the debate to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on the tremendous success that he has achieved?

Mr. MacGregor: It was because I was conscious of the requests from many of my hon. Friends and some Opposition Members for plenty of time for the debate that I have extended the time available. I am happy to accept my hon. Friend's chiding on this occasion, because the reason that he gave for it is one of which I entirely approve and fully support.

Mr. John P. Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): Will the Leader of the House find time next week for a debate so that we might consider whether legislation should be introduced to compel record companies to place warning labels on recorded material that is unsuitable for children, especially in the light of the irresponsible decision by EMI not to do so? If we fail to do that, there is a danger that there will be a repeat of what happened to my constituent, Mrs. K. Morris of Barry, who unknowingly purchased for her 10-year-old son, and in the presence of her seven-year-old daughter, a cassette which contained the most foul and obscene language. *[Interruption.]* I am sure that everyone believes that Parliament has a duty to

[Mr. John P. Smith]

protect mothers and fathers who want to exercise parental guidance and judgment, even if some Conservative Members do not. Will the Leader of the House carefully consider this important issue?

Mr. MacGregor: I think that my hon. Friends were referring to a different matter from that to which the hon. Gentleman believed they were referring. Of course I understand his concern. We all wish to ensure that children are protected by their parents from such incidents as he mentioned, although I cannot comment on the particular case because I do not know about the incident. However, I cannot find Government time for such a debate next week. If he wishes to raise the matter in detail, he must find an opportunity himself.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): May we have a debate next week on safety in the home, which would give me an opportunity to point out to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how vital it is to adopt the practice that is prevalent on the continent of having moulded-on plugs for electrical appliances? At the same time, it would give me the opportunity to salute the excellent campaign run by *The Mail on Sunday*, which is urging the Secretary of State to allow that to happen.

Mr. MacGregor: I think that my hon. Friend has already made his point.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Will the Leader of the House allow Government time in the very near future for a debate on the future of the textile industry? Does he acknowledge that, even in areas such as south-east Scotland and at the high value end of the textile industry, there are substantial factory closures and redundancies? The importance of the general agreement on tariffs and trade negotiations and of the Uruguay round to the future of the industry is recognised by all hon. Members, and it would be a good thing if the Government could find time for a debate in the near future.

Mr. MacGregor: I know the importance of the GATT round to the textile industry. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the basis for agreement of the Uruguay round needs to be established by the end of the year. It is now known that the GATT director general, Mr. Dunkel, has announced his intention to table a comprehensive paper embodying the results of the negotiations of all the issues, including textiles, on 20 December. We must all hope that that will enable the round to be concluded formally early in the new year.

As the hon. Gentleman also knows, there has been an agreement to extend the multi-fibre arrangement on textiles for another year in the event of that timetable not being met, but I should have thought that the time to consider a discussion of that matter in the House would be when we know how the GATT negotiations are going.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Gedling): Has my right hon. Friend had a chance to study an as yet largely unnoticed declaration to the treaty on the protection of animals and which was included at the special behest of the British Government? Would it not be widely welcomed by our constituents who care deeply about animal welfare, and should not the important success of the British Government be given some prominence in the debate next week on the Maastricht treaty?

Mr. MacGregor: I agree with my hon. Friend, and I am sure that he will wish to go further and to draw attention to the recent success of right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in the successful outcome to the negotiations on the directives, which involved, among other matters, the export of live horses.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Will the Leader of the House accept my apologies for being unduly patient with the profligacy of the Government—especially of the Secretary of State for Scotland—in relation to the Sheriff Kearney inquiry into social work in Fife? May we have a statement before the recess on why an inquiry costing £600,000 to the Scottish Office and £1,350,000 to Fife—nearly £2 million in total—has not printed one word and on why we have no sign of when Sheriff Kearney will report? May we have an urgent statement from the Secretary of State for Scotland on that matter?

Mr. MacGregor: Most hon. Members would want us to restrict oral statements next week to those that are most urgent, given that we have a timetable on the first two days and an extremely important debate on the next two. I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's point to the attention of my right hon. Friend, but I would not want to hold out hope of an oral statement.

Mr. Rupert Allason (Torbay): In business questions last week, my right hon. Friend heard calls for the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to make a statement about what and when the Government knew of the serious allegations made against Maxwell Communication Corporation, dating back to December 1990. As the Secretary of State has not made such a statement, can my right hon. Friend confirm that he has not been deterred or fixed by the Opposition, who are clearly worried by the fact that not only is the legal adviser to Mirror Group Newspapers a former Labour Member of Parliament but a director of MGN is the deputy leader of the Labour party in another place——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Business question time is not an opportunity to make that sort of allegation. We are asking about the business for next week.

Mr. Allason: Will my right hon. Friend arrange for the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to come to the House, undeterred by calls from the Opposition, to make a full statement on Mirrorgate?

Mr. MacGregor: If and when it is appropriate for my right hon. Friend to do so, I am sure he will. As my hon. Friend knows, these matters are the subject of an inquiry by the Serious Fraud Office and by IMRO, the Investment Management Regulatory Organisation, and they will draw to the attention of my right hon. Friend any matters that they feel should be drawn to his attention.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement next week giving more information, following the Prime Minister's welcome announcement today that additional help will be given to those on benefit who are experiencing difficulties in repaying mortgages? I ask on behalf of constituents living in Hanover square in Bradford, many of whom are

pensioners on low incomes or are unemployed. Having sold their homes for £1 to the British Heritage housing trust, they are extremely angry because they cannot afford to buy them back at prices of up to £51,000. May we have a full statement on the help being given to those having difficulty in repaying mortgages? I hope that that will help my constituents to buy back the homes that they are occupying.

Mr. MacGregor: That is a rather different matter from the one to which my right hon. Friend was responding. If and when a statement is to be made, I am sure it will be made as quickly as possible.

Mr. Michael Irvine (Ipswich): In 1987, the late Robert Maxwell took control of Ransomes and Rapier, a long-established Ipswich company. Five months later he closed it down. It now appears that, not content with robbing several hundred of my constituents of their jobs——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but he is making a statement. Will he relate it to the business for next week, or raise it later tonight?

Mr. Irvine: I certainly will. It now appears that this socialist millionaire, having robbed several hundred of my constituents of their jobs, went on to plunder their pension funds. I ask my right hon. Friend for an assurance that before long we will have a full day to debate pension funds and how best to protect them against the depredations of unscrupulous directors and negligent trustees.

Mr. MacGregor: I have noted my hon. Friend's request for a debate on these matters in due course. As you, Mr. Speaker, have said, some of those issues can be debated later today.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Attorney-General to come to the House next week to make a statement on Sunday trading? I know that he has already made one, but there is a national outcry at the way in which the Government, including the Attorney-General and the Prime Minister, are standing by while there is an outbreak of lawlessness among the multinationals on Sunday trading. Does the Leader of the House realise that without such a statement many people outside the House will conclude that the Government's inertia and double standards in allowing such lawlessness are not unconnected with the large contributions which B and Q has made to the Tory party?

Mr. MacGregor: That is a disgraceful allegation which has nothing to do with the issue. "Lawlessness" is an inappropriate word to use because the state of the law is now being considered by the highest court in the land. The hon. Gentleman knows that my right hon. and learned Friend made a full statement to the House the other day, and I see no need for one next week.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Will my right hon. Friend arrange for an early debate on the public funding of Opposition parties in this place? There now seems to be a need for public funding for Militant Tendency in this place. If that were true, it would encourage not just the hon. Members for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist) and for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields) but other Labour Members who are closet Militants to come out of the closet. The Opposition parties would be grateful because they are likely to remain in opposition for a long time.

Mr. MacGregor: I notice that my hon. Friend is due to initiate a Consolidated Fund debate on that very issue tonight, and I hope that we reach it.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): Further to the comments made by the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady), with which I agree, on the extraordinary moratorium on public sector contracts in Northern Ireland which will hit hard several important health projects in my constituency as well as being a poor Christmas present to the construction industry, is the Leader of the House aware that the excuse given by the Northern Ireland Office for that remarkable action is that criminal damage claims have run between £10 million and £15 million higher than budgeted for, a figure which ought to be within the scope of the contingency fund or covered by the many billions of pounds of additional public spending announced recently by the Government, is literally incredible? Is it not more likely that the Northern Ireland Office's finances are in a mess, underlining the need for a Select Committee on Northern Ireland?

Mr. MacGregor: I have already made clear many times the position on the Select Committee. I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's first point to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Has my right hon. Friend noted the decision of the parents of St. George's school, Gravesend, by a majority of nine to one, to become grant-maintained, and the same decision of two other schools by similar majorities? Therefore, may we have a debate on the management of schools which will enable us to highlight the Opposition's policy to overrule the decision of the parents in those schools, to claw back education funds to the centralised bureaucracy and, while we are about it, highlight the Opposition's policy to destroy the two excellent grammar schools in Gravesend?

Mr. MacGregor: As an enthusiast for and advocate of grant-maintained schools, I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I am sure that he will take every opportunity to express his points locally because, in so doing, he is clearly very much on the side of the parents and the extra choice that we are now giving in education as well as the raising of standards.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Port Glasgow): The Leader of the House mentioned that European Standing Committee B, of which I am a hard-pressed member, is to meet next week. Will he confirm that the Procedure Committee will be publishing its report on the modus operandi of that Committee and European Standing Committee A? May we have as soon as possible a statement on the right hon. Gentleman's reaction to that report in order, among other things, to give some sustenance to the members of those two Committees? I am not talking about financial sustenance. We need assistance to deal effectively with a work load which, I suspect, will increase during the next few months.

Mr. MacGregor: I thank the hon. Gentleman and all right hon. and hon. Members who serve on those two Committees, which are doing a valuable job in a more

[Mr. MacGregor]

effective way than was done previously. That is the general conclusion that I am reaching from all the reactions that I am receiving.

I look forward to receiving the report of the Select Committee on Procedure, and agree with the hon. Gentleman that, depending of course on what it says, we ought to see whether any further measures could be taken to assist the Standing Committees in their work. As the hon. Gentleman knows, it is an interim review. We have had only comparatively short experience, and no doubt we will look more widely in due course. I look forward to receiving the report.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): Is my right hon. Friend aware that a significant number of my right hon. and hon. Friends are bitterly disappointed that during today's Consolidated Fund Bill debate only one and a half hours have been allocated to discussing pension funds? We would wish to pursue further the criminal frauds committed by Robert Maxwell and others associated with the *Daily Mirror*. In particular, I ask my right hon. Friend to find time next week to allow us to pursue the role played by Mr. Joe Haines, sometime press officer of a Labour Prime Minister, an executive director of Mirror Group Newspapers——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that he is also a peer—*[Interruption.]* No, he is not a peer.

Mr. MacKay: I hope, Mr. Speaker, that he never will be. In addition to being an executive director of Mirror Group Newspapers, Mr. Haines cringingly wrote the authorised biography of the late Robert Maxwell, in which he threw out of the window what little journalistic integrity he ever had.

Mr. MacGregor: It is clear that there is considerable interest and concern in the House about that matter. I know that the Consolidated Fund Bill allows for only a short debate, but there will be other opportunities for raising the matter, including tomorrow.

Ms. Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): Is the Leader of the House aware that decisions will be taken in Brussels on 18 December about the permitted level of support for the shipbuilding industry in Europe? Has any consideration been given to allowing right hon. and hon. Members to express an opinion on that matter, either on the Floor of the House or in European Standing Committee B? If not, can the Leader of the House at least persuade the silent Department of Trade and Industry to say something on the subject?

Mr. MacGregor: I will look into the point and will write to the hon. Lady.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): My right hon. Friend intimated that the House cannot expect a statement on Sunday trading next week. Will he give an assurance that there will soon be a full day's debate so that the House can clarify its view, if that is possible, on Sunday trading?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that I can give that assurance in the near future, because my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office is continuing with her discussions. The House has been expressing its view quite a bit recently, such as on the two statements that we had. I would not necessarily say that it clarified its view. Certainly I felt that it made it clear that there were still strongly divided views in the House.

Ms. Hilary Armstrong (Durham, North-West): The business of the House for next week means that we will yet again have a 10 o'clock vote on a Thursday. When the Leader of the House came to the Select Committee on Procedure when it was considering the sittings of the House, he tried to reassure us that right hon. and hon. Members with constituencies some distance from London would, through the usual channels, be able to return to their constituencies to conduct their business at weekends. As the right hon. Gentleman has already heard, we from the north are already having exceptional difficulty in travelling to and from London on public transport. There have been six votes at 10 o'clock on a Thursday evening since the right hon. Gentleman told us that that would not happen.

Mr. Speaker: Order. With great respect to the hon. Lady, what does that have to do with next week's business? Will she ask a question about that?

Ms. Armstrong: It has to do with the way in which the Leader of the House organises the business of the House. He is making it exceptionally difficult, given the commitment that he made to the Procedure Select Committee, for some right hon. and hon. Members to fulfil their responsibilities as Members of Parliament to their constituencies and to the House.

Mr. MacGregor: I did not give any commitment to the Select Committee; that was not the purpose of the evidence. I made known a number of personal views, proposals, and recommendations for the Committee to consider. It is now for the Committee to do that, and to report to the House. I indicated also that, wherever possible, we endeavour—including through the usual channels—to assist right hon. and hon. Members representing constituencies well away from London to return to them on Thursday evening. However, it is not always possible to arrange that. I hope that the hon. Lady understands that next week's debate is of great significance, and I cannot believe that Members of Parliament feel that it would not be right to have that debate and the 10 o'clock vote on Thursday.

Mr. Tim Devlin (Stockton, South): I shall be happy to vote in the hon. Lady's stead.

The Tees and Hartlepool port authority is currently being privatised. The board will decide on the preferred bidder on Monday, and the Government will make a statement on Thursday, but we shall have no opportunity to debate the matter in the House. May we have a statement on Monday or Tuesday?

The Institute of Terrestrial Ecology in Banchory was destroyed by fire on 4 December. So far no statement has been made about its future. May we have such a statement?

Mr. MacGregor: I shall have to discuss the hon. Gentleman's second question with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science. As for his first question, the Tees and Hartlepool port authority is the vendor in the current privatisation, and it is for the authority to assess bids for the port in the light of its objectives of sale and then to decide which bid

to recommend. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will, I know, consider that recommendation carefully, but the decision will be his; I cannot anticipate it, or the exact time when he will make it.

Mr. Brian Wilson (Cunningham, North): We are now entering the coldest spell of the year. Once again, statistics show that the mortality rate among elderly people in cold conditions, whose homes lack heating facilities, is higher here than in any other European country.

Opposition Members wish that European standards in this regard could be imported. May we have a debate—not towards the end of the year, when conditions will have changed, but now, while the problem is urgent and immediate—about the effectiveness of support systems for elderly people in cold weather, and the possibility of delivering the pittance that is, potentially, available now, in time for it to have an effect? Can the House possibly be faced with a more urgent subject than that of the thousands of pensioners who will die in the weeks ahead because of a natural element against which this prosperous society has proved incapable of protecting them?

Mr. MacGregor: There is no need for a statement on cold weather payments. The Government introduced those payments, and they have also introduced significant improvements for this winter. All those eligible will be paid automatically and quickly. We also have the facility to base payments on forecasts made by the Meteorological Office, as well as on recorded information. The capital rule has been abolished, and 400,000 more people will be eligible as a result. The links with weather stations have also been improved. No statement is necessary; the Government have done the right thing, and they have already acted.

Mr. John Browne (Winchester): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 373?

[That this House, aware that as a result of the recent agreement at Maastricht the United Kingdom will now move inevitably, despite an 'opt-in' clause, towards a single European currency which will replace the present European composite currency or ecu; recognises that such a new single currency will be heavily influenced by Germany and that its naming is of great importance; suggests the name of Karl, derived from Karl der Grosse or Charlemagne, who in early times achieved the unification of much of Europe; notes that the monetary sign of ₭, like £, is unique and therefore well fitted to take its place beside the $ and ¥; and urges Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer to put this initiative to his colleagues at the European Council of Ministers.]

Does he accept that the naming of a new single European currency is a matter of considerable importance? Please may we have a specific debate to consider that important matter so that we can present a well-considered British suggestion to our European colleagues?

Mr. MacGregor: I have no doubt that my hon. Friend will wish to make his own suggestions, and he will be able to do so next week. I do not think, however, that I can give a time for a specific debate on that one item.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): May we have a debate on the future of the bus and commercial vehicle manufacturing industry, particularly in the light of Volvo's decision to close Britain's principal bus manufacturing plant, which is in Workington? Does the Leader of the House agree that it is not for private companies to decide to close strategic parts of British industry, and that it is for a British Government to be fully consulted and to be part of such decisions?

Mr. MacGregor: If the hon. Gentleman is recommending direct intervention in particular commercial decisions, I do not agree with him. Obviously, I have great sympathy for all who have been affected by the closure, but it is for the hon. Gentleman to look for opportunities to speak. I know that he has already tried, but other opportunities are available. I cannot promise a debate next week.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the Leader of the House make a statement next week about the plight of the homeless? We shall not be occupying this place for three weeks during the Christmas recess. Why does not the right hon. Gentleman make a decent gesture, instead of just talking? Why does he not throw open the doors of Parliament to the homeless of London? There is plenty of heat and plenty of light here; there are plenty of places to sleep—plenty of empty Benches. There are catering facilities, and there is plenty of security.

I think that it is high time that the Government did something about homelessness, instead of just talking about it. Open the doors—or will the Government opt out of that as well?

Mr. MacGregor: We have already acted, rather than talking about it, and have provided substantial additional facilities for the homeless in London.

Adjournment (Christmas)

Mr. Speaker: I remind hon. Members that on the motion for the Adjournment of the House on Friday 20 December up to nine Members may raise with Ministers subjects of their own choice. Applications should reach my office by 10 pm on Monday next. A ballot will be held on Tuesday morning, and the result made known as soon as possible thereafter.

BILL PRESENTED

Protection of Pension Funds and Investments

Mr. Kenneth Hind presented a Bill to require that trustees of pension funds and investments shall be independent of the employer company concerned; to require trustees to furnish annual reports and accounts to contributors and beneficiaries; to give contributors and beneficiaries additional rights in respect of the control and ownership of pension fund assets; to limit pension fund investment in the employer company; to afford other protection to pension fund contributors and beneficiaries; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on 31 January 1992 and to be printed. [Bill 42.]

Adjournment (Christmas)

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That this House at its rising on Friday 20th December do adjourn until Monday 13th January 1992.—*[Mr. MacGregor.]*

4.15 pm

Sir John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): The theme of my speech is the grievous shortage of officers in all walks of life in this country—except, of course, in the armed forces of the Crown—and, more generally, to consider the state of the nation after the settlement reached at Maastricht, to enumerate the good and bad points of our institutions and our society, and to try to find out where remedies can put things right.

Constant visits to Europe over many years have made me realise more and more how different England is from nations on the continent. We are an island, unconquered for 900 years, and we still look to the great sea routes of the world, and to our cousins in America, as well as to our close neighbours on the continent.

Our whole history and background are different from those of most continental countries. We have had, on the whole, a long and peaceful history here. We have not had the appalling revolutions or wars which have so disfigured continental nations. We much value our Houses of Parliament, in contrast with the low esteem in which continental assemblies are often held. Not only our constitution but our laws are different from those of other nations. We have not had a Code Napoleon.

Until recently, we had a hierarchical and conservative society, with the great lords living on their estates—not at court in Versailles, as they were in France—and the small squires running the villages where they knew the people and their way of life intimately.

We have had few riots in this country, and no fighting for hundreds of years. In short, we are a quiet, kind, politically mature people who have learned over the centuries to live together. We are proud of our history and our traditions; our monarchy is greatly beloved.

In my view, our best institutions are the armed forces of the Crown. The Navy and the Army, of course, are very old, and the Royal Air Force, although founded only in 1918, has fully carried on their ideals. The hallmarks of the armed services of the Crown are chivalry, truthfulness, honesty, integrity and loyalty. Those are not always found in other occupations. The armed forces perform magnificently whenever called upon to do so, and when their members retire they are highly respected in civilian society.

As we all know, the forces consist of officers, non-commissioned officers and other ranks. Those clearly separate roles are not usually found in other organisations —sometimes I wish that they were. We instantly know what the rank stands for. We know where we are, and we are never let down. Unfortunately, we do not always find such high standards in the other great institutions of the state or in the main professions.

We in this House should hold to the highest standards ourselves, and try to keep others up to the mark.

Most of the nation spends several hours a day looking at television screens and reading newspapers. How degrading the tabloid press has become. On television, the swearing and sexual licence is unacceptable. In the tabloid press, the emphasis on sex and sexual misbehaviour is nauseating. Unfortunately, the Church of England, that great institution established by law, fails to reprove those tendencies and even appears unable to control homosexuality among its own clergy. The bishops no longer, alas, have the respect that they used to have and the Church seems to fail to recruit the best men in the land for its clergy.

We find a further tragedy with education. Over the past generation, so-called progressive methods of teaching have meant that many children now leave school being unble to read, to write or to do simple arithmetic. Those responsible were sinning against the light and it will take another generation to get things right.

In the old days, Oxford and Cambridge and our great universities were admired throughout the world. It is a mistake to try now to increase the number of university students and to pretend that the polytechnics, which have a different, but most vital, role to play, are the same as universities.

The public schools have maintained their standards and are still a nursery of leaders. It would be far better if we were to increase the number of our public schools, even with the assistance of some taxpayers' money, rather than to continue to produce what some people fear are half-baked intellectuals in enlarged universities. We should also extend the assisted places scheme which has been so successful.

The amount of crime, especially violent crime, is a blot on our society. Responsibility for that must lie to a great extent with how young people are brought up. Parents, teachers and clergy bear a heavy responsibility.

There was less dishonesty in high places when I was a young man and virtually none in the City of London. Unfortunately, the Maxwell case is only one of a long line in recent years of crime on a massive scale in financial circles.

We constantly find examples of poor management in some of our largest institutions. The banks, which seem to lend millions of pounds to doubtful Governments in South America, to property companies and, I am afraid to say, to corrupt financiers, often seem rude and unhelpful to ordinary customers who badly need the money to help them to carry on their businesses.

British Rail, the Post Office and the management of the health service—not the doctors and nurses—are of varying quality. If anything goes wrong in British Rail or in the Post Office, it is unusual to see anyone about above the rank of lance-corporal.

My solution to all those problems is to try to educate, to train and to recruit more officers and leaders, as in the armed services, who can take charge in almost every walk of life. We should also cherish the House of Lords, especially the younger Lords who are coming on. The Lords are independent and highly respected, and always possess the most perfect manners.

We need better men in British industry if we are to compete on level terms with Germany, with the United States and with Japan. A career in industry should be as much respected as a career in the City.

We all know that the police face appalling challenges today. I am glad that they are highly paid, and they deserve all our sympathy and support. However, what is lacking, as I have said so often, is an officer class. The Home Office should insist on the refounding of the

Hendon police college as it was under Lord Trenchard where officers were recruited and trained for leadership and the highest positions.

We know from recent opinion polls that English people are still highly patriotic and that many more here in these islands are prepared to die for their country than is the case on the continent of Europe.

That deep, abiding patriotism is still found among the mass of the working people. The middle class, of which most of the country is now composed, still keeps high standards in that respect. However, it now unfortunately includes a number of over-educated intellectuals who believe in nothing and wish to destroy all that we hold most dear.

One can have too much democracy. We are not all equal in our abilities. We must pay more attention to finding and choosing those who will become our leaders. The old grammar schools did the job so well—as well as the public schools—until, alas, they were abolished. Let us hope that some grammar schools can now be re-established.

When educating and training our leaders in society, we must ask what is our national purpose. What are we aiming at in our daily lives? We are a mature people, as I said earlier. Sometimes we are inclined to be lazy, but we are capable of great exertions in times of crisis. We now live in a highly competitive world. We must be as good at business as our competitors on the continent and elsewhere.

Of course we must defend the nation properly and keep law and order. We must maintain moral standards and ensure that our children are properly educated. It is important that in every walk of life we should articulate where we are going and where we are trying to go.

I learnt some of those principles as a young officer serving under General Montgomery both on the staff and in the field. We all knew what the object was and what we had to do. Above all, everyone was put in the picture.

In an organisation it is the people who matter most. Their performance can be improved enormously by proper training, example and leadership. As a people, in spite of the faults that I have enumerated, I believe that we have great talents. We must not hesitate to build on them. Therefore, after Maastricht I believe that our country, with all its experience and history and achievements, still has a great deal to give Europe and the world.

4.26 pm

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): I appreciate, as no doubt you, Mr. Speaker, appreciate as a former Deputy Chief Whip, the strictures that that places on hon. Members who hold that position. However, I am so concerned about a safety problem in my constituency that I want to intervene briefly in this debate. I have put myself on the Standing Committee of the Transport and Works Bill and I will speak on the matter in more detail there.

I want to draw to the attention of the House a very dangerous situation in relation to a railway crossing in my constituency. The railway crossing is an unmanned crossing at Newton Garths on the main Newcastle to Sunderland line which runs through my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark).

The crossing is located between two large housing estates—the Biddick Hall housing estate and Boldon Colliery estate. There are fields beside the crossing in which horses graze. As we know, children are often tempted to play near horses and feed them. On 14 May 1990, a seven-year-old girl called Lisa Mohamed was killed on the crossing. She had spent the day with her great-aunt and her younger brother. She had played in the field and walked along the road to the crossing.

Anyone who knows anything about crossings will be aware that the tracks on a vehicular crossing are recessed into timber to allow vehicles to cross the track. The young girl walked along the road believing that she was crossing the field on her way to feed the horses. Unfortunately, she was killed on the track by a train which came around the curve.

The crossing is particularly dangerous because the secondary school on the Biddick Hall estate has been closed and many of the children on that estate must cross to the Boldon Colliery secondary school. That unmanned crossing has become an unauthorised short cut for some children.

The crossing is about one mile from the signalman's cabin, and it is not visible because of the curve in the rail line. Therefore, no one can supervise the gate and crossing procedures. More than 120 high-speed trains pass over that crossing daily, at approximately 65 mph. I have visited the crossing several times, along with Lisa's father, Philip Mohamed, and one of our ward councillors, Councillor Mrs. Wagott. She is a new councillor, but she is capable and competent, and she has taken an interest in that dangerous crossing.

The crossing has been and is plagued by vandals. Warning signs and telephones have been ripped out. Despite repeated warnings, children still use the crossing as a short cut. The crossing is used to service what used to be Harrison farm, and it is used by vehicles and by people riding horses. At times, the gate is tied back and not closed. It takes only one person to leave the gate open, and safety at the crossing goes out of the window.

Several letters have passed between myself and various Ministers at the Department of Transport and between me and the local authority. Ministers, the local authority and everybody on the estate have agreed that the crossing should be closed and are trying to find an alternative route into the farm. However, until it is closed, someone from British Rail should man that crossing.

What appalled me and led me to intervene in this Adjournment debate was a statement by a chap named Brian Ward, who is supposed to be a British Rail regional spokesman. Since Lisa died, her father Philip Mohamed has fought a campaign to have the crossing closed. I have been supporting his campaign. Philip Mohamed, like most people in our area, which has high unemployment, must work away. When Lisa was killed, he was working on an oil rig in the middle of the North sea. His wife has had health problems ever since—her nerves have suffered, as any parent can imagine.

On Friday 29 November, when I went to my constituency, I obtained a copy of the local paper, the *Gazette*. According to that paper, British Rail has decided that it should blame Lisa's parents for her death. That character, Brian Ward—I do not know who he is; he is some pinstriped moron who works in a British Rail heated office—said:

[Mr. Don Dixon]

"We find that Mr. Mohamed has rarely, if ever, publicly expressed any concern for the train crew involved in his daughter's death . . . We have no real wish to attack Mr. Mohamed or his family."

He felt that Mr. and Mrs. Mohamed were to blame because of lack of supervision. That is an insensitive and scurrilous attack on loving parents who lost a seven-year-old daughter.

An editorial in the *Gazette* stated:

"British Rail's outburst against grieving South Shields father Philip Mohamed is astonishing in its insensitivity. Following the tragic death of his seven-year-old daughter eighteen months ago, Mr. Mohamed has waged a ceaseless campaign to get the railway crossing where she was killed closed down."

Any parent would join him in his campaign. He will not fetch Lisa back, but he did not want other parents to suffer the sadness that he and his wife have suffered since Lisa's death.

The article continues:

"Yet BR are adding to the heartbreak of the Mohamed family by blaming 'those who failed to supervise his daughter' for the tragedy.

Such a vitriolic attack does BR no credit whatsoever . . . Now they criticise him for 'failing to show concern for the train crew involved in her death'. This statement is almost breathtaking in its tactlessness.

Only those unfortunate parents who have lost a child can know the suffering involved."

After that scurrilous article by Brian Ward appeared in the newspaper, Mr. Mohamed, the young father who lost his seven-year-old daughter while working in the middle of the North sea, stated:

"British Rail have attacked me and my family. I was at work in the middle of the North Sea on the day she died. Lisa was on a visit to my aunt for the day.

At the time of the incident my aunt was in her front garden along with several other adults, and in front of her house is a large field surrounded by houses and a school.

There is virtually no traffic, only the occasional car going past to a nearby farm. My aunt has brought up a large family in that home for over 12 years and her children along with neighbouring kids have played on the field for many years without incident.

No one thought for a moment Lisa could without instruction or hindrance walk straight on the main Newcastle to Sunderland line after seeing horses on the other field."

That is precisely what happened.

Following that outburst from British Rail's so-called "public relations officer", I found on my return to the constituency last weekend that the *Gazette* had reported that a lorry had been hit by a train at the very spot on the crossing where Lisa was killed 18 months ago. The newspaper reported that the lorry driver, Andrew Atkinson, 25, narrowly cheated death when the 12.30 pm Sunderland to Newcastle train demolished the back of his lorry. I repeat that that happened on the very same crossing on which a young girl was killed, yet British Rail had the effrontery to blame her parents for not supervising their child. It is a dangerous crossing.

I ask British Rail to make a public apology to Mr. and Mrs. Mohamed for its outburst. I also call for the sacking of Mr. Brian Ward. Perhaps he should be sent to work on the North sea oil rigs where he could perhaps do the job that Philip Mohamed had to give up so that he could look after his ill wife following their daughter's death. I hope also that the Minister for Public Transport will disassociate himself from British Rail's remarks. I apologise to the House for having to speak in this Adjournment debate, but I was so appalled by British Rail's attack on parents who had lost their seven-year-old daughter that I felt that it was my duty to do so.

4.37 pm

Mr. James Kilfedder (North Down): Last Saturday, I had the pleasure of calling on a new constituent, Mrs. Noreen Hill, at her new home in Holywood in my constituency. However, that visit was tinged with sadness because, as some hon. Members will recall, Mrs. Hill's husband, Ronnie, a former school headmaster, has been in a coma for over four years since being seriously injured in the notorious IRA terrorist explosion at the remembrance day service in Enniskillen in 1987.

I was deeply moved by Mrs. Hill's quiet courage, dignity and total commitment to the loving care of her husband. She prays as we all do, that Ronnie will one day come out of his coma. To that end, she constantly talks to him in the belief that he understands what she says and that it will eventually help his recovery. I am sure that, like me, all hon. Members admire that wonderful couple and I pray that Noreen Hill's hopes will be realised.

However, I compare the tremendous service that Ronnie Hill gave to the community of Enniskillen, especially as a headmaster, and the love, care and dedication of Noreen Hill, with the ruthless, merciless and cowardly behaviour of the IRA which caused that explosion and so many of the atrocities in Northern Ireland during the past 20 years and more.

The police have warned the people of Ulster that they face increased atrocities from the terrorists during the Christmas season. Is it not ironic that, when goodly people, prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ and provide a memorable and happy time for their children, evil men lurk in the dark recesses of Northern Ireland and, indeed, mainland Great Britain, planning death, mutilation and destruction?

The massive 1,000 lb IRA van bomb which caused such grievous injuries and havoc last week in Belfast could easily have caused widespread carnage. Indeed, it was a miracle that no one died in that explosion, but the IRA demonstrated what, of course, we have known for years. It demonstrated by that bomb outrage that it was at war even with little children, because it badly damaged the opera house where a Christmas pantomime "Babes in the Wood" was being rehearsed, to which many families and their children were looking forward with infinite delight.

The IRA wishes to destroy the economy of Northern Ireland. I pay tribute to the spirit of the business men of the Province who, never daunted, though often depressed, reopen as soon as possible after their premises are damaged by IRA bombs or incendiary devices. Previously, grants were provided by the Government so that the firms could pay for security guards at the premises. It is time for the Government to reintroduce financial assistance. The money would be well spent. It could certainly save businesses hundreds of thousands of pounds.

I am deeply worried about the number of unemployed in my constituency of North Down and the lack of sufficient vacancies, especially for school leavers and graduates. I have complained in the past to the Minister responsible in Northern Ireland that the North Down area benefits least from Government help, because most effort is concentrated in the west and south of the Province.

Therefore, I appeal to the Government to attract more inward investment to my constituency. I urge the Government to get the unemployment in the North Down area off the dole queues. I urge them to give hope and help to our young people. I have met many young people in my constituency who are out of a job. It is difficult to explain the position to them. They are disheartened, and I do not blame them. They are disenchanted, and I fully understand that. That is why I believe that we must help our most prized possessions in Northern Ireland—our young people. I make that appeal strongly and fervently to the Government tonight.

I appeal for adequate recreational facilities for children and young people in my constituency. For instance, they see the vast concrete marina in Bangor, which has cost millions of pounds and has row upon row of expensive yachts beyond the reach of the vast majority of people in the area. Indeed, many of the yachts belong to people from outside the area. The young people feel—in my opinion, rightly—that they are victims of economic discrimination. As no recreational facilities, or only inadequate facilities, are provided in their separate areas, either in Bangor, Holywood, Conlig or Dundonald, they feel that others are benefiting and they are losing.

I refer in particular to places in Bangor such as Kilcooley, Whitehill and Bloomfield. I also think of Holywood, which is in need of better recreational facilities. Young children in Conlig have asked through me for playgrounds for many years. Other areas also suffer a lack of such facilities.

In this season of good will, when we concentrate our intentions on young people, the Government should bear in mind their needs and the fact that, if facilities are not provided, it is all too easy for young people to go astray. It would be money well invested to provide recreational facilities. I hope that the Government will listen to and heed my appeal.

4.44 pm

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): There are two very important issues I want briefly to raise before the House is asked to approve the motion. Both are of urgent public concern and affect the interests of people whose claims to the attention of this House are of undoubted priority. They are issues about which there ought at least to be ministerial statements before we rise for the recess.

I turn first to the issue of homelessness this Christmas, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) referred in his business question. Everyone expects there to be more people sleeping rough this year than at any other Christmas in the post-war years. As the Leader of the House may be aware, I have for many years been a trustee of Crisis, still perhaps more widely known as Crisis at Christmas. The deep social concern of all who work for the charity, in whose splendid achievements Lady Macleod can take especial pride, is well appreciated on both sides of the House. My own approach to the challenge of homelessness is very much informed by their work. Crisis recognises that homeless people are to be found not only in London and gives vitally important help to voluntary organisations which work to reduce the suffering that homelessness causes in many parts of Britain.

By contrast, the Government are widely accused of ignoring the claims of homeless people outside the capital. I quote a recent letter sent to me by Shelter. Simon Keyes, its director of housing services, said:

> "The Housing Minister has announced some provision for people sleeping rough in London this winter but has, once again, limited the scope of this provision to London only. This is despite evidence from Shelter's report . . . on the 'big freeze' last February and the recent official census data showing that the majority of people sleeping rough are outside London. Sixty per cent. of those counted in the census were outside the capital."

That is very strong criticism, well justified by the facts, and Shelter is right to call on the Government to extend to the rest of Britain the full range of initiatives being undertaken in London. After all, homelessness is no less calamitous for people living elsewhere in Britain than it is in London, especially at this time of the year. Nor can Ministers be unaware of its cost in human terms.

Ministers must know that last year, in Manchester alone, there were five recorded cases of people dying from sleeping out during the winter. Their deaths in my native city naturally cause me very deep concern. Yet Manchester is not alone in the north-west it its difficulties in trying to cope with the worst-ever homelessness crisis. There, as elsewhere, the rising tide of repossessions by building societies is an ever more worrying factor.

Council-owned hostels in Bury are authoritatively reported to be almost full and bed-and-breakfast accommodation may have to be found by next Wednesday for families there who face repossession of their homes. At present only 91 council properties are vacant. Most of them are unsuitable for living in, owing to vandalism, fire damage, dilapidation or the fact that they are too small for families.

The situation is set to worsen soon, and Joseph Robinson, the council's assistant housing director, said last week:

> "This is the worst situation our staff can recall."

At the same time, the housing chairman said:

> "We are in desperate circumstances. We have only one vacancy in our temporary hostels and nine families are due to have their homes repossessed by 18 December."

He went on:

> "It's not helped by the fact that we are having to sell 300 council homes every year, but are unable to spend the money on building new ones."

I hope that the Leader of the House will accept that we must have a ministerial statement on this issue before the House rises for the Christmas recess. He may have seen Tim Rayment's reports in *The Sunday Times* about homelessness this Christmas, with their emphasis not only on London but on giving the national picture. His reports bear moving testimony to the priority of the claims of a huge number of our fellow citizens who, without very urgent help, will have to spend Christmas on the streets in localities all over Britain.

The second issue I wish to raise concerns severely disabled people whose well-being and often whose personal freedom and safety depend heavily on the availability of services to which they are entitled under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970. At Question Time on 3 December I raised from the Opposition Front Bench a number of crucial questions about the difficulties that more and more disabled people now experience in trying to secure and/or retain the services to which the Act entitles them. I asked the Minister for Health:

[Mr. Alfred Morris]

"How many disabled people, after being assessed for services under the . . . Act . . ., are now on waiting lists for the help that they need . . . how many local authorities at the latest date for which figures are available, had reduced or removed services in cases where there was no diminution in the disabled person's needs".

I also asked the Minister to comment on a case, of which I had informed the Secretary of State for Health "where home help provision was withdrawn from an elderly couple both of whom are severely and progressively disabled?"—[*Official Report* 3 December 1991; Vol. 200, c. 138.]

Not one of my questions was answered by the Minister. I shall be grateful, therefore, if the Leader of the House will obtain the answers for me before the motion is approved.

Before he does so, I must tell the House that the legal advice given to me, when I was Minister for the Disabled, was that it was unlawful to keep disabled people who have been assessed for services on waiting lists for them. I was also unequivocally advised—as I know all my successors as Minister for the Disabled have been—that it was unlawful to reduce or withdraw a service provided under the Act unless the disabled person's need for it had diminished. Yet in the case about which I questioned the Minister for Health, on 3 December, home help provision was withdrawn from an elderly and severely and progressively disabled couple whose nearest relative lived over 180 miles away in Manchester.

They are not alone in having their legal rights trampled on. Arthritis Care and the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation said in a recent statement that such cases could be found all over Britain and that "widespread distress has been and continues to be caused among disabled people."

In a letter that I received from the Minister for Health before I questioned her in the House, she said, without any suggestion of criticism, that some local authorities had now withdrawn cleaning-only home help services altogether. If so, then *ipso facto* such services are no longer available to any disabled person in their areas, irrespective of need and the requirements of the law.

That is a very serious matter indeed, about which there should not only be a statement to the House before the recess, but urgent ministerial action to end all misconceptions about the legal duties imposed by the Act. On behalf of many national organisations of and for disabled people, I implore the right hon. Gentleman to make a positive response to my plea to him to play his part in ending what their members see as law-breaking on an increasingly wide scale.

In pressing the right hon. Gentleman to help, I emphasise that about 50 per cent. of the homeless in Britain this Christmas are expected to be disabled people, most of whom sleep rough due to the yawning gap between promise and performance in the Government's approach to community care. Thus, the two issues that I have raised are linked. Shelter says that there was a 92 per cent. increase in the number of homeless disabled people between 1980 and 1988, and the number has undoubtedly risen since then. That is sombre further proof of the need for a humane response from the Government before this debate concludes.

4.55 pm

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson (Newbury): In eight days' time, the House will rise for the three-week Christmas recess. I have no doubt that we are all looking forward to that event, a time for rest, a time to be at home with our families, a very special time when we talk of good will towards all men and hope that the happiness to which we look forward will be shared by others.

However, I suspect that for 28 people at least—those who remain of the 50 or so people who received blood transfusions contaminated with the HIV virus from the national health service between 1982 and October 1985—Christmas will be overshadowed by the deadly nature of the virus and its awful consequences—its life-shortening consequences if it becomes AIDS. Now, of course, blood donations are screened to prevent such contamination happening again, but for those poor 28 people, unlike the 1,200 haemophiliacs who got the HIV virus from contaminated samples of the factor 8 blood product, no Macfarlane Trust exists for them, nor for those 22 who have already died from AIDS as a result of the virus, nor for their dependents.

It is right to ask why that should be the case. According to a letter that I received from the Under-Secretary of State for Health in the other place, Baroness Hooper, on 19 October 1991, the Government

"decided to make special provision for HIV infected haemophiliacs because we accepted that they were a very special case. The haemophiliacs were doubly disadvantaged by their hereditary condition, which was compounded by the onset of HIV. The position of those others infected with HIV through blood transfusions is more difficult, since the Government does not consider that their case is different in principle from that of others seriously harmed through medical accident."

So the Minister seems to acknowledge that those people have been seriously harmed through a medical accident derived from their treatment at the hands of the NHS, but the Minister goes on to say that it was nobody's fault—and anyway, that the haemophiliacs got compensation because they were haemophiliacs, not simply because they had been given contaminated factor 8.

It is almost the identical defence originally submitted by the Department of Health when it first refused to pay compensation to haemophiliacs. Effectively, it said, "If you can prove we were negligent, we will pay. If not, you get nothing." Legally, I recognise that that is strong ground, because proving negligence is an expensive and long drawn-out process, perhaps taking six to seven years, and how many of those 28 people who are still alive and who had contaminated blood transfusions will be alive that far ahead?

There is another dimension to those cases in terms of what any of us expects from treatment under the NHS. Surely we expect to be made well or better than we were when we went for treatment. Also, I know of no patient who tells his doctor what treatment he should or should not receive. I know of no patient who has ever told his doctor that he needs a blood transfusion. The decision about the treatment is one for the medical staff. The patient does as he or she is told.

I do not complain about that—the doctor has the experience—but, if we place our lives in the hands of medical men, we presume that the course of treatment they prescribe will make us better, not give us a viral infection from which we will die. That is implicit in the contract, unwritten though it may be, between patient and doctor.

It adds up to a moral obligation which the service takes on when it describes itself as the national health service. Of course, the chance of our being made well depends on what we are suffering from when we enter hospital, but few, if any, of us expect to die from the treatment that we are given. Yet that is what is happening to the haemophiliacs and to those who have had tainted blood transfusions.

Those people are now living in the twilight existence outlined to me by a haemophiliac constituent who had received contaminated factor 8. He asked me to go and see him at night so that his neighbour would not ask why the Member of Parliament was visiting him. He told me how fearful he was that his children's friends might find out about his condition and refuse to come to the house or to continue to be his children's friends.

He told me of his financial worries for his wife and his family if he could no longer work and if he subsequently died from AIDS; about the problem of keeping up mortgage payments that pressed on his mind; about the impossibility of obtaining any insurance and about that permanent worry as to whether his HIV positive condition would in the course of time turn to full-blown AIDS. Lastly, he explained that because of what had happened to him he had ceased to have any sexual relationship with his wife owing to the risk of infecting her. Effectively, that side of his marriage is over—as, probably, is his life.

Thank goodness, the Government softened their attitude and their heart towards the haemophiliacs and gave them a sum, through the Macfarlane Trust, which relieved the financial worries of people like my constituent; they gave a sum of £42 million. If they can give it to that group, why not to this much smaller group of transfusion-damaged people? All the problems that apply to the haemophiliacs apply equally to them, and to give all 50 the same compensation would cost only £1,750,000.

I find the Department's argument that haemophiliacs are a very special case a very difficult one to follow. All these people are human beings. They have been given this dreadful virus, not because they asked for it, but because of something that happened within the Department. The same faith in the NHS that persuaded the haemophiliac to accept factor 8 from the NHS persuaded the 50 to accept blood transfusions from the NHS. But for the grace of God, I might have been one of them. I was receiving blood transfusions at that time from the NHS because of kidney failure. That is why I stand in the House tonight conscious that it is the grace of God that has preserved me and aware that I at least have a voice through which to make this House think again about the plight of the now only 28 people whose lives have been so blighted.

I put this appeal to the Leader of the House: a measure of compensation should be provided for these unhappy people. I know that I am not the only Member who feels strongly about this matter. I know that hon. Members on both sides of the House have made a number of appeals and put many questions to Ministers. In my opinion the good name of the Government, the Department of Health and the National Health Service is somehow besmirched by the failure to recognise the dreadful blight that has come to these people at the hands of the NHS.

When a Minister admits in a letter to me that a medical accident has killed 22 people and looks likely to kill a good many more, leaving families without financial support and ruining marriages, natural justice—and I submit that there is such a thing—demands compassion demonstrated by financial assistance.

I have already referred to the Macfarlane Trust, which disburses Government funds to the haemophiliacs. I wrote to its chairman, the Rev. Prebendary Alan Tanner, asking if the trust had any discretion as to who it helped with funds. In his reply Mr. Tanner said:

"The Macfarlane Trust Deed was written very specifically for the haemophiliac community . . . I am sorry to say that I do not think that your enquiry reveals a viable option. We hope that you and like-minded colleagues of all parties will be able to provide a separate and additional solution for other afflicted groups."

So do I. After all, only as recently as last Tuesday the French Government decided to change its mind and bring forward a compensation package which included both haemophiliacs who had contracted HIV from contaminated blood products and those who had received blood transfusions also containing the virus. So why not us?

Baroness Hooper, in her letter, argues:

"The more that is spent on making payments to those who, through nobody's fault, have been harmed as a result of a medical accident, the less there is available for treating patients who have become ill."

That is quite right, but is her statement borne out by what we know of spending on AIDS, to take an example linked to the case that I am arguing? I fear not.

Only this week, on 10 December, *The Daily Telegraph* reported, under the heading "MPs attack NHS over AIDS money", as follows:

"Government health officials were strongly criticised by MPs yesterday for their handling of health authorities who 'pinched' money earmarked to treat Aids for other purposes. Mr. Duncan Nichol, chief executive of the health service, was closely questioned by the Commons public accounts committee about the lack of disciplinary action against those responsible for significant lapses in Aids spending uncovered by the National Audit Office.

In a report in the summer, the Office found more than £15 million granted by the Government to combat Aids remained unspent or had been diverted to other work."

I suggest to my right hon. Friend that the Government need not stumble over the £1,750,000 which would give the same compensation to the 50 who received contaminated blood transfusions as was given to the haemophiliacs. The money is really there in terms of this £15 million, which I gather is now being sought from the local authorities that have misspent it and some of which, apparently, is unspent.

If I am right, providing that compensation would effectively cost the NHS nothing, but it would end one of the unhappiest and most tragic incidents to afflict the health service in my lifetime. While I know that my right hon. Friend, in winding up this debate, may not feel that he can comment in detail on what I have said, I ask him to convey my comments to the Secretary of State for Health and that, as a distinguished former Treasury Minister, he will consider what I have said about payment of compensation and, perhaps, before we resume in the new year, will have been able to make a statement that will give comfort to the 28 people who are still alive and to the dependants of the 22 who have already died from AIDS.

5.8 pm

Mr. David Alton (Liverpool, Mossley Hill): Eloquently and at times movingly, hon. Members have used the Adjournment debate to raise distressing situations and to take the opportunity to remind us, as we approach the Christmas festivities, that many find themselves in very distressing circumstances. I take the opportunity to press the Government on the position in Croatia, where there

[Mr. David Alton]

continues to be a massive loss of life. In particular, I want to ask the Leader of the House to comment on the dual issues of recognition of Croatia and the need for an international peacekeeping and peacemaking force in that troubled part of the world.

If anyone is in doubt about the importance and the urgency of the matter, he need look only at today's tapes. Just two hours ago, I took the following extract from the tapes:

"Undeterred by freezing temperatures, the Yugoslav army and Croatian forces fought new battles today in Yugoslavia's breakaway republic of Croatia, further denting dwindling hopes of peace. The fighting raged throughout Croatia yesterday and up to 26 people were reported killed. This reduced the likelihood of a ceasefire taking hold that would allow the United Nations to send peacekeeping troops to Yugoslavia. Croatian radio said the town of Valpovo in eastern Croatia was under artillery fire all night and nearby villages were also fired on. The two of Zemenuk Donji, about six miles from the Adriatic coast, was also under attack".

According to the tapes, the European monitors, who have been reporting about the position in Croatia say that about 1,000 have been identified as having been killed during the fighting in Vukovar. The report continues:

"The once quiet town of 50,000 people on the river Danube was reduced to rubble by constant shelling and house-to-house fighting. About 14,000 civilians stayed through the siege, cowering in cellars."

Inevitably, much of the information is a patchwork of reports, but we know that about 11 per cent. of the population have been displaced by the fighting that has continued since the summer. Although estimates of casualties are notoriously unreliable, about 15,000 people have been registered as injured during the fighting, and 30,000—90 per cent. of them civilians—are missing. We are told that 223 churches and monasteries have been destroyed, that damage to hospitals and other medical facilities is estimated at about £100 million and that damage to civilian property is estimated at between £1 billion and £2 billion. Dubrovnik, now in its 72nd day without electricity or water, is in a parlous state.

I heard from one Croatian earlier today about what had happened to her friends. She said that they had recently killed a pig for food but could not eat it after discovering human hands in its stomach; it had been scavenging food from unburied bodies. That graphic illustration demonstrates the desperate seriousness of the position in Croatia and perhaps our failure in the West to concentrate our minds and our attention sufficiently on the tragedy.

There has been no debate in the House on the war in Croatia, but hon. Members have tabled early-day motions with which I have been associated. An all-party Friends of Croatia group has been established. The hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Sir H. Rossi) tabled early-day motion 138. My hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston) tabled early-day motion 219. About 70 signatures have been added to those motions. The hon. Members for Hyndburn (Mr. Hargreaves), Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones), Sheffield, Attercliffe (Sir P. Duffy) and Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) are among the sponsors of those motions. That demonstrates the breadth of concern in the House.

In looking at the origins of the conflict and at why hon. Members believe that there is a need for recognition of Croatia, it is worth reflecting that, in any civil war, families and communities become pitted against one another as old grievances, half-remembered slights, distortion and disinformation compete tenaciously for attention. As we have heard today from the hon. Member for North Down (Mr. Kilfedder), we need look no further than Northern Ireland to see the truth of what I am saying.

Now, in what was Yugoslavia, there is massive communal violence between Croat and Serb, Catholic and Orthodox. One in ten of Croatia's inhabitants are of Serbian extraction and they, as a vulnerable minority, fear that in an independent Croatia they will be reduced to servile status. That issue has to be addressed by Croatians. For decades, Serbian privileges have permeated every public institution, the police, the army and all the apparatus which enabled the communist regime to flourish.

Collective memory prevents many of the principal players from seeking solutions based on trust, reconciliation or consensus. Serbians prefer instead to remind us of the all too real atrocities committed by the Ustashe, backed by the Nazis, who reputedly supported a programme of racial purification: one third of Croatia's Serbian population was to be exterminated, one third repatriated to Serbia and the remainder forcibly converted to Catholicism. Many Serbian families living in London can graphically describe the barbarism which they experienced during that lamentable period. Notwithstanding that, many Croatians also supported Tito and the patriots.

The issue now is not what happened in the 1940s. To confuse those events with the present tragedy is as logical as saying that every member of today's German Government could be associated with the events of the 1930s and with Hitler's Germany. Surely, in looking to the future, we must look to today's Croatian leadership. We must examine what they stand for, whether they are entitled to our respect and whether their goals differ from those of the Ustashe.

Most of today's leaders are modern democrats who see their future as an independent state within the European Community of nations. With a population of 4·5 million, that would put them on a par with some of the Community's smaller states. The Croatian Democratic Union successfully fought the 1990 election on a programme of establishing a modern democratic state. It is pledged to reprivatising social ownership, the establishment of a market economy, the guarantee of all human and civil rights and the rule of law. In contrast, Serbia continues to be ruled by communist hardliners who seem totally uninterested in resolving the Yugoslav crisis democratically.

Some commentators have caricatured Croatia's leaders as the heirs of fascism. I think that caricature is unworthy of those commentators. We need to look more deeply at the issue. We must recognise that people in Croatia are entitled to the same aspirations as the rest of us. In the recent referendum, 94·6 per cent. voted for self-determination and the right of autonomy.

I should like to commend three principles to the Leader of the House for action. The first is self-determination and the protection of democracy. We should not be locked into borders created in the aftermath of world war two. We have already had to recognise the reality of events in the Soviet Union and the emergence again of the Baltic states as independent republics. There will be massive changes

throughout eastern and central Europe, so there is no point in clinging to old borders and old boundaries. Surely it is the principle of self-determination which must count.

I agree strongly with the Foreign Secretary's description of the Serbian-dominated federal army as a band of brigands. He should also recognise the legitimacy of the Croatians to break free from that band of brigands and to be able to have control over their own affairs.

The second principle is international recognition. The Prime Minister said that the Government would consider recognition "when there is peace". That is a formula for ensuring that there never will be peace. It builds in a reason why the Serbs should continue the conflict. Germany is about to recognise Croatia, probably before Christmas. European Community leaders will discuss the issue on Monday. I hope that we will not try to impede the process. We should not see it as a stalking horse for a common European foreign policy or defence policy.

If the Prime Minister is to be consistent with the statements made post-Maastricht that every issue will be considered on its merits, he and the Foreign Secretary should look at the position in Croatia on its merits and consider again the issue of recognition. If Croatia were recognised, it would enable it to go to the United Nations to argue its case. That is the main reason why that important decision needs to be taken.

The third principle is international peacemaking. In the House, we have maintained the need to have a United Nations peacekeeping and peacemaking force in parts of the world where people's rights are suppressed. When Kuwait was invaded by Iraq, in the House we sanctioned the use of force to re-establish the legitimacy of the Kuwaiti Government to govern their own affairs. I believe that we should argue for nothing less, despite the fact that no oil or financial interests are involved. Sadly, those are all too often the major motivating force.

The same logic should apply to Croatia. One half of Europe should not become obsessed with monetary union and internal policy while the other half cracks up. We must take action with our European neighbours and through the United Nations to try to end the conflict in Croatia. We should not wait until the conflict is resolved before discussing whether to send a peacekeeping force.

The Government should consider the possibility of erecting a sky shield over Croatian air space. It would not require the deployment of troops on the ground, but would stop some of the worst aerial bombardment and could be enforced effectively by NATO or the United Nations. We also need the establishment of more humanitarian sea lanes, which the Foreign Secretary has already supported. Such a sensible idea could give immediate relief.

We should also consider the issue of humanitarian aid. So far, just £77,000 has been given, yet one in eight Croatians are displaced persons or refugees. Given the chronic poverty, hunger and destitution, we should try to increase the amount of aid that we give.

The European Community observers' report starkly and bleakly reminds the House of our need to be concerned about what is happening in that important corner of Europe. In their report published today, they say that the army is

"ready to press the button for a ground offensive which could cut through Croatia and Slovenia".

That could happen within the next seven days—before Christmas. But the report says that the army will try to take back Slovenia and reclaim the old Yugoslavia. It says that nine regions of Bosnia with Serbian majorities are said to be preparing to declare autonomy but that the army is arming Bosnian Serbs and disarming Muslims and Croats.

The EC observers say:

"An aerial photograph would show Bosnia as a huge assembly area of army forces ready to break into Croatia."

EC observers have warned President Kucan of Slovenia that he is likely to be personally attacked. The European Community mission has been told that it should leave "if the expected surge in fighting takes place next week."

European Community observers do not favour recognition. They, too, have been saying that we should wait. But that is a form of appeasement. After 14 broken ceasefires, such a position will not deter the Serbian army, which the west has armed as a buffer state. The moral case for international intervention and recognition is overwhelming. When the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) went to Prague last year, she said—I totally agree with her—that never again would we in the United Kingdom ignore the plight of a small country because it was a faraway place and we knew little about it or its people. Is not that precisely what has been happening as Dubrovnik and Vukovar have been pounded into the ground, while people have been terrorised and churches and hospitals destroyed?

We must recognise that it is not a conflict between equals—the Queensberry rules have not been applied in Croatia. Serbia invaded Croatia, not the other way around. Serbia has access to stockpiles of arms and the full might of the federal army, whereas Croatia does not. In trying to shape western public opinion, Serbia is using all the crude black propagandist tricks that have been the hallmark of communist Governments throughout the years.

There is no logical reason why the British Government and the European Community should be indifferent to the plight of a small European nation, or why we should pretend to hold a neutral position in that battle of unequals. We should ensure that there is an effective international response to the conflict and, once a democracy is constructed in Croatia, minorities are adequately protected and all possible efforts are made to achieve reconciliation in that part of the world.

5.25 pm

Mr. John Ward (Poole): This evening we shall hear various speeches on matters of national and international importance. I draw the attention of the House to two subjects, the first of which is concerned with human welfare and the second with animal welfare.

In 1988, stringent regulations were introduced in this country to prevent the sale of furniture and furnishings that did not meet tough flammability standards. Those regulations affected particularly the use of foam in furniture but covered only domestic upholstered furniture. Many of us hoped that similar regulations would be introduced to cover furniture in buildings open to the public, in cars and in public transport, including aircraft.

At present, the only European Community countries with fire regulations for domestic furniture are the United Kingdom and Ireland. Furniture in public buildings throughout the EC is covered by guidelines, voluntary agreements and codes of practice. Many of us hoped that avoidable deaths by fire could be prevented through the introduction of EC-wide regulations and, two years ago,

[Mr. John Ward]

work began on such a directive covering both domestic and contract furniture. A second draft directive was circulated last year and there was talk of a separate draft directive covering furniture in means of transport.

Now, however, EC Commissioner Bangemann has announced that the new directive, which would introduce lower standards of fire resistance than those currently required in the United Kingdom, could be postponed for up to eight years. That decision has been taken because the original proposed directive would introduce controls on the ignition resistance of furniture, and later measures would be introduced to control the spread of fire in ignited furniture. Commissioner Bangemann now wants to wait until the tests on the latter requirement have been devised before introducing either control.

That is bureaucracy gone mad. Although the United Kingdom would still be protected from the deadly effects of old-style foam fillings, the rest of the EC would continue to be at risk. I presume that we must now monitor the problem carefully to ensure that furniture that does not meet our high standards is not imported into the United Kingdom. Above all, we do not want lower standards of fire protection in this country, simply in the interests of EC harmonisation.

I congratulate the Consumers Association, which has campaigned for many years to have dangerous foam banned in the United Kingdom. I commend to the House its current campaign to ensure that our safety regulations are introduced throughout the EC in the shortest possible time. The association tells me that it is supported by fire brigades throughout the United Kingdom and it intends to bombard Commissioner Bangemann with seasonal greetings that will also ask him to reconsider his decision to postpone the introduction of an EC directive on safety in furniture. If any hon. Members wish to join in that campaign, full details are contained in the current edition of *Which?* I am sure that the House will wish to support the Consumers Association in its campaign.

I hope that Commissioner Bangemann will accept that we should introduce the safety regulations that can be implemented now, and introduce those that require more sophisticated testing at a later date. It is madness not to introduce each safety measure as soon as possible. We should not have to wait to present a neat and tidy package of regulations.

It is particularly distressing that we should have to debate this sad but vital subject at Christmas and we must convince the European Commissioner that he has a duty to take immediate action to prevent needless deaths that could be avoided by strict controls over the use of foam, which rapidly produces toxic fumes when subjected to fire.

The second subject to which I wish to refer is animal welfare. Records show that standards of animal welfare in this country are generally higher than those of our European partners, but many of us are still concerned that regulations to be introduced in this country in 1998, such as a ban on tethering sows, will not apply to the rest of the European Community until 2006. The EC directive does not deal with the close confinement of sows, which has already been dealt with in this country.

At present, the only way of showing our disapproval of veal crates is not to buy veal in this country, provided we are able to identify it. Animal welfare in an appropriate issue for the European Commission to act on and improve standards throughout the Community.

At a time when European food stores are bulging it seems senseless to go on producing surpluses of meat in such cruel conditions. We have all seen the distressing scenes on television when live animals are transported across the continent of Europe for ultimate slaughter. I am sure that most of us would prefer all the animals to be slaughtered here before being exported. I accept that that may not always be possible.

I want the European Commission inspectorate which is to be appointed—largely as a result of the effort of our own Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and his colleagues, on which I congratulate them—to have effective powers and penalties at its disposal. I welcome the fact that there are proposals for a directive covering the welfare of animals at slaughter. I am told that it will roughly conform to the laws already in force in the United Kingdom. I am worried that some of our European partners will not wish to enforce directives on animal welfare; so the European Commission inspectorate must have the power to enforce the regulations.

I particularly wish to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on achieving what some may consider a minor protocol at Maastricht on animal welfare. It ensures the consideration of cruelty issues in all future moves by the Commission and European Community Ministers, which should help to prevent some of the factory farming scandals of which we know and some of the well-publicised Spanish practices involving cruelty to animals. I trust that progress can be made in obtaining protection for animals and—this is important—fire protection for humans.

5.33 pm

Mr. Allen McKay (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I hope to raise a number of issues that affect my constituency and constituents.

Since the Government introduced poll tax capping, I and other hon. Friends and representatives from local authorities have tried, without success, to persuade the Secretary of State for the Environment of the unfairness of the standard spending assessments and how the system works to the disadvantage of my local authority of Barnsley and its residents.

The Association of Metropolitan Authorities has clearly recognised the problem, and responded by saying that the system is unfair and it would not object to movement in the total SSA of all local authorities to try to overcome that unfairness.

Next year's increase in standard spending assessment will give Barnsley authority an increase of just 4·6 per cent. —only 89 per cent. of the average increase for all the Metropolitan districts, 68 per cent. of the national average increase, 65 per cent. of the average of the shire counties increase and 55 per cent. of the increase given to the city of Westminster. The rate support grant settlement announced recently, the unfairness of the SSA and this year's reduction in the area support grant mean that the poll tax payers of Barnsley will have to pay significantly higher poll tax while the local authority is faced with a £5 million cut in its already depleted services.

While I accept that someone has to be at the bottom of the league, the way that the figures are calculated means

not only that we are at the bottom, but that the system is unfair. Why is it that for every £1 per adult that Barnsley receives, Manchester receives £1·78, Westminster receives £2, Liverpool receives £1·54 and Birmingham receives £1·53? How can the House accept that an average 1,000 pupil school, costs Manchester £654 per pupil more than it costs Barnsley? Surely there cannot be such a difference in the educational system of the two authorities. Why is my authority deprived of the money that other people are able to receive?

While I think that the Secretary of State understands the problem, he cannot find a formula to alter Barnsley's position without altering that of every other local authority. His answer that someone has to be at the bottom does not alleviate Barnsley's problem. The gap between those at the top and bottom of the league is huge, and needs to be decreased through a restructuring of the grant system for all local authorities. I accept that that will mean that other local authorities will have to lose some of their grants, but the extent of the present unfairness is unbelievable.

There are many effects of that injustice: roadworks are not carried out; the parks and recreation department has been cut to a minimum; repairs to schools have not been carried out for the past three to four years; the whole of the adult education system is now being wiped out; and social services provisions such as home helps has been curtailed. About 50 per cent. of social workers are currently on strike purely because the necessary regrading structure cannot be implemented because the money is not available.

The fire service, which runs on the same standard spending assessment formula, is also affected. The fire service SSA was due to be increased by 9·2 per cent.—the highest increase for some time—but the capping level is below that. Therefore, the service cannot receive the 9·2 per cent. increase that it was supposed to have. Once the figure reaches 4·8 per cent., its levels are capped.

The issue is significant in relation to the speech of the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Ward) on foam furniture. The fire service, which is already 28 firemen short, will lose another 52 men because they cannot be paid. Training has been cut: for the past two years no senior officers have been sent to Moreton in the Marsh for specialised training because the money is not available. The trickle-down effect of that is that services and training are not available. There is a delay in the replacement of equipment, and repairs to equipment have been cut. That means that appliances are kept on the road for far longer than they should be without being serviced. Minimum basic training is disappearing.

I know of a specific problem involving Mr. and Mrs. Hodgson of Rockley Abbey farm, Worsbrough, who farm various districts around my constituency, one of which is at Worsbrough, down White Cross lane. The only way out from that district involves crossing a railway bridge. The central farm is at Rockley Abbey; farm machinery and the stores of produce are kept in outlying regions. That means that 500 tonnes of corn, 300 tonnes of rape, 100 tonnes of barley and a quantity of beans have to be transported down that lane. British Rail has asked the local authority to reduce the restrictive load across the bridge from 30 to 3 tonnes, so the produce and farm machinery cannot now be moved across the bridge.

Since April, nobody said a word to the farmer about that happening. Had he been told, a store would have been made on the other side of the bridge, but his produce is now waiting in a barn or a store. Farm equipment is on the wrong side of the bridge and it cannot be got across; nor can the containers go across to bring out the produce.

Nothing has altered on the bridge since it was built. The structure and the surface are the same. Only the regulations about how to calculate the safety of a bridge have altered. It is merely a bit of paper which says that such a bridge can now carry only 3 tonnes. Since April, there have been arguments with the local authority about whose responsibility it is. The local authority, as the highway authority, has accepted that it is responsible. At a cost of £6,000—that sum has to be put to a committee because of poll tax capping—the authority could enable the bridge to carry 17 tonnes and thus allow the farm equipment to cross, but that would still not bring out the farm produce.

It is inconceivable that in 1945 we could in a few hours build across the Rhine bridges that could bear armies, but that now we cannot build a bridge to carry corn in a 20-tonne load. British Rail insists that the work must go out to tender and that there must be a design stage before then. It is estimated that the work to increase the capacity to 17 tonnes will take three months.

However, there is another problem. European Community regulations impose a certain way of bringing the corn across. They ask whether the load can be decanted and brought across in 10-tonne loads and pushed into 28-tonnes vans. That problem is currently being considered, but, even if the regulations are waived, there is still the problem that in three months the farmer will be near bankruptcy because the contracts that he had already signed to sell his produce cannot be kept. It is inconceivable that such an attitude should prevail.

It is necessary only for British Rail to lift the restriction for a few hours and for its inspectors to be present to allow the load to cross. The local authority, having accepted a 17-tonne limit, could do the work in three months and the farmer could get his machinery across and store it on the other side.

In the long term—this relates to standard spending assessments—it will cost the local authority £1 million to build a new bridge. It is a political issue because, in view of capping, the authority must decide whether, faced with crumbling schools and cuts in services, it can spend £1 million to build a bridge to satisfy the needs of a farmer who has a legal right to get his stock across.

That is a Catch-22 situation and the Government must consider two aspects. First, they should persuade British Rail to lift the restrictions so that the farmer does not go bankrupt and, secondly, they must ensure that there is sufficient flexibility to allow a local authority to spend the money to remedy the problem with the bridge. If they do not, it will be clear how ridiculous and inflexible central and local government are in not allowing the authority to carry out its duties merely because of insufficient finances.

Before the House rises, I should like to think that the produce will get across and that there will be some sensibility in the SSA to help my hard-pressed authority. I should also like to think that the Secretary of State who refused to meet representatives of the authority will at least have the magnanimity to recognise the problem and to use his good offices to remedy it. I should like to see some sensibility in the Government's attitude towards allowing local authorities to get on with their duties.

5.43 pm

Mr. Michael Latham (Rutland and Melton): I shall follow the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. McKay) by talking about another public service, in this case one which is very near the heart of my right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council, because he was once Secretary of State for Education and Science. I want to talk especially about adult education, and to ask for a clear statement of Government policy before the House rises for the Christmas recess. I appreciate that the House has exceptionally important business next week, but there are a number of matters about which there is considerable public concern and which need immediate clarification.

During Question Time this week, I asked the Minister of State, Department of Education and Science about the representations that he had received on the future financing of adult education. he said:

"I am aware of the concern felt by community colleges in Leicestershire, Devon and Cambridgeshire."

He continued:

"we can categorically reassure those colleges that they have nothing to fear."—[*Official Report*, 10 December 1991; Vol 200, c. 724.]

The community college provision in Leicestershire and in many other counties is extremely important. Such colleges are, so to speak, schools during the day, and cater for varying ages, although in my constituency Rutland is different from what I would call "old Leicestershire". However, in the late afternoon and evening, they become an important part of adult and further education. I believe that the same is true in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Powell). My wife, my family and I take advantage of these provisions at Uppingham community college in my constituency.

Such institutions are important and are well respected by members of the public, so there is concern that they might be badly affected by the new Bill. Having had assurances from my hon. Friend, I should be grateful if my right hon. Friend could repeat them and say that community colleges—I am not talking about colleges of further education—play an important part in Government thinking, and that the Government do not believe that they will be disadvantaged by the new arrangements.

That would reassure the community colleges that have expressed their concern to me, and it would also reassure the Workers Educational Association, which is a respected organisation. The secretary of its east midlands district wrote to me—and, I am sure, to many other hon. Members representing east midlands constituencies:

"There is no recognition of Role Education in the White Paper"—

which is now a Bill. He continued:

"This includes retirement education, school governor training, education for those actively involved in voluntary organisations, many courses enabling women to play a fuller part at work and in society and courses building the confidence of the unemployed."

He asked:

"Can you bring pressure to bear to identify and acknowledge the importance of this very large sector of adult education?"

One specific aspect, I know, is of great concern to my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Sir J. Farr), whom I am delighted to see here. Only the day before yesterday, he and I were discussing adult basic education, which means, in practice, helping people who have learning difficulties. Such people have often left school and might be in their late teens or twenties, or may be considerably older. Some may have handicaps and difficulties with reading skills.

The usual method of assisting such people in Leicestershire and Rutland—and probably in other counties—is either to work in small groups with a maximum of 10 students with individual support and some voluntary assistance, or, in many cases, on a one-to-one basis in the student's home or in a neutral place such as a church hall. These people do not find it easy to go to formal classes in colleges of further education or schools.

I have received a letter from some people who act as tutors or perform similar roles in Syston in my constituency:

"Every student within the scheme is visited in their home by a specially trained tutor. The tutor finds out what the student's needs are and informs them of what adult basic education actually is. They tell them that the groups are small and informal, you leave whenever you feel ready and join when you want to. Students are treated as adults and therefore all our materials are adult based."

The lady goes on to ask:

"Informal groups such as ours help to build confidence and enable students to apply for better jobs or to attend further courses . . . Will an FE teacher be able to handle this situation correctly so as not to cause further harm, whilst getting information at the same time?"

She goes on to ask whether students who are physically or mentally handicapped or who have Down's syndrome will be catered for in the new arrangements. She wants to know what will happen to groups during the day, held for unemployed people, mothers at home and people who cannot attend during the evening. These are genuine questions, and they must be answered.

I have had a number of moving letters from students who are receiving help by means of adult basic education in community colleges, and receiving one-to-one teaching. I want clear assurances from my right hon. Friend that the matter will be properly dealt with.

My hon. Friend the Minister of State wrote to me on 28 October on this very matter:

"We want to see a pattern of provision which makes the best use of facilities and expertise and which is readily accessible to local communities. This will mean using all resources properly—whether these are in further education colleges or in adult education centres and colleges run by local education authorities. We shall expect colleges and local authorities to work closely together, building on existing collaborative links, to secure a pattern of provision for adults which best suits local circumstances and is accessible to local communities. We are looking at this might be achieved."

I presume that my hon. Friend meant, "looking at what might be achieved in this regard."

I want clear assurances from my right hon. Friend that matters have moved on since that letter and that Ministers can reassure me, my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough and people from other county authorities in which adult basic education is handled on a one-to-one basis. We need to know that the new arrangements will not disadvantage these people, who are struggling and who often experienced difficulties in their school careers. They are trying to bring their reading and numeracy skills up to scratch so that they can go on to other courses, to better jobs or to any job at all.

We must help these disadvantaged people. I am worried by the number of letters that I have had from them. They, in turn, are worried about the new proposals; and I look to my right hon. Friend to offer me clear assurances that their needs will be tackled.

Sir John Farr (Harborough): I am much obliged to my hon. Friend for giving way to me on this important subject. I echo all that he has said. Leicestershire is in a peculiar situation, because we have spent more than the national average on one-to-one education and adult basic education, and we want to be absolutely certain that anything the Minister puts in place under the new legislation will provide us with no less than we already enjoy in the form of high standards.

Mr. Latham: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for putting it so well. He reflects my views exactly. I commend his views, my own and those of my constituents to my right hon. Friend.

5.53 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I should like to bring to the attention of the House serious matters that arose in Northern Ireland on Friday 22 November.

That morning, the people of Northern Ireland read in their papers and heard on the broadcast media reports that, in its first ever decision, the Fair Employment Tribunal, established by an Act of this House in 1989, had found the Eastern health and social services board guilty of religious discrimination when making an appointment. That was regrettable, but my complaint is not with the finding of the tribunal. The news went on to say that the tribunal had found that it was discrimination, and thus unlawful, to display in a workplace the union flag and pictures of the royal family. It was also said that one of the board's supervisors had displayed a photograph of herself and a leader of a principal party in Ulster. We were told that that was also unlawful.

These reports were based on a Fair Employment Commission press release issued the previous night. The first page of that release, after announcing in its first two sentences that the tribunal had held the board guilty of discrimination in failing to appoint a Catholic laundry worker to a permanent position, continued:

"The tribunal recorded that the officers of the EHSSB who appeared and gave evidence appeared to know of the existence of the board's equal opportunities policy but that none of them were acquainted with the contents of that policy and none of them appeared to be in the least disturbed by that fact."

The press release further recorded that the undisputed evidence of the applicant was that party tunes were played in the laundry, the union flag was displayed in the laundry, pictures of the royal family were displayed, and one supervisor displayed a photograph of herself and the leader of a political party in Ulster; but that the Eastern health and social services board stated that the board did not have a policy on such matters as flags and had no reason to think that offence would be taken to the union flag. The tribunal described the respondents' evidence as "contradictory and fundamentally so".

This press release clearly gave prominence not to the reasons why the board failed to appoint the applicant but to what, on any reading of the case, was a peripheral issue. This emphasis was reinforced by the behaviour of one of the commission's directors who, the night the press release was issued, telephoned the main media outlets to let them know that the commission was releasing an important statement on flags and emblems. That of course biased the discussion the next day. The director followed that up in interviews. I did not hear those interviews, but the director's conduct of them has been described to me as aggressive and as leaving the listener in no doubt that these emblems must be removed from the workplace.

The press release and the comments on it gave considerable offence to a wide range of people in Ulster who were appalled by the disrespect shown by a public body to the royal family.

The story so far is bad enough. It gets worse when one realises that the reaction of the press and its presentation of the story was based on a complete misinterpretation of the tribunal's decision. The case concerned the failure of the board to make an appointment to a job and it turned on the reasons why other candidates had been preferred, and on the interviewing panel's assessment of those other candidates.

The tribunal's reasons concentrated on the conduct of the interview. Paragraph 7(g) of the tribunal's judgment reads:

"Whilst it is not in any sense conclusive regard can nevertheless be paid to"—

three matters are mentioned here, and the fourth is:

"whatever may be said about the effects of the union flag or indeed pictures of the royal family in the work place in Northern Ireland, the fact that the local management permitted the playing of party tunes in the laundry at Purdysburn".

It is clear that in this part of the judgment the tribunal is taking into account only the playing of party tunes, which is fair enough. I should perhaps point out that "party tunes" does not refer to the sort of festive music in which people might be engaged at this time of the year. Party tunes might involve on one side Orange songs and on the other, Republican songs—or any other form of what we call diddle-de-de-music.

It is fair enough to criticise the playing of party tunes, but it is also clear that the tribunal does not take into account at any point in its decision the display of the union flag and pictures of the royal family. The most that can be said from the Fair Employment Commission's viewpoint is that the tribunal left those matters to one side and criticised the absence of a board policy on them. But the FEC distorted matters so as to give a false impression. In the reasons given by the tribunal no reference was made to the photograph, which appeared prominently in the press release of the FEC.

I consider the most damning aspect in the FEC's press release was the description by the tribunal of the board's evidence as "contradictory and fundamentally so", which, in the FEC's press release, comes after the words:

"but that the [board] informed [the tribunal] that the board did not have a policy on such matters as flags and had no reason to think offence would be taken to the Union flag."

That gives the reader the impression that "contradictory and fundamentally so" is related to this aspect. But it comes nowhere near the brief mention of flags in the tribunal's judgment; it comes at the tribunal's assessment of the evidence of the interviewing panel and its reasons for preferring someone else to the applicant. It is a comment on the evidence of the chairman of the interviewing panel when comparing the applicant with one of those successful in obtaining employment.

I have said enough to show that the commission issued a press release which created a false impression. Sadly, I have to say that I am convinced that that false impression was created deliberately. This was not a case in which someone, in his enthusiasm, misinterpreted a complex legal document. The judgment was fairly short and clear.

[Mr. David Trimble]

Moveover, the commission director who issued the press release is a lawyer who is perfectly capable of reading a short tribunal judgment correctly. She cannot have forgotten how to read a case so soon. You see, Mr. Speaker, I am sorry to say that that commissioner is known to me not just as a lawyer but as a person of strong nationalist opinions who would probably be hostile to the display of our national flag or our sovereign's portrait at any point in Northern Ireland.

There are important issues of principle. It is appalling that a public body should issue such falsehoods. That will only reinforce the widespread impression in Northern Ireland that the commission is biased, following its own political agenda. I am sorry to say that that impression is strengthened by the commission's silence since I first exposed the errors more than two weeks ago.

The fair employment code of practice speaks of promoting a harmonious working environment where no worker feels threatened or intimidated. That is a fair objective. One can easily think of slogans and emblems which would intimidate. One could even think of circumstances in which the union flag might be used in an intimidating way—for example, by pushing it aggressively at people—but I cannot see how it can be said that our national flag or pictures of the royal family can by themselves ever be threatening or intimidating.

If they were—if the commission's apparent view on the matter were followed—it would lead to absurdities. Portraits of Her Majesty are displayed as a matter of course in schools and police stations. The union flag is regularly used in advertising and packaging. It is even used by some firms which bear the name "British". Are those uses to be outlawed?

It is significant that in this matter the commission has pursued and attacked only those emblems which express a British identity. It does not pursue the emblems of Irish nationalism with the same vigour, and it is silent on Roman Catholic religious symbols prominent in some schools and a national health service hospital—symbols which many would find offensive, not just on aesthetic grounds.

The Northern Ireland Office must curb that campaign. I wrote to the Secretary of State on that matter on 25 November, nearly three weeks ago. Not only has there been no reply but to my knowledge no statement has been made by the Northern Ireland Office on the matter. It is time for that silence, which might appear to give consent, to be ended. I hope that the Leader of the House will arrange for a statement to be made on the matter before the House rises.

6.3 pm

Mr. Douglas French (Gloucester): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Sir M. McNair-Wilson) on the moving way in which he presented his case on behalf of those who have received contaminated blood. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Sir J. Stokes) on a vintage performance in which he reminded the House of the great traditions and components of British public life. He is a touchstone of sound values and common sense, which we neglect at our peril.

I was interested in the case made by the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon). He spoke about rail safety, and I want to refer to road safety, which merits attention before the House rises. Road safety usually finds a place in the Christmas Adjournment debate, because it is a sad fact that, during the holiday, there will be many road accidents. I hope that the number of those will be down on last year, but I am afraid that many will be killed or injured and vehicles will be damaged.

In all such cases, the drivers will need to produce details of their insurance. Many will be able to provide such details for the police or for the other drivers involved on the spot, but unfortunately many will not. Some will not have their insurance certificate or cover note with them, some will think that they have it but on looking will find that they do not know where it is, and some may have to produce their documents at a police station within five days, a procedure which is reported to cost the police about £20 million a year. Some involved in an accident will adopt an indignant attitude because they believe that they are innocent, and may refuse to produce their documents altogether for fear that that might affect their no claims bonus.

In some cases, it will be discovered that the insurance cover has expired, that the driver has no insurance cover at all, and that has serious consequences. Sometimes that situation might exist knowingly or even deliberately, and in other cases it will be the result of an oversight.

On the face of it, that problem could be eased by requiring evidence of insurance to be displayed in the windscreen of every vehicle in the same way as the tax disc provides immediate and visible evidence that a vehicle has been taxed and may be used on the road. In the same way, an insurance disc could be required to be displayed in the windscreen, and would provide visible evidence of insurance cover.

That would not be a total solution to the problem. The uninsured motorist who has failed for one reason or another to obtain the necessary insurance cover may not be persuaded by that procedure any more than the person who is determined to avoid the payment of the tax necessarily finds that the requirement to have a tax disc persuades him to abide by the law. But it can be fairly said that, if the tax disc were not required to be displayed, the level of evasion would be likely to be higher. It follows from that that, if an insurance disc were required to be displayed, the number of uninsured motorists would be likely to decrease.

It has been estimated that the number of drivers driving while uninsured is in the region of 1 million. Some may have stolen the vehicle that they are driving, a situation which the House had an opportunity to consider on Monday, 9 December, when it debated the Aggravated Vehicle-Taking Bill, but tonight I am not so much concerned with those who steal vehicles—they can be dealt with by separate legislation—as with those who decide to take a chance on not being insured. They may think that it is a fair bet that they are unlikely to run into difficulties if they do not have insurance cover, and will at the same time save a considerable amount of money. There are also those who simply neglect to get cover because they are disorganised or cannot be bothered, and who do not appreciate its importance.

The proposal for an insurance disc has some objections. Under section 143 of the Road Traffic Act 1988, the user of a vehicle is required to be insured rather than the vehicle

itself. Some insurance policies cover an insured person and his spouse or a named driver only; it is not the vehicle that is insured but the individual. Therefore, an insurance disc would not necessarily prove that the person driving the vehicle was insured to drive it.

A similar difficulty might be said to arise in regard to the use to which a vehicle is being put. Some policies restrict use to social, domestic and pleasure purposes only, and that problem would not automatically be solved by displaying an insurance disc on the windscreen. Such a disc would not provide total proof, because the terms of the policy might be being broken. However, it would provide usable and tangible evidence that cover of some kind existed in relation either to the driver or vehicle; evidence of the existence of an insurance policy, rather than proof of its adequacy.

It would be possible to incorporate in the design of the disc information about the insurance cover in force. It could specify the name of the driver, which should be no more difficult than specifying the make of a car on a tax disc. Likewise, specifying the restricted use attributable to a particular driver should be no more difficult than specifying on a tax disc the class of vehicle that it covers.

As to insurance being based on individuals rather than on vehicles, most people are accustomed to driving one or perhaps two vehicles most of the time—but an individual could display his or her own personal insurance disc in the windscreen at the beginning of a journey in any other car that they might drive.

Those arrangements have found favour in several other countries. It is the prevailing system in France, Italy, Belgium, and the Irish Republic. It was introduced in Ireland and France as long ago as 1986, and has proved very successful. In Ireland, it was estimated that, prior to the system being introduced, as many as 20 per cent. of drivers on the roads in the Republic were uninsured. Within one year, the number fell to between 6 and 8 per cent. It was estimated also that each uninsured car was costing as much as £70 extra on the insurance of those drivers who did take out insurance.

In the Republic of Ireland and in France, it has become the practice for insurers to provide discs as part of the certificate issued when a policy is granted, in the form of a tear-off section to be displayed in the vehicle's windscreen. If any details change during the term of the insurance, the old disc is called in and a new one is issued. That simple procedure has presented neither country with any difficulties.

The time may eventually come when the Chancellor of the Exchequer decides to abolish vehicle excise duty and the tax disc in favour of a duty on petrol. Successive Chancellors have considered doing so for a very long time, and Jersey is to adopt that system with effect from 1 January 1993. If that practice were adopted in the UK, it would bring to an end the annual regular check on insurance, under which drivers are required to produce insurance documents before a new tax disc is issued. That would increase the argument in favour of being required to display a separate insurance disc.

It remains an anomaly that, in order to obtain a vehicle excise disc that relates to a vehicle, one has to produce documents that relate to an individual. It is anomalous also that the driver's insurance may expire within a week of the issue of a tax disc that could remain valid for as long as one year afterwards.

The scheme that I have described would discourage evasion and effect considerable savings in administrative and police costs, and in insurance premiums, and would provide greater certainty and knowledge for motorists. In due course, such a system could form part of a greater scheme in which driving licences, MOT certificates, excise duty, and insurance all found their way on to the same database, which would bring great benefits to the organisation of motoring in general. However, a good start could be made by the introduction of insurance discs.

6.14 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I should not want the House to adjourn for the Christmas recess until I have raised the issue of the desirability of the Government reviewing the distribution of food surpluses from Europe.

Today, I received a telephone call from a reporter on the *Halifax Evening Courier* informing me that, at 10 o'clock this morning, a constituent of mine—79-year-old Mrs. Maria Clark—died as she stood in the freezing cold, queuing for free surplus butter and beef that is distributed to those eligible for it. I understand that, earlier this week, two other elderly people collapsed as they queued for hours in the cold for that food.

In March, a member of the women's section of the Halifax branch of the Royal British Legion contacted me for advice on how she could help to distribute food surpluses. I contacted the local authority's director of social services, Mrs. Meryl Denton, who arranged for that lady to approach the local Council for Voluntary Services. It decided to apply for a licence to distribute food surpluses—as did another voluntary organisation, the Islamic Cultural Centre.

I tried to highlight through the local press the fact that Government policy meant that not all elderly people were eligible to free surplus food, but only those who are on income support, and that strict criteria had to be observed. The local press did a very good job in conveying that information to the public. However, many pensioners who believed that they could be recipients were left disappointed when they realised that they were not eligible.

Such has been the increase in poverty during the last 12 years under a Conservative Government that 17,000 people in Halifax and the Calder valley are eligible for free butter and beef. The local authority cannot act as a distributor, and in any case does not have the money or the resources to do so, given the cuts that it has suffered in recent years as a consequence of poll tax capping and the rest.

Instead, applications to serve as distributors were made by the CVS and the Islamic Cultural Centre. I supported the former's application, but was unaware of the second. Nevertheless, I am pleased that the ICC applied, because the application by Mrs. Jackie Stark of the CVS was turned down by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. In August, she received notification that it had been made one day late. She was very cross, and disputed the fact that her application was late.

Given that it took the Ministry five months to respond, I cannot help but suspect petty bureaucracy and deliberate obstruction. The Ministry could be much more helpful to the voluntary sector, which is hard pressed trying to cope with the state's abandonment of caring for the less well-off.

[Mrs. Alice Mahon]

That left the Islamic Cultural Centre. I place on record my gratitude and thanks to that organisation, which works hard to distribute food to queues of literally thousands of people who turn up every time that it is available. It is a small organisation, and its centre cannot accommodate indoors all those who queue for the food. The Asian community are known for their respect for the elderly and concern for those who are not very well off. The ICC had a herculean task given the resources available to it, and it worked very hard.

I can think of no other recent incident that serves to highlight the way in which the Government have divided society and impoverished our nation over the past 12 years. The queues for food are reminiscent of what we saw in the 1930s. I find it tragic that a 79-year-old woman should die in freezing cold conditions while queueing for food.

The Government should be ashamed of their inability to organise a better distribution method. Every community should provide a place to which people can take a voucher and collect the food to which they are entitled, without experiencing the humiliation of queueing in the cold. All pensioners should be automatically eligible to such provision, as should everyone who receives benefit. The present criterion is much too mean.

I understand that the United States has called today for a conference on food aid for people of the Soviet Union to be held in Washington. In the light of what has happened in my constituency, I feel that the United Kingdom should be included in that conference.

6.20 pm

Mr. William Powell (Corby): I understand that the Select Committee on Sittings of the House—which is chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Jopling)—is considering a proposal that Adjournment debates such as this should cease to be part of our procedure. I hope that, if any such proposal is made, the House will reject it.

Yet again, our debates this afternoon have been extremely interesting and informative. My hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Sir J. Stokes) made a characteristically splendid speech, and the moral strength with which my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Sir M. McNair-Wilson) treats the subject that he raised is without parallel. The quiet authority with which he advanced his case made his speech one of the most impressive that I have ever heard in the House, and I hope very much that it will be taken seriously by my right hon. Friend and his colleagues.

I strongly agreed with what the hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton) said about Croatia. I am a member of the all-party group chaired by the hon. Gentleman, and I have twice called in the House for the recognition of Croatia. What is going on there now besmirches the reputation of our continent, and we must take a more robust attitude towards bringing the current dangerous nonsense to a halt.

We have heard other remarkable speeches this afternoon. It would be a great pity, and would diminish our procedures, if Adjournment debates ceased to take place.

A year ago, my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) asked for the prosecution of President Saddam Hussein for war crimes. She was quite right, and I strongly supported her view that he should be brought before a suitable international tribunal and required to account for his behaviour in the Gulf region.

The United Kingdom, Germany and the United States are all extremely concerned about the prosecution of those who are alleged to have been involved in the bombing of the aeroplane that exploded over Lockerbie a year or two ago. Warrants are out for their arrest, and no one has a greater admiration than I for the work of the Lord Advocate and the constabulary of Dumfries and Galloway: they have carried out a magnificent investigation. The fact remains, however, that it will be virtually impossible for us to bring those whom we wish to hold to account before any criminal tribunal in this country. Moreover, we must be honest and admit that the reputation of the quality of justice administered in British courts is not as good as we should like, following the alarming miscarriages of justice that have taken place in recent years.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley was absolutely right to call for the prosecution of Saddam Hussein; there is, however, no international tribunal before which he, or any other international criminal, can be brought to justice. I hope that the country will begin to take seriously the work that is being done in the United States and many other countries to establish such a tribunal, under the authority of the United Nations.

The first international court of criminal justice—I am not talking about appeal courts or bodies such as the European Court; I am talking about first-instance criminal courts which try people to establish their guilt or innocence—was established in 1474, in Breisach, Germany. No fewer than 27 judges of the Holy Roman Empire—I imagine that my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge approves of the Holy Roman Empire just as much as you and I, Mr. Deputy Speaker—judged and condemned Peter von Hagenbach for his violations of the laws of God and man. He had allowed his troops to rape, kill and pillage innocent German citizens and their property.

Modern international criminal law began with the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Those present—we heard about Prince Metternich only last week—discussed an international law relating to the suppression of the slave trade. Since then, there have been no fewer than 315 declarations, international instruments and protocols on substantive international criminal law, covering 22 crimes that could be recognised as having a genuinely international dimension: aggression, war crimes, unlawful use of weapons, crimes against humanity, genocide, apartheid, slavery and related practices, unlawful human experimentation, torture, piracy and crimes on board commercial vessels, aircraft hijacking and the sabotage of aircraft, kidnapping of diplomats and other internationally protected persons, the taking of civilian hostages, the mailing of explosive and dangerous objects, illicit drug cultivation and trafficking, destruction and theft of national and archaeological treasures, environmental damage, bribery of foreign public officials, international traffic in obscene materials, interference with submarine cables and the false accounting and theft of nuclear weapons and materials. Many of those are grounds on which an indictment or impeachment could be applied to

Saddam Hussein—and ought to be—but the world has no tribunal before which he, or anyone else who could legitimately be charged with such crimes, can be tried.

From time to time, efforts have been made to establish such an arrangement. At the end of the first world war, at Versailles, it was agreed that the Kaiser could be tried; he was not tried. It was agreed that the Turkish leaders could be tried for the mass genocide of 600,000 Armenians during their occupation of the area in which Armenians lived during the first world war, but no progress was made. After the second world war, international tribunals were established at Nuremberg and in Tokyo, but their authority was subsequently undermined. Meanwhile, the United Nations has been trying to establish an international court of criminal jurisdiction.

This is not the first time that I have raised the matter in the House. I did so in the debate on the Queen's Speech. I did not, of course, expect my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to have sufficient grasp of the subject to reply, but I did expect him to pass on my views to the Foreign Office. I expect that he did so, but I have heard nothing from the Foreign Office about the action that it is taking. I regard that as disgraceful: I do not believe that the Foreign Office is doing anything about the matter, and it ought to be doing something.

An immense amount of work is being done in the world, under the leadership of one of the most remarkable legal scholars alive today—Professor M. Cherif Bassiouni, professor of law at De Paul University in Chicago, Illinois. His international institute has the support of the Italian Ministry of Justice in Syracuse, Sicily. Officials as well as academics in many countries have worked hard and the United Nations has published two draft constitutions for such an international court—the most recent was published in 1990. Professor Bassiouni took the leading role in the preparation of each, and is regarded as the UN draftsman on the subject.

What should we be doing? I have several suggestions. First, this country is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. Given the change in the international situation since the collapse of the iron curtain, and the fact that the UN is now for the first time capable of operating in the framework which its founding fathers envisaged, we and the other permanent members of the Security Council should take a lead in bringing forward the draft convention which is in place and turning it into agreed international law with an agreed permanent international tribunal capable of enforcing it.

I shall not go into detail on all the legal rules, and so on. They are all there. For the benefit of the House, they are easily available in the spring 1991 editions of the *Nova Law Review* and the *Indiana International and Comparative Law Review*. My right hon. Friend and our colleagues in the Foreign Office may find the articles by Professor Bassiouni in those two journals rather more interesting than many of the other documents that they may be given by their Departments to take away over the Christmas recess.

We need to start taking the matter seriously not only in the Security Council but in the European Community. Over the past few days, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, with our other right hon. Friends, has been involved most successfully at Maastricht, but in the new architecture of the European Community no place has been found for an international criminal tribunal dealing with European matters. I am convinced that, if there were such a tribunal, it would be easier to bring those accused of the Lockerbie bombing to justice.

Surely that would be true in the dimension of Irish terrorism, too. The quality of justice in British courts has been called into question from Ireland so many times that I am sure that it would be easier to overcome the difficulties of extradition if we had an international tribunal operating on a European basis.

One of the biggest deficiencies in the European institutions is the absence of such an international court. I hope that we will use our presidency of the Council of Ministers in the second part of next year to advance and bring to a successful conclusion the establishment of such a court.

One other factor is noticeable. Not only is the Foreign Office doing very little, if anything, but almost none of the vast literature on the subject is British. Almost none comes from English or Scottish universities, or the professional literature of lawyers and law libraries. In this country, an international tribunal is a Cinderella subject. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor should do much more to stimulate the study of how such an international institution could be used to overcome some of the deficiencies in our present system.

I have already said that Professor Bassiouni is one of the outstanding legal scholars in the world today. His work seems to be taken seriously in almost every country in the world—except this country. I am glad to say that in the United States Congress his work has been pursued with considerable vigour by Senator Specter and Congressman Jim Leach, who have brought the idea to the attention of the American public.

It is worth remembering that the US Senate voted by 97 votes to two that Saddam Hussein be brought to trial—but even if we manage to get hold of him, there would still be no place to try him. That problem must be dealt with.

In his seminal article in the *Indiana International and Comparative Law Review*, Professor Bassiouni concluded:

> "We no longer live in a world where narrow conceptions of jurisdiction and sovereignty can stand in the way of an effective system of international co-operation for the prevention and control of international and transnational criminality. If the United States and the Soviet Union can accept mutual verification of nuclear arms controls, then surely they and other countries can accept a tribunal to prosecute not only drug traffickers and terrorists"—

and those who ensnare people into slavery, and so on—

> "but also those whose actions constitute such . . . crimes as aggression, war crimes, crimes against humanity and torture.
>
> Many of the international crimes for which the court would have jurisdiction are the logical extension of international protection of human rights."

I entirely agree with Professor Bassiouni. We proclaim human rights again and again. Many people both in the House and elsewhere have distinguished reputations for proclaiming human rights. Long may they continue—but it is not enough merely to declare human rights: we must provide a forum in which we can enforce them. Some human rights can be enforced in the domestic courts of individual countries, but the world is getting smaller all the time. More and more crimes are being carried out across borders, and many of those crimes are becoming more serious in their extent, scope and inhumanity.

[Mr. William Powell]

That is why it is our duty to do everything that we can to ensure that there is a tribunal available that has authority not only in our continent but throughout the world. Great Britain should take the lead.

I urge my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to ensure that this time my remarks are brought to the attention of the relevant Ministers, and that action is taken to ensure that an idea which I am certain would command wide support in this country if only people were aware of it, can make greater progress than it has done hitherto.

6.37 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): There is one more Conservative Back-Bench Member who wishes to speak, and as the Front-Bench spokemen want to sum up soon, I shall try to split the remaining time between us. I imagine that if I take five minutes that will not be too long.

I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the theme of my speech, because you, more than anyone else, already know what I shall say. I have raised the issue in the House with growing momentum since the Report stage of the Bill that introduced the poll tax, because it was obvious that that would have some devastating consequences. We now have empirical evidence and details to show that that was true: the poll tax has seriously damaged electoral registration in this country.

A report by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys reveals that 1 million people are missing from the electoral register—2·5 per cent. of those entitled to be registered. That represents the equivalent of 21 parliamentary seats—more seats than exist in Northern Ireland, for example—having their entire electorate disappear. But there is no problem with the franchise in Northern Ireland, because it never had the poll tax. The register there is in a healthy state.

The worst deficiency in the register is in youngsters coming up to vote for the first time—those approaching 18, who are called "attainers". The attainer figures in Northern Ireland are healthier than they have ever been. They are worse than they have been in recent years in Scotland, in England and in Wales. They began to become worse first in Scotland where the poll tax was introduced. The House should be deeply concerned about that.

I make no apology to the House for raising the issue, because I think that we should take the matter seriously. It should not be left to me to raise the matter as if it were my bugbear. The Government expecially should take the matter seriously. It is appropriate to raise the subject on the Christmas Adjournment because we are approaching the time when there must be a general election. We still have some opportunity to try to do something about the disastrous situation.

We cannot put the electoral register right before a general election, but we can at least show that we are aware of the problem. Money spent on seeking to encourage electoral registration would be worth while. Advertising on television, in cinemas and on billboards to encourage people to register is of vast importance. There are about 350,000 expatriate voters on the register who have been encouraged by new legislation. We have spent £22·50 of public money for each voter who has been registered. For registration in this country on what is supposed to be the compulsory register, we have spent one tenth of a penny per person. We should spend considerably more.

There has been massive expenditure on all types of Government advertising, such as advertising for fancy employment schemes and for privatisation programmes. The money spent on advertising to encourage electoral registration amounted to 0·32 per cent. of the Government's total publicity expenditure.

The matter should seize us considerably. We are supposed to believe in democracy and in a full franchise, but those views are becoming dogma from the past. We repeat them without fully understanding them. The people who fought for the franchise through the Reform Acts of the 19th century and through the legislation that introduced votes for women in 1919 and 1928, which finally gave us a full franchise, understood the importance of people having a vote and a full say in decision making. It is now becoming a matter that should apply to Europe as a whole and to proper democratic federal structures in which the vote begins to mean something and is not neutralised by deals being done in secret by the Council of Ministers.

We must ensure that the franchise is correct. It would be bad enough if the franchise were being destroyed at random so that a cross-section of voting patterns was affected, but what is happening is worse. The poll tax has deterred from registration the people who have most to fear from its operation and who have the most reason to object to the Government. A fiddle is involved in the franchise.

The Leader of the House knows the matter well, because I have often raised it with him. I hope that he will tell us tonight that something is being done to overcome the problem and that legislation will be introduced which stipulates that the two registers are kept wholly separate from each other and that the present arrangement by which they are linked by computer will cease.

We introduced legislation to try to separate the census from poll tax provisions in the Census (Confidentiality) Bill. If something similar were produced for the operation of the poll tax, it would at least be a sign that things were being done. The council tax, which is the likely successor to the poll tax, will still require a register for local authorities.

6.44 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): Before the House adjourns for the Christmas recess, I wish to raise three points. Last week, Essex county council decided to give my constituents and their children a Christmas present by announcing in a sub-committee that it intended to close Fryerns secondary school. The announcement came as a bolt out of the blue. There was no consultation and there was not even the common courtesy of informing the local Member of Parliament. As ever, the local socialists were out next day delivering leaflets saying, "Save Fryerns school. Vote Labour." They play at politics; I intend to ensure that the school does not close. As long as I am Member of Parliament for Basildon, there will be no closure of schools in my constituency.

I have five children, which is not unusual for Basildon. In contrast to the rest of Essex, we have a growing population. The idea that the other six secondary schools could absorb the children from Fryerns schools is crazy.

Over the past year, I have spent a lot of time working with the excellent headmaster, Mr. Slater, and his wonderful teaching staff. They offer the full range of the national curriculum, they concentrate on helping children who have special educational needs and they run an excellent adult education centre. We certainly need Fryerns school. I give Essex county council a warning. Fryerns school will not close and I intend to ensure that it does not close.

At my surgery on Saturday, I had a deputation from shopkeepers in Whitmore way. In Basildon, we have the largest covered shopping centre in Europe. It is an excellent shopping centre and I hope that people throughout the country will do their Christmas shopping in Basildon. One effect of the covered shopping centre has been that local traders have suffered to an extent. The Basildon development corporation and the Commission for New Towns have spent a huge amount of British taxpayers' money on the infrastructure in Basildon. There is, of course, a duty for the CNT to return some of that investment to the British taxpayer.

However, it came as a tremendous blow to the local shopkeepers when they recently received the rent review on the leases of their shops. Most of those people are small shopkeepers who have been in the town for 30 years. They have found that their rents have gone up by 50 or 75 per cent. That is not acceptable. Trading conditions over the past 18 months, as we all know, have not been favourable in the south. We need to help those small shopkeepers stay in business and the rent proposals are quite unacceptable.

Earlier this year, I tried to amend the Pet Animals Act 1951. I know that it may seem unpleasant to spoil children's fun at Christmas, but, extraordinarily, under the Act minors are allowed to go into pet shops without their parents' permission and to purchase all kinds of animals including dogs and exotic reptiles. I am delighted to say that the House gave my Bill an unopposed Second Reading. The Bill was referred to a Standing Committee, but we ran out of time.

I hope that the House will unite on the issue. We can then amend the 1951 Act so that any child who wishes to purchase a pet will have to have the permission of a parent or, better still, be accompanied by a parent. As the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals can testify, many pets are abandoned at Christmas time. Let us make this a happy Christmas for human beings and also for animals.

6.49 pm

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): The debate on the Christmas Adjournment is always interesting. Hon. Members speak on a variety of subjects about which they feel strongly and on which they feel they are knowledgeable. However, it is an impossible debate to respond to. Therefore, I will not make much of an attempt to respond to it but instead will concentrate on a few issues that I believe it is appropriate to consider at this time of the year.

I am sure that hon. Members were concerned to hear the speech of the hon. Member for Newbury (Sir M. McNair-Wilson) about people infected with HIV. Several other contributions will also be worth reading.

I cannot possibly carry on without mentioning the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon). As a result of his position as deputy Chief Whip, he does not often have an opportunity to speak in the House. However, my word, I enjoyed his speech today. Perhaps we should alter the convention that deputy Chief Whips should not speak in the Chamber.

I apologise for not being able to respond to all the points that have been raised. I want instead to refer to two issues that have a holiday and seasonal flavour. The first is holidays, and in particular bank holidays, and the second is television, which is the nation's most popular entertainment during holiday periods and which, for reasons that I will spell out briefly, is facing tremendous problems not least as a result of the Broadcasting Act 1990.

As hon. Members will be aware, we will enjoy three bank holidays during the Christmas recess, two of which —Christmas day and new year's day—are common throughout the European Community. That is a basic standard of provision for workers throughout the Community. I am not sure whether the Government are hostile towards that harmonisation of holidays. Perhaps they feel that our competitiveness would improve if there were no holidays in this country or that investment would flow into this country if we ended those basic minimum standards of provision. However, even this Government must agree that it is not a bad idea to have some bank holidays. Mercifully, we will not have an opportunity to discover whether the Government want those privileges to be removed because the Conservatives will not be in office for much longer.

It is worth drawing attention to the fact that we have the worst provision of any European Community country in respect of national public holidays. We have only eight and we will be using up three of them in the next few weeks. Ireland and Holland have nine; Italy and Denmark have 10; Germany and France have 11; Luxembourg and Portugal have 12; and Belgium, Greece and Spain have 13. I cannot for the life of me understand why we should not have more public holidays in this country. I am a reasonable fellow, so I will not ask for 13 overnight. However, perhaps we should have 11, the average for the Community.

The bank holiday on 25 December will be the first bank holiday since 24 August. That is a huge gap. Almost every other country has at least one public national holiday between those dates. Only Denmark and Holland are the same as us in that respect. It is high time that we had a holiday between 24 August and 25 December. That is another harmonisation that I would be delighted to see developed. There would be no crisis of confidence in British industry if we had another holiday then. The Government talk about a crisis in confidence whenever we make any improvements in basic employment rights. There would be no flight of capital, so why not will the Government take a risk in that respect?

The other subject to which I want to refer which is oddly appropriate at Christmas time is the television industry and broadcasting in general. Whether we like it or not, television is the national recreation at Christmas time. The highest viewing figures always occur on Christmas day. The figures stagger me: 30 million of our fellow citizens will be watching television at peak time on Christmas day. The average person watches television for six hours on Christmas day. Over the last Christmas holiday period, an average of thirty-three hours of television were watched by our fellow citizens. That figure is much higher than for the rest of the year.

[Mr. Bruce Grocott]

I believe that the British television industry and British programmes produced by British television are the best in the world. It would be a sad day if we began to slide down the road towards American-style television. I should perhaps declare an interest as I once worked in the industry, but I have no financial involvement with the industry now.

Morale and confidence in the television industry are at an all-time low, largely as a direct and deliberate result of the Government. I do not often pray in aid the present and former Prime Ministers. However, we all know the former Prime Minister's view of what she did to the television industry via the Broadcasting Act 1990 and the ludicrous franchise round that followed. When TV-am was told that it could not continue to broadcast, she wrote a letter to Bruce Gyngell in which she said that she was "only too painfully aware" that she was responsible for the system and that she was "mystified and heartbroken" by what had happened. It is astonishing that anyone could respond like that to legislation for which her Government had been responsible.

Even the present Prime Minister announced in his usual ringing rhetorical tones, "I don't think it has been an optimum success." That was his description of what happened during the franchise round. What happened was absurd. Sixteen companies had to tender for the franchise by placing bids in sealed brown envelopes. On those bids depended the jobs, programme plans, hopes and careers of many people and, most fundamentally, the quality of the programmes that we see on our screens.

The results of the round were absurd. The most dramatic contrast involved Central Television, which I was delighted was able to beat the system. It received its franchise with a bid of £2,000 a year, while Yorkshire Television—a smaller company—bid £38 million a year. There are no winners or losers in such a situation. It was a farce of free enterprise and so-called market forces. The irony is that the franchise that went via market forces was TV-am, about which the former Prime Minister was most upset.

Of the 16 independent television companies, three went to the sole bidders; five went to the highest bidders—Anglia, Tyne Tees Television, HTV and a couple of others. Eight were awarded on so-called quality grounds; in other words, the franchise went, not to the highest bidder, but to one of the others.

The net result has been chaos and uncertainty in the ITV system and that is mirrored in many ways by fear and anxiety in the BBC. The BBC is deeply afraid of the plans that the Government—should they remain in office—have for it. I can reassure the BBC that none of those plans will come to fruition, but it is still very worrying for the people working at the BBC.

As a result of all the changes, about £100 million which was previously available for programme making will go to the Treasury through taxation, and that is bound to have an effect on programme quality.

I referred to the number of people who will watch television over the Christmas period, but I did not mention that much of that television material would be made by the BBC. About 150 hours of Christmas programming is made by British film editors, producers, production assistants, location managers, lighting engineers and sound engineers. All that expertise is in Britain, and it is under threat because of the Government's broadcasting lottery.

Conservative Members do not often get worked up about some matters, but I shall mention one about which they will get worked up. Another effect of the so-called free market on broadcasting is that, in the gloomy days of February when the world cup cricket series is being played in a sunny clime, because of a higher bid by British Satellite Broadcasting, we will not be able to see it on our television screens. The free market at work will ensure that most of our fellow citizens will not be able to watch it. I hope that plenty of constituents rightly complain about the operation of the free market on broadcasting.

Mr. Ward: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Grocott: I cannot give way, as I have only a minute left.

I should like to think that the Government would pay attention to those considerations, but I know that they will not do so. In a sense, that does not matter, because the Government will not be with us for much longer. The only reason why this Parliament is stumbling on is that the Government are waiting and hoping that something will turn up. There is no raison d'etre left for this Parliament. It has no functions of substance left to perform. The Government have no mandate left to fulfil. As we all know, it is simply a matter of the Prime Minister checking the opinion polls and hoping desperately that three or four in succession will show a slim lead for him. As soon as that happens, Parliament will be dissolved. The sooner that happens, the better.

7.1 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): Unlike the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott), I do not have the luxury of not being able to respond to the debate. As always, many interesting and often detailed points have been raised. I try to keep abreast of most issues of policy, but I cannot cover every detail of what happens in constituencies. As usual, there has been a fair amount of telephoning to Departments during the debate. If I do not manage to cover all the points in the short time available to me, I will certainly draw Members' comments to the attention of my appropriate right hon. Friend.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Sir J. Stokes), with his characteristic courtesy, warned me that he could not stay for the end of the debate. However, I must comment on his speech. As always, my hon. Friend spoke for England, which makes me wonder how appropriate it is for a Scotsman to reply to his comments. However, as I have represented an English seat for nearly 18 years, I can say that we would be sad if we did not hear his voice and sentiments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge paid tribute to the armed forces. As recent conflicts have shown, the benefits of their discipline, courage, training and professionalism have been very evident. He also commented on the effect of progressive methods in education. He had in mind some of the heavy emphasis on child-centred education in primary schools. He will know that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science and I have

been concerned about such matters and have been trying to obtain a different approach in some of our primary schools.

My hon. Friend was a little off balance today in the picture that he painted. He might have pointed out that there are many outstanding teachers and clergymen, and a huge improvement in British management. In the 1970s, there was constant interference by the Government and difficult industrial relations which prevented managers from managing. We must contrast that with the position today: many British firms are performing extremely well, not least in export markets. I hope that he will agree that, over the past 10 years, there has been a huge improvement rather than the reverse.

My hon. Friend also referred to the competitive world in which we live. I could not agree more. In training, which is a vital part of the performance of British industry, we have seen a two and a half times increase in real terms in Government expenditure on training, and, of course, a massive £20 billion emphasis on training and expenditure on training by British industry. I am pleased that that training priority has been maintained throughout the past year.

The hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) made a rare but very welcome contribution to the debate. It was an understandable intervention. It was sad that it had to be about such a tragic accident. I am sure that the whole House would wish to offer its sincere condolences to Mr. and Mrs. Mohamed on the loss of their daughter. I understand that the authorities concerned—British Rail and the South Tyneside metropolitan borough council—are pursuing the provision of an alternative access road to land on the south side of Harrison farm crossing with a view to closing the crossing. The hon. Gentleman emphasised that he wanted a public apology from British Rail for some of the comments that he quoted from local newspapers. Of course, I will refer his comments to the chairman of British Rail, and I will do that straight after the debate.

The hon. Member for North Down (Mr. Kilfedder) spoke very movingly about what happens in Northern Ireland, particularly in relation to our sentiments as we move towards the Christmas period. All hon. Members share his view about Mr. Hill and hope that he will recover. We share absolutely the abhorrence of terrorist activities to which he referred. I join him in his tribute to the business men of Northern Ireland for their resilience and determination. The hon. Gentleman knows well that the Government remain absolutely committed to bringing terrorism to a permanent end.

The right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) raised a couple of points, one of which was about homelessness in Manchester. He will know of the considerable sums of money——

Mr. Alfred Morris: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot give way at all.

Mr. Morris: It was not only about Manchester.

Mr. MacGregor: The right hon. Gentleman referred to Manchester. I cannot give way, because I must be fair to all hon. Members.

I was about to say that, with reference to homelessness, the right hon. Gentleman will know that the concentration is very much on London, because many people come to London for a variety of reasons. He will be aware that there has been a considerable increase in the provision available to the homeless. About £100 million over three years is being spent on that issue because of the heavy concentration of the problem in London.

In respect of areas outside London, where concentrations of rough sleepers are comparatively small, the Government expect individual local authorities to make emergency provision for people sleeping out in their areas. The right hon. Gentleman will know that the Government provide funding for voluntary organisations concerned with homelessness throughout the country. Grants totalling £4·5 million have been given in the current financial year to 93 voluntary organisations in England, which involves an increase of about 30 per cent. in expenditure. I have in front of me the names of the three organisations in Manchester which are currently receiving support.

Another important point is that much housing stock in Manchester—6·5 per cent. of homes—is currently empty. Action on that front by local authorities is a way of dealing with the problem. There are points that I could make about repossessions, but, in view of the time, I must move on.

The right hon. Gentleman asked particularly for answers to some factual questions that he raised with my hon. Friend the Minister for Health. I have been endeavouring to obtain answers in the short time available since the right hon. Gentleman spoke, and I regret to say that I cannot supply the figures that he requires. However, he will know that the Government expect local authorities to be well aware of their legal responsibilities under the 1970 legislation and to ensure that their policies and practices comply with it. The Government have powers to intervene in alleged cases of default, and will not hesitate to do so if necessary.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Sir M. McNair-Wilson) made a most moving speech. We understand not only his tremendous interest in such matters but his outstanding concern. His point has been substantially considered already and raised on many occasions in the House. I have great sympathy with the plight of those who have been infected with HIV as a result of blood transfusion.

As my hon. Friend knows—this will disappoint him—the House has only recently decided that it does not support the principle of no-fault compensation for medical accidents. I say "disappointed" because that point has already been made to him in the context of that case. It is widely accepted that the haemophiliacs are a special case, and the Government have acted accordingly. However, we have not been convinced that the blood transfusion recipients who have been infected by HIV are a similar special case, but we would consider any new arguments that might be made. As my hon. Friend requested—this was his precise point to me—I shall certainly draw his comments to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Mossley Hill (Mr. Alton), who has also advised me that he cannot be present for the close of the debate, raised the question of the recognition of Croatia. As he will know, considerable efforts are being made to try to achieve a lasting ceasefire in Yugoslavia and my noble Friend Lord Carrington has been unceasing in his efforts, as has the European

[Mr. MacGregor]

Community. In addition, Mr. Cyrus Vance has only recently returned from a visit to Yugoslavia. I understand that his report to the United Nations will be issued today.

We shall continue actively to explore the possibility of United Nations involvement. However, recognition would not stop the fighting. The Serbs could be provoked to tighten their grip on the areas of Croatia that they now hold. Recognition now, without any agreement on such issues as minorities, could be a recipe for chaos. The southern republics might also seek independence, and fighting could spread to them. Although there are difficulties, the hon. Gentleman can rest assured that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has been taking the closest interest in all the peacekeeping efforts.

My hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Ward) raised two matters. The first related to foam-filled furniture, an issue in which I recall being involved when I served at the Department of Trade and Industry. As my hon. Friend knows, the United Kingdom supports the introduction of the European directive that will provide a level of fire protection that is commensurate with the requirements of our furniture regulations. However, the Commission's former proposals were not acceptable because they would have resulted in a lower level of safety requirements than we already have. They would not have provided any protection against the toxic effects of foam fillings. We have made it clear to the Commission that the United Kingdom will retain its regulations until a satisfactory regime is available under the directive. I assure my hon. Friend that we shall continue to pursue that point.

My hon. Friend's second point related to animal welfare. He is absolutely right to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. When I held that post, I put a lot of effort into animal welfare issues and into trying to ensure that the Community sought to achieve similar high standards to our own. My hon. Friend referred especially to the new directives on pigs and calves. They do not satisfy the necessary basic welfare requirements that are provided for in our legislation. That is why we voted against them. I assure my hon. Friend that we shall continue to press for the Commission's reviews to be completed as soon as possible.

The hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) raised a detailed case relating to fair employment tribunals. It would be wrong for me to comment on a tribunal decision. The hon. Gentleman knows that the Fair Employment Commission is independent of Government. However, I shall certainly draw his remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, who will bear them in mind. I can advise the hon. Gentleman immediately, however, that there is nothing wrong with the display of the Union flag or royal portraits in appropriate locations and circumstances. I have already referred to the difficulty of making statements next week, so I cannot promise the hon. Gentleman one then but, as I have said, I shall ensure that his remarks are drawn to the attention of my right hon. Friend.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. French) spoke interestingly and with much knowledge on the subject of uninsured drivers. I shall draw his suggestion about the introduction of insurance discs to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

I advise the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) that the Community funds for butter aid allow for considerable expenditure in this country. About £43 million-worth of surplus produce has been distributed in the past three years, and we rely on the voluntary organisations to carry out that distribution. This year we have designated 774 organisations as potential participants, which is way up on the number designated last year. That is why there must be rules. Although I greatly sympathise with the hon. Lady's constituent, I do not know of the individual circumstances to which she referred.

I have only one comment to make about the closing remarks of the hon. Member for The Wrekin. There are plenty of raisons d'etre for the House to continue with this Session, because we have plenty of work to do. His comments totally ignored the fundamentally important outcome of the Maastricht negotiations and the importance of the fact that it was my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary who undertook those negotiations, not his right hon. Friends, as the country has widely recognised. That is why the country will want my right hon. Friends to lead Britain into the 1990s and beyond.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House at its rising on Friday 20th December do adjourn until Monday 13th January 1992.

CONSOLIDATED FUND BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Question, That the Bill be now read a Second time, *put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 54 (Consolidated Fund Bills), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Motion made, and Question proposed, pursuant to Standing Order No. 54 (Consolidated Fund Bills), That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Lightbown.]*

Crime

7.15 pm

Mr. Peter Archer (Warley, West): It is said that fortune smiles alike on the just and the unjust, and I am grateful that in the ballot for this evening's debate, fortune did not make that distinction, because I invite the House to consider the subject of crime and how to reduce it. That subject is a source of great concern to my constituents.

In the industrial black country of the west midlands, we could list many problems. We are never short of topics for conversation these days, but one recurring source of anxiety is the crime wave. I accept that the statistics show that the increase is not uniform across all offences, but no one will persuade the people of Rowley Regis and Oldbury that crime has not been increasing or that it is not continuing to increase. Their experience tells them what the statistics confirm—that between 1980 and 1989, recorded crime rose by 46 per cent. In 1990, the last year for which we have the figures, it increased by a further 17 per cent. And those figures relate only to recorded crime. People increasingly say to me, "I had a break-in but, no, I did not report it. What's the use?" I shall return to what they mean by that observation in a moment.

My constituents sometimes read about massive frauds, and some of them are the victims of what has come to be known as white collar crime. However, when they speak about crime, they have in mind the burglary of people's homes, malicious damage and petty but distressing assaults. They believe that it is a function of Government to do something about it. They have lived for 12 years with a Government who believe that nothing is the legitimate concern of Government. It is all the fault of parents or of the decline in churchgoing or of the break-up of the family. That is a bit rich from a Government whose policies on the poll tax and social benefits are driving children away from home.

"But," the Government say, "it is nothing to do with us." My constituents do not accept that. They believe that Governments can do something about the increase in crime, especially when they see the Home Secretary receiving standing ovations at successive Conservative party conferences for saying that he jolly well will do something about it.

I do not suggest that there is a single simple solution that will restore law and order at a stroke. There are as many ways of reducing crime as there are reasons why people commit crime. Human conduct—whether human virtue or human wickedness—is not reducible to one single motivation. I would not dispute that increasing the penalties that the courts may impose may help to reduce some offences.

As the Minister of State and my hon. Friends the Members for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) and for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) will recollect —I am encompassed about with a great cloud of witnesses —earlier in the year I was responsible for tabling an amendment in Committee to the Criminal Justice Act 1991 to increase the penalty for badger baiting. To her credit, the Minister of State, Home Office, the right hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold) listened and was persuaded. I believe that increasing the penalty will go some way to reducing that vicious manifestation of cruelty.

My constituents would not dispute with the Home Secretary the part that increased penalties can sometimes play, but they think it reasonable to expect that he should sometimes have some other ideas. Like the old army doctors who thought that the answer to every complaint was a laxative pill, the Home Secretary goes on prescribing the same remedy as he offered last time, while the patient's condition continues to deteriorate. That is despite the fact that the Home Office, even under Tory Governments, has produced some valuable studies of the factors that encourage crime, as the Minister and Opposition Members have agreed more than once.

It is not always necessary to wait until a crime has been committed and then respond to it. It is better, if possible, to prevent a crime from being committed. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] There seems to be some unanimity about that. In the past few years, a whole science of crime prevention has grown up. No one now argues that medical science is confined to waiting until people fall ill and then curing them. Everyone knows about preventive medicine. If we are wise, we all try to arrange our diet and life style accordingly.

A great deal of work has been done recently on what has come to be called situational crime prevention. I am happy to announce that I did not invent that expression, but it refers to a valuable field of activity. It involves such measures as improved household and car security, property marking, better street lighting, safer pedestrian access and better design for car parks and shopping areas. It includes building security considerations into planning practice and improving the design of public transport systems. It would be sensible to bring together, by greater use of crime prevention committees, all the various groups and bodies that should be involved in taking those measures. Indeed, local authorities could give a better lead if they were not confronted by a Government determined to reduce them financially and funtionally to impotence.

I repeat, perhaps at the risk of being tiresome to some of my hon. Friends and some Conservative Members, what I have said many times before. Of course it is not true that everyone who is unemployed or deprived resorts to crime, nor is poverty an excuse for lawlessness—that is not the argument—but there is such a thing in every locality as a social climate. The greatest single influence on most people, especially in the age groups where, unhappily, crime is most prevalent, is the opinion of a peer group.

A teenager on a deprived estate will not respect the law because the Minister and I say that he ought to do so, but if his friends and associates and other teenagers tell him that the authorities are trying to be fair and trying to build a better environment, and that taking out his frustrations on his neighbours will not help, he may listen to them. Of course, they will not be conned into telling him that if it is manifestly not true.

The Government paid lip service to the Scarman report. They denounced "Faith in the City" without even reading it. No prophetic messages from the Government reach those peer groups. Common sense tells us that three of the factors that are most likely to induce crime are poverty, boredom through enforced idleness, and resentment. The Government would do us all a favour if they did something about those factors and explained what they were trying to do.

I should like to concentrate the remainder of my contribution on one aspect of crime reduction. There is virtually no dispute between academics and the people

[Mr. Peter Archer]

whom I meet in the clubs, between the two sides of the House, or between social science and common sense that an important factor in reducing crime would be greater activity by the police, giving them a higher profile and in particular putting more officers on the streets.

The West Midlands police force has been addressing that problem. I have an account of its thinking over the past few years. It has considered how to arrange administrative tasks so as to leave the maximum number of officers free for operational duties. It has established administrative support units manned largely by civilians to remove as many administrative tasks as possible from officers who have operational duties. It has saved an average of one hour per officer per day. It is seeking to replace controls at sub-divisional level with single divisional control rooms. It has established a computer and communications system. If time permitted, I could list more of its initiatives.

West Midlands police force then considered carefully how the operational officers who had been made available should be deployed. Some have to be put on specialist tasks. The more we urge the police to undertake a wider range of activity, the more special tasks there will be. The West Midlands police force has a programme of working with schools. The programme is designed to induce more confidence and co-operation with the police and to reduce the number of juvenile offenders. It has set up special domestic violence units.

I suspect that I would be naive if I did not expect some reaction when I mention special units in the West Midlands police force. No one in his right mind would accuse me or any of my hon. Friends of minimising some of their units' less praiseworthy digressions. This is not the occasion to discuss them, except to say that I have learnt that if any group of people have specific duties imposed on them and discover that the burdens placed on them are not matched by the time and resources available, they may be tempted to cut corners.

The West Midlands police have made provision for the various special units. Subject to that, they have tried to arrange that as many officers as possible are out on the streets. Of course, some of them need to be in squad cars so that they can respond quickly to a call. Sometimes they need more squad cars, but the object is to have as many officers as possible on patrol and for residents to have a resident beat officer who is available when they need help.

The chief constable and the police authority in the west midlands calculate each year the number of officers they will need to perform their duties, but it is not left to a police authority to decide what its establishment should be. It must obtain the approval of the the Home Secretary, with or without the advice of the Minister of State. Lest there should be any confusion, let us be clear that police authorities do not come as beggars asking for a gift that will cost them nothing.

When the establishment figures are approved, the police authority has to pay its full share of the cost. The cost is shared between central Government and the police authority, precepting on its constituent councils. The authority consults the councils. Councils know that money for policing has to be raised out of poll tax or by cutting some other service to their residents, but they recognise that, if their residents are to be protected and crime is to be reduced, the money must be found, subject to the amount that the Government have cut by poll tax capping.

In 1988, the West Midlands police authority went to the Home Secretary and said, "Here are our proposals. These are our detailed calculations. We need an increase of 350 officers." Do you know what the Home Secretary said? He said, "You can have 70." In the following year the authority said, "We have looked at it again and we still need 350 officers." The Home Secretary said that it could have 62. The next year the authority asked again for 350 oificers. The Home Secretary said that it could have 63. Last year the authority tried to compromise and asked for 148 officers. It was allowed 48. This year it asked for 121 officers and he has allowed it 11.

Those are depressing figures on any showing. They mean, translated into fact, that in Sandwell there are whole estates the doors of which are made of steel because, if they were made of wood, they would have been kicked in on the first night they were put up. People living alone are afraid to go out shopping beause they fear that when they get back they will have been burgled. I know people who park their cars a quarter of a mile from where they live because if they parked them outside their homes the vehicles would be vandalised, and by the next morning they might not be there at all.

Happily, there is some good news from time to time. Recently on one such estate, the CID arrested an entire gang. They were tried, convicted and sent where they belong, and I hope that there will be a period of peace on that estate. But it is all like the Roman empire in its decline, with the forces of law and order too thinly spread, racing to beat the latest threat, only to learn that while they have been away the vandals have broken through somewhere else.

I am somewhat inhibited in telling the House the whole story. If I made all the details public, a welcome signal might be sent to the criminal fraternity, but I know of a sub-divisional station which on some nights is manned by one woman police officer, together with one male officer who has agreed, with no great joy, to do a night's overtime.

If that male officer is out responding to a call and another call comes in, the woman police officer must seek such help as she can get from another sub-division, or close the station and go herself. So people who telephone the police station may or may not see an immediate flurry of activity, depending on whether somebody was available when the phone rang. Hence, sometimes they do not bother to telephone. That is why I say that the recorded crime figures do not tell the whole story. That situation is the despair of local residents and heartbreaking for the police. It is not the way to reduce crime.

Let me add one other matter, on which my hon. Friends who represent Sandwell constituencies and I have written to the Home Secretary seeking a meeting. I shall understand if the Minister of State does not respond tonight to the issue, and I am not inviting him to do so, but it is part of the picture and is well known to you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The present headquarters of the West Midlands police is situated in central Birmingham. It is overcrowded and unsuitable in many ways. A number of changes that the police wish to make, which would increase efficiency and save expense, are not possible in that building. The car parking space is too limited for the purpose and, in any event, the whole place requires extensive refurbishment,

which would be very expensive. As it is held on a lease, the cost of the refurbishment would virtually be money thrown away.

It would be better—and, over a reasonable time scale, cheaper—to construct a purpose-built headquarters. An ideal site is available in West Bromwich, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape). The police authority has decided that it would be common sense to go there.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Hear, hear.

Mr. Archer: I knew that I would not have to try hard to persuade you on that point, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Such a move would offer a bonus, because it would regenerate the appearance, the environment and the economy of the area. The project is wholly supported by Sandwell metropolitan borough council. It would greatly assist the effectiveness of policing, and be value for money, if the Home Secretary looked favourably at that proposal.

That being so, wisdom may suggest that I should abstain from further comment about the Home Secretary, but he should know that my constituents would find the quality of their lives changed if crime were more effectively reduced. They expect more from a Home Secretary than a periodical upgrading of the penalties and a rousing speech at the party conference, followed by a wave of hysteria from pinstripe-suited and blue-hatted lynch mobs. A little thought would be worth a great deal of that kind of reaction.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): At the last Conservative party conference, which rightly gave a standing ovation to my right hon. Friend, there was only one hat worn by a lady in the audience, and it was grey and knitted.

Mr. Archer: I suppose that even a cosmetic improvement is to be welcomed. Some of us wish that when the leopard changed its spots, it changed its behaviour as well. While perhaps I am responsible for the frivolity, I am making a serious point.

My constituents want some serious thought applied to the problem. That would be worth a lot of shouting. Our constituents deserve better, and we are not asking for the impossible. It is better to spend money on crime prevention than on long criminal trials, prison sentences that could have been avoided and repairing and replacing property which need never have been damaged or lost in the first place. My hon. Friends and I say that a little thought and some resources now would pay a worthwhile dividend.

7.35 pm

Sir John Wheeler (Westminster, North): It is a particular pleasure for me to speak following the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) and to be able to respond to some of the points he made. He must know that much of what he said is well understood and that the general thrust of his argument is supported by my hon. Friends and myself.

I wish at the outset to trespass into the area of his jurisdiction and comment on the methodology of arriving at police establishments in the 43 police forces of England and Wales. The right hon. and learned Gentleman will know that I have a particular interest and responsibility for the subject, and I comment accordingly.

It is right to say that it is for the chief constable to decide what his police resources should be, both police and civilian, with the increasing emphasis these days on civilian resources, for what they do in support of the police and in the prevention of crime is increasingly recognised and often outstanding. I think, for example, of scene of crime officers. Without their work, the information and necessary evidence would not be available to clear up crime and make arrests.

So the chief constable decides what his establishment ideally should be, and he discusses that with the police authority, which inevitably supports him. But then it is a matter for Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary to decide, on an independent basis, what resources should be available. It is on the advice of that body that the Home Secretary makes his decision about police strengths.

We should not just ignore the number of police officers in a constabulary. We should think also of the ways in which they are used, and my recent Select Committee on Home Affairs report, for example, on sick leave was a good example of an analysis of the use of police officers and their time.

Mr. Archer: So that nobody is misled, may I ask the hon. Gentleman to make it clear that the Home Secretary is not bound to act on the advice of the inspectorate of constabulary, and the fact that he has made a decision does not necessarily reflect what the inspectorate said?

Sir J. Wheeler: That is correct. The Home Secretary is not bound to act on the advice of the inspectorate of constabulary, but he must take into account a large number of other factors. For example, he may want to see whether the chief constable has been making use of civilian resources as well as he should, and he might be saying to the inspectorate of constabulary, "If you can demonstrate a better use of money and resources through civilianisation, that might have a bearing on the availability of uniformed police officers."

The Home Affairs Select Committee report, when the Committee looked at sick leave, for example, found that some progress could be made in improving on the sick absence record of police officers. The equivalent of the entire strength of the West Yorkshire constabulary is absent on an annual basis through sick leave, if we use that as a means of illustrating the depth of the problem, and, by improving on that, more police officers, who are expensive, would be available. My right hon. Friend must also take into account the fact that, by one means or another, 90 per cent. of the cost of the police service comes from the Exchequer, the taxpayer, and only 10 per cent. is raised through local government tax.

I was very interested in the right hon. and learned Gentleman's remarks about crime figures and the extent of crime in Britain today. It is widely believed that the United Kingdom has a rising crime wave, and crime is thought to be more widespread in the United Kingdom than in other western countries. That is simply not the case. Crime levels have been rising throughout the western industrialised world since the 1950s, on average by about 6 per cent. per annum. They have risen everywhere, under Governments of every political complexion, so it has nothing to do with the nature of the politics of a country.

[Sir J. Wheeler]

It is widely believed that the United Kingdom has one of the highest rates of crime, whereas it has one of the lowest in the western world. Our society is much less violent than that of north America or of the Commonwealth of Australia, as the 1989 international crime survey showed in the report published in March 1990. The United Kingdom and Germany have the lowest overall crime rates of all the industrialised countries.

Crime statistics, to which the right hon. and learned Gentleman referred, are the most commonly used indicators of the level of crime, but they refer to notifiable offences reported to the police. That measure does not show the total crime, only the incidents reported to the police. When these figures show a substantial increase, it is usually assumed that crime, in particular violent crime, has risen dramatically, but, particularly in recent years, other factors have influenced those statistics.

Women have been encouraged to report rape and domestic violence. I was delighted to hear the right hon. and learned Gentleman refer to the work of his own police force in setting up a unit to receive that kind of report from women. That is a very desirable objective. Because this is being done, crime statistics are increased and their nature is changed. This is particularly true in this country, where the insurance industry requests that thefts and burglaries are reported so that a claim may be proved.

The increasing ownership of telephones has created a greater inclination to get in touch with the police. Five million more motor cars on the roads since 1980 mean that there is bound to be more damage to, theft from and taking of motor vehicles. Also, of course, 15,500 more police officers are likely to detect and record more crime and, indeed, to be available to receive reports. So a whole host of factors influence the collection of statistics.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Sir John Wheeler: I was going on to give an explanation, which may help the hon. Gentleman. May I do so and see whether he is still of the same mind?

Since 1980, the Home Office has collected its own crime figures through the British crime survey, which attempts to gauge the total number of crimes committed rather than those notified to the police. The survey shows that crime is not rising anywhere near as fast as police figures suggest. For example, the 1988 British crime survey reported a 12 per cent. rise in wounding, the most common form of assault, between 1981 and 1987, whereas police statistics showed a 40 per cent. rise. The increase in robbery was 9 per cent., compared with a police total of 62 per cent.

The fear of violent crime has risen out of all proportion to the actual risk. I am not saying that that is not worrying, and we must address that problem; I shall seek to suggest how in a moment. Interviews with 10,000 people for the survey showed that one in five women felt very unsafe when out walking at night; yet fewer than one in 70 claimed to have been attacked in the past year.

It is very important to get the facts if we are to contemplate what the police should be for controlling and preventing crime.

Mr. Sheerman: The hon. Gentleman must also know that it depends how one selects one's facts and which surveys one looks at. Referring to the point at which I first tried to intervene, he will know that there is under-reporting of crime. At a time when there is more sympathetic treatment of rape cases and domestic violence, there is greater reporting, thank goodness, but all the evidence shows that there is under-reporting of burglary as people become worried about making claims against their insurance policies. We know also that police screening encourages people not to report.

Can I direct the hon. Gentleman's attention to the Islington crime survey, which gives rather different evidence about how much crime is being committed and how much it is rising?

Sir John Wheeler: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, because I suspect that we are not really disagreeing. I am suggesting that the British crime survey is very important. It is independent of Government and is formulated by researchers who are anxious to establish the truth, because without those facts we cannot deploy the resources effectively. I know about the Islington survey, and I also share his concern about under-reporting in some areas of the country of some types of crime in particular, but let me continue with the facts before we begin to look at the solutions.

It is very important to know that less than 6 per cent. of all recorded crime is violent; 94 per cent. of the crime about which most members of the public are concerned relates to property. Rape, for example, accounts for less than 1·5 per cent. of violent crime. In 61 per cent. of cases, rape is by someone known to the victim, so women are not at risk from every man they happen to encounter when they go for a walk on a dark night. Over half the assaults on women are domestic, according to the crime survey of 1986, and, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman said, are now being reported and investigated.

Although women, elderly women in particular, feel at greater risk from violence, it is young men who are by far the main victims of assaults, which occur principally in the middle of the afternoon, not late at night.

Let us begin to look at what is being done to remedy these problems. The Government's initiatives are many and varied and of very great importance. The safer cities programme, for example, has resulted in reductions in burglary on a housing estate in Wolverhampton to the tune of 40 per cent. These are surely the solutions for which the right hon. and learned Gentleman is looking. There has been a drop of 35 per cent. in car crime in a central Nottingham car park through the safer cities programme. Crime in central Birmingham is showing a 16 per cent. decrease after the introduction of new security measures. So there are ways forward in difficult inner-city areas which bring real solutions to the lives of ordinary people, which is what we want to see.

Perhaps I can deal now with car crime. Seventy-five per cent. of people are prepared to pay for built-in car security features. At long last, the motor manufacturers are waking up to the reality that they ought to do more and that they too can assist in the reduction of car crime.

I am delighted that the Association of British Insurers, an organisation committed to a reduction in car crime, has recently issued a video aimed at young males, particularly in the 12-to-16 age group. Those are the people who commit most car crime and who take away and drive away most motor vehicles. The video will try to help them understand the misery they cause and what they should do to avoid being tempted down that road.

That is an example of an institution joining the Government to try to provide a solution to a serious problem. The majority of known car crime offenders are males aged 15 to 16. The evidence is overwhelming; we must address crime prevention far more successfully if we are to achieve the reductions referred to by the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West.

The other important statistic is that 94 per cent. of crime relates to property, much of it to burglary and breaking into people's homes. Here again, more could be done by ordinary people. A large number of homes lack basic security measures. About half those surveyed said that they had no locks on their windows, and one in four were without mortice locks or deadlocks. People have taken very few sensible precautions to stop young male burglars breaking in. Of those surveyed, 73 per cent. felt that they could do more to protect themselves. Part of the crime prevention initiative which many police forces are following is to assist the public to take more precautions to help themselves.

One other initiative was announced in a written answer to me only today, so it is topical and relevant. I refer to the 16 local drugs prevention teams which are being brought into action to assist in dealing with the problem of drug addiction among the young. Again the emphasis is on primary prevention of the misuse of drugs and on preventing young people from being drawn in.

As to serious and organised crime, in the 1990s we must address the subject of police structure with greater enthusiasm. The common police services must be combined in a central police agency so that we can deal with serious and organised crime, not necessarily crime which immediately affects the lives of constituents but crime which can affect them through the stealing of their pension funds or the misappropriation of their assets and savings.

As we examine the structure of the police in the 1990s, I hope that we shall see the need for a national police agency to deal with national and international crime, while preserving the important links through the local constabularies, because it is through the local police links with the public that crime is prevented.

7.53 pm

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) on initiating the debate. He reflected the view of my constituents when he said that crime and how to reduce it are matters for the Government. The Government have failed to tackle or prevent crime. I want to touch briefly on four areas in which the Government could and must do better, in addition to the initiatives mentioned by my right hon. and learned Friend and the preventive programmes, such as that mentioned by the hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) in relation to drug addiction.

I shall rely not just on statistics but on the position in communities which I have known well over many years. The Government's record is not as good as the hon. Member for Westminster, North suggested. For instance, the safer cities campaign has minimal resources and ignores Wales completely. Other worthwhile initiatives do not go to the root of the problem.

I compare the Government's record to the experience I once had of helping to redecorate a pensioner's home to brighten up the dingy gloom. As we tried to attach fresh wallpaper to the wall, we found that the damp had so undermined the structure that the wall fell down. That was not a criticism of the redecoration scheme, any more than my remarks are a criticism of some of the Government initiatives. Rather the criticism is that the basic and structural problems are not being tackled with the vigour that is required.

The Government are not giving the police the tools they need to do the job, certainly in south Wales. Here I reflect very much the comments of my right hon. and learned Friend. In Wales, the Home Secretary cannot distinguish a rural community from an urban community, much less appreciate the different policing needs of each. Let me spell that out.

When the Home Secretary announced the additional numbers for police forces throughout England and Wales, I was shocked to find that Gwent merited only one extra officer and was astounded to find that the South Wales police force was not to have a single extra officer, especially as the chief constable has undertaken a major review to ensure the best use of available manpower, a process which must continue.

In the South Wales police area, the crime level this year will be up some 22 per cent. on last year. I spent a Saturday night recently on patrol with the police in central Cardiff and saw just how thin is the blue line which looks after law and order in the city at night. Weekend availability was frightening, even before the Home Secretary's failure to tackle the issues within Cardiff prison, and other areas put enormous pressure on police time and cells.

My constituency includes part of four divisions, so I have had a unique opportunity to see the problems which the police face in diverse communities. Right hon. and hon. Friends could replicate that experience and express the same concern about urban and rural areas throughout Wales and England. The Home Secretary and the Minister of State must face up to two facts: first, that their party is guilty of creating the conditions for crime and failing to tackle the root causes of crime; and, secondly, that the police do not have the tools for the job.

I set out to find out why no extra police were coming to help our communities. It is not enough for the Minister to pass the buck to the chief inspector of constabulary. I found that part of the reason lay in the formula used to decide the police needs of each area, by which the Home Secretary gives greater weighting per thousand of urban population. Hon. Members might say that that was fair enough, but the Government have gone on to use a bizarre and irrelevant definition of urban and rural.

According to the definition, Cwmbran is not an urban area, nor is Aberdare, Rhondda, Abertillery, Neath, Barry, Penarth, Merthyr, Pontypool or Port Talbot, that well-known steel town; nor is Newport, the third city in south Wales. According to the bizarre method of calculation, the urban population of Gwent is nil. Only Swansea and Cardiff fall into the urban category. It is no wonder the Home Secretary came up with a derisory response to the heartfelt plea for more police to restore a sense of security to our communities. How, a week after that crazy decision, are we to place confidence in Ministers who talk about policing and crime prevention in our urban and rural communities when they cannot tell one from t'other?

It is not as if the Home Secretary had not been warned. If present trends continue, reported crime will have risen

[Mr. Alun Michael]

by 113 per cent. between 1981 and 1991 in the South Wales police area. Incidents requiring attendance by police officers are up by nearly 80 per cent. since 1984, and 999 calls are up by over 20 per cent. in the same period. I am not sure who is more demoralised by that—the local people, who frequently complain that they do not get a quick response when they need help, or the local police, who attend the crime in an attempt to do the good job that they intended when they entered the police force, knowing that they are likely to be pulled in all directions to answer calls on a blue line that has been pulled far too thin by the Government's demands. In 1990, the number of crime calls per officer in south Wales was more than 42, compared with 29 in Cheshire and 39 in Leicester, to take just two examples. Where is the sense or comparability of that?

In his response to the Home Secretary's manpower announcement, the chief constable of south Wales, Mr. Lawrence, said:

"I must repeat my warning that the South Wales Constabulary cannot be treated like a sponge and continually expected to absorb an ever-increasing workload without an inevitable decline in the quality of the service we provide".

In the light of the facts that I have set out, his conclusion that the Home Office decision is "ill-conceived" is a masterpiece of restrained understatement.

In a number of ways, the police are making positive responses to suggestions of working together to tackle problem areas and undertake inter-agency approaches to the many problems that need a co-operative approach. But they need help from the Home Secretary both to do their basic job properly and to take their share in such initiatives, and I greatly regret that help has not been forthcoming. I understand that the Home Secretary still has some flexibility within this year's resource allocation, and I appeal to the Minister of State who is present for this debate, the right hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten), to undertake to reconsider the needs of the South Wales and Gwent police forces.

I wish that I had time to go more deeply into the Government's failure to tackle the root causes of crime in our communities, but suffice it to say that neither unemployment nor lack of a decent home is an excuse for crime. On that, I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer). However, failure to tackle the economy, provide relevant training and create long-term prosperity all help to create a second and third generation of young people growing up with despair ever present in their communities. That is not healthy, and it nurtures the likelihood of crime, which damages victim and delinquent alike, as well as their families and the community in which they live.

I worked in the communities that experienced the most painful impact of the first of the Government's recessions in the 1980s. At that time—at least to start with—we could pick up some of those who had been the least successful in their school careers, often because they had turned their backs on the opportunities open to them, and provide the first steps towards training and employment. They often responded positively to being given a chance, but as time went on, the same families ended up with the father on the dole and older brothers and sisters unable to find work. Younger brothers, sisters and cousins approaching working age did so in an atmosphere of discouragement and despair. That experience angered and frustrated me sufficiently to consider coming to this place to try to change the evil which the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) was letting loose on decent families in decent communities.

Sadly, largely the same communities felt the burden of crime. Most of the delinquent youngsters with whom I worked—I stress most, not all—did not need to be involved in delinquent activity. There remains truth in the adage, "The devil makes work for idle hands"; and I assert that lack of hope is the greatest recruiting officer for all criminal activity.

The assertion, "If it isn't hurting, it isn't working," shows callous disregard and ignorance of the effects of social problems on individuals, families and communities at the sharp end. As for the economy, when it hurts in this recession, the pain is felt most—in a way that is most unfair—by the same families and communities who felt the worst pain in every other recession. It is felt by the same people who experience the pain of all the other inequalities in our unequal society. It encourages the conditions for crime in communities that already feel more impact from crime because they contain more victims of crime, as well as more offenders.

For many hon. Members, unemployment and criminal activity are one-off experiences. It is often a matter of history repeating itself from generation to generation and, under this Government, even within a single generation. That is the real failure of the Government's approach. They cannot wash their hands of social problems and the incidence of crime by saying, "Let the markets take care of it all". That will not work; it is not responsible, and future generations will pay for the Government's failure.

The Government must recognise that there needs to be a positive approach to young offenders if we are not to encourage them to grow into hardened and repetitive offenders. I served on the Committee which dealt with what is now the Criminal Justice Act 1991, in the hope that I could draw on my own experience as chairman of the Cardiff juvenile bench, and as someone who had worked with young offenders. I found that amendments that sought to divert young people from criminal activity would not fit into the Bill because of what an Officer of the House described as

"the curious geography of the Bill".

Whatever the Bill was about, it was certainly not about preventing crime and diverting young people from it.

Since well before I was elected to this House, I have pressed for the provision of secure accommodation to end the scandal of young offenders and remand prisoners in particular being held in prison accommodation. Others, particularly my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams), have pursued the matter vigorously in the House in recent years. The Home Office has now decided that places should be provided but that the Department of Health and the Welsh Office must find the money. But it gets worse: the Home Office has now decided that those Departments must find the money to build the places but that local authorities must find the running costs. If the Prime Minister really believed in the principle of subsidiarity, as he said yesterday, that would certainly not be allowed to happen.

Magistrates and others who have called for more secure places want them to be used to contain the activities of young offenders who are not currently kept in prison accommodation, like so-called joyriders and repetitive

burglars. The current proposals do not meet that requirement. Indeed, they contain the seed of a massive oak tree of nonsense.

At present, if there is an objection to bail on the ground that the young offender may commit another crime while on bail, there are two alternatives. Either the magistrate refuses bail and says, effectively, that the court orders that the weekly equivalent of £20,000 a year is spent on the offender until his case is heard, or the court grants bail and orders that nothing is spent on the offender until the case is heard. There are many cheaper and constructive ways to contain young offenders, but they ware not being funded by the Government. Custodial sentences and remands prevent immediate offending but increase the likelihood of later and more serious reoffending. That is an area for immediate consideration and actions by the Government if they have the slightest interest in protecting society from the growth in criminal activity over which the Home Secretary and the Government continue to preside.

The Government's actions regarding observance of the law do not escape attention by ordinary people. My constituents are outraged by the fact that Ministers seem to regard themselves as above the law. I shall not refer to wider policy matters, or to matters that are currently subject to argument in the courts or on appeal, but I condemn the Government for running away from their responsibilities on Sunday trading. Ordinary citizens cannot understand why they do that. In their squalid and cowardly decisions announced last week, they spelled out in large letters the message that, in Conservative Britain, there is one law for powerful corporations that have a voice at the heart of the Tory party, and another for ordinary individuals in urban and rural communities of Wales and England.

Sir John Wheeler: The hon. Gentleman is being most unfair. The senior Law Officer of the Crown, the Attorney-General, explained to the House that, on the question of the Shops Act 1950, he had to make a decision based not on party politics but on the law.

Mr. Michael: The hon. Gentleman rightly describes the responsibilities of the senior Law Officer. I bow to the knowledge of people like my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warley, West on the technicalities of the law, but the Attorney-General's comments satisfied neither me nor my constituents. My constituents saw him as a responsible Government officer who came to the House to say that the Government washed their hands of the matter and would leave it alone. I repeat my view, which is shared by my constituents, that a squalid and cowardly decision was announced last week, spelling out the fact that there is one law for those with a voice in the Tory party and another for the ordinary individual in the urban and rural communities of Wales and England.

Commercial organisations like the Co-operative Retail Society, the Co-operative Wholesale Society, Marks & Spencer and Iceland have expressed their horror that the Government should so abdicate their responsibility as to say, "We shall do nothing if you break the law," and weakly add the unconvincing refrain, as the Home Office Minister did, "But we'd rather like it if you didn't." Organisations that want to keep the law are effectively being invited to watch their competitors steal their trade, which is not on.

As chairman of the Co-operative parliamentary group, I was delighted to see Sir Dennis Landau's comments on behalf of the CWS. As he said, such a retailer must recognise that each family in such hard times will buy only one turkey, one tin of biscuits, and one Christmas pudding, and the retailer which is not open will lose that custom. However, he went on to say that the CWS

"remains wholly opposed to unrestricted Sunday trading and will continue to seek a sensible reform of the law on the basis of the REST proposals put forward by Keep Sunday Special Campaign."

That must be the way forward. My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) will tackle that issue later if we reach his subject for debate. The point that I am making is that the argument is not one of Sunday trading, but one of law and order, with the Conservative party ranged firmly among the enemies of law and order.

We should not be surprised by that. I saw £3 million stolen from my local authorities of Cardiff and South Glamorgan when the Government introduced retrospective legislation to change the rules that they had set and which those councils had followed carefully and obediently. From 1979 to 1987, six Conservative Ministers were found guilty of breaking the law—in their official capacity, I hasten to add; I hate to think what the tally is now. The Conservative party has never been the party of law and order, and during this Parliament it has thrown away the last vestiges of any claim to such a title.

To restore law and order in a way that makes sense to, and works to the benefit of, ordinary people—we have an obligation to ensure that Government actions make sense—we need action to tackle the four issues that I have mentioned. We must address the social ills that are at the root of much crime; we must take action to divert young people into more positive ways of using their time and lives; we need the sort of common-sense and long-term commitment shown by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) and his team. In short, we need a Labour Government as quickly as possible.

8.14 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): This has been a most interesting debate, and I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) on introducing it. I have enjoyed all the contributions, particularly those that touched on the way that crime affects constituents who live in districts such as Cardiff and Sandwell. I have been to many of those areas and seen the problems. I sympathise with the views expressed. I do not want to cover the whole subject, this evening; I shall focus on what I understand to be the thrust of the debate—tackling the causes of crime.

The speech of the hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) disappointed me, as usual. He is extremely knowledgeable on the subject, and I am still something of an idealist at heart. I have an ideal picture of a Chairman of a Select Committee who is knowledgeable, takes an overview of the subject and does not hold a strongly party political view, but weighs the evidence in a dispassionate way. In such a debate, he should both praise and criticise the Government. That would give the House the impression of a Chairman of a Select Committee of some stature.

However, every time I hear the hon. Member for Westminster, North, I am disappointed, because he is such

[Mr. Barry Sheerman]

an awful Government apologist, and is renowned as such. For example, he reels out evidence that the Government are doing a wonderful job. He mentions Home Office research suggesting that crime is not as bad as everyone thinks, but he does not mention any of the other analyses and carefully toes the party line. He avoids mentioning Home Office research that suggests that there is a relationship between deprivation and crime. That causes me deep disappointment. I hope that, before a Labour Government come to power early next year, the hon. Member will give one speech in the mould of a great Select Committee Chairman.

One of the aspects we should consider in this debate is the necessity of taking a pragmatic rather than an ideological approach. My remarks will follow that line. There is a tidal wave of crime in this country, and it does no good to the people of Cardiff, Sandwell and Westminster to say there is not as much crime there as in Chicago or Sydney. That does not wash. Crime has doubled since 1979 under the so-called party of law and order.

The one sphere of crime that the Government will not consider is its underlying causes. Crime is a complex social phenomenon with no single cause or solution. Research has identified some key factors that affect crime rates. There is a critical link between crime, recession and employment opportunities. Last year, Home Office research showed a clear correlation between recession and levels of property crime. Other research has shown a critical link between crime and employment opportunities.

Only last week, the National Association of Probation Officers issued a report showing that up to 80 per cent. of probation clients are now out of work. The Apex Trust work shows that ex-offenders in employment are three times less likely to offend than those who are unemployed, which is remarkable. I wish that the Minister would respond to a point that I made in a debate last week when I spoke of the tragedy that the employment advisory service—available to prisoners both before and after their release—had been withdrawn by the Government. I wish that it could be restored.

The link between recession, deprivation and crime hardly comes as a surprise—it is a common-sense notion. Moreover, it has been obvious for more than 50 years. As long ago as 1940, Mannheim produced a report on the social aspects of crime in England in the inter-war years. His work showed that crime more than doubled during those years. The idea that the 1930s was a crime-free era is a myth. The same disastrous pattern of crime rising in the wake of recession was seen then as now. In 1940, Mannheim concluded:

"Where unemployment and crime both stand at a high water mark, it can safely be assumed that the latter is largely due to the former."

The second critical factor is the treatment of youth. Anyone wishing to tackle crime rates must pay enormous attention to youth crime because of its sheer scale. The hon. Member for Westminster, North touched on that, but he was not convincing when he spoke of the underlying causes of that crime.

Is it not astounding that half of all crime in Britain is committed by people under the age of 21? Some 73 per cent. of all auto crime is committed by those under 21. Some two thirds to three quarters of all solved burglaries are committed by young men under the age of 21. There is a tidal wave of youth crime, and the Government have not begun to answer it.

Mr. John Patten: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that there is something new about a substantial majority of crime being committed by young people—that it is a phenomenon of the 1980s and 1990s? If he looks at the statistics, he will see that it has always been like that. Right up to the head waters of time, young men have always been those most inclined to commit crime.

Mr. Sheerman: The right hon. Gentleman is right about the significance of that age group, but I am trying to point out that the age for offending has become very young. The enormous crime rate and the fact that the average age of a young person who takes a car is 15 are new and frightening phenomena.

Mr. Patten: I shall attempt not to intervene again, but I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way with his characteristic courtesy.

As a student of these matters, surely the hon. Gentleman recognises that in, for example, the past five years, the peak age for offending for a young male has not gone down but gone up. The average peak age for offending was 15 but is now 18.

Mr. Sheerman: We can pick over whether the peak age is 15 or 18, but I am saying that crime has doubled. The youth component of that crime is much more substantial than it was, according to all the figures. Whether or not the peak age has gone from 15 to 18—and specific categories of crime move either way—the average age is 18. That is worrying enough, but we are talking about a category of young criminals up to the age of 21.

Research has shown clear links between the level of crime and number of children brought up in poverty in families in difficulty. I quote from Professor Irving's introductory report to this month's international conference on urban safety, drugs and crime prevention in Paris. I hope that the Minister has read this—it should be engraved on the hearts of the Home Secretary and his Ministers. The report states that rates of child poverty

"remained constant in the 1980's for most countries, but doubled in the United Kingdom . . . The results of longitudinal studies suggest that countries that have more child poverty and do not provide universal child care or other programmes to reduce inequalities before the child goes into the school system will have more crime. This is indeed the case. Moreover the rapid increase in child poverty in England, some of which is mitigated"—

admittedly—

"by income transfers, is likely to result in further acceleration in the crime rate in the 1990's".

That is a chilling thought.

The Government are pursuing policies that are directly linked to the rise in crime. There is increasing child poverty in our country. The level of unemployment is rising—especially among the young—and we are seeing the creation of what some commentators call an 'underclass'. We see alienated young people with no stake in society and, increasingly, without even a bed. Is not that what we would have expected when the Government take on the 16 to 18-year-olds and perpetuate the myth that that age group is in full-time employment, in full-time training or in full-time education? We all know that that is a myth or a lie.

Many 16 to 18-year olds are living off their wits and on the streets. That is a sad comment on our society. Only a bone-headed Government would not accept that, by taking away young people's ability to claim benefit and housing benefit and the opportunity to receive a decent reward for a training scheme, and by halving the value of the training allowance in the past 12 years, they are picking on young people who, at the same time, are being pushed ever further towards the consumer society. Television advertising tells them that they must have designer trainers, designer clothes and good stereos. It is a sad comment on our society that the Government cannot see what they have done to young people and cannot see the relationship between what they have done and the crime rate.

The Minister said that the peak age for offending has risen to 18 from 15, but he chose the end of the two-year period that I would describe as covering the most vulnerable young people on whom the Government have picked in the past 12 years.

If, with the help of all the civil servants who advise Ministers and who sit under the Gallery and elsewhere, one worked on a policy to create crime, one could not come up with anything better than what the Government have created in the past 12 years. They have done a wonderful job of creating crime, but they will still not recognise the link to which I have referred.

Any Government who are seriously concerned about dealing with the escalating crime rate must begin to tackle crime at its roots. That means a concerted attack on poverty and it means attaching far more importance to early crime prevention measures, such as the development of pre-school provision. How can the Minister be complacent about pre-school provision? Why do not the Government set up—as the Labour party will when it takes office in a few months—a national crime prevention council to co-ordinate the work of all the Departments of state in crime prevention?

I return for a moment to the link between pre-school education and the later propensity towards crime. It has been shown that the development of pre-school provision has a very marked effect on later offending. As I have said, we lag behind our European counterparts. Ninety-five per cent. of pre-school children in France and Belgium receive state-funded education. Furthermore, each child has access to eight hours daily nursery provision in France and five to six hours in Belgium. In Britain, only 44 per cent. of three to five-year-olds receive pre-school education, and a substantial proportion of them have a school day of only two and a half hours.

The knock-on effect is unacceptable to the Government, because it means having a properly resourced training programme, a properly resourced pre-school education programme, proper training opportunities and the development of measures to counter unemployment. It also means providing a range of creative leisure opportunities for young people. They are Labour party policies, which are desperately needed in their own right but which have a vital knock-on effect on offending rates generally.

Other countries saw the need for such policies years ago. Again, the French have been at the forefront. In 1983, the Bonnemaison report brought the issues to the fore. The result was a network of municipal crime prevention councils which co-ordinate social and criminal justice agencies to deal with the circumstances that breed crime and which focus on youth in particular. Our Conservative Government reject that, as they do so many other aspects of the European social programme.

Indeed, one of the most disgraceful things that we have seen in the Chamber this week was the Maastricht agreement which, in terms of social policy, means that the opportunity to do so much to support the family, children and working mothers has been lost. The knock-on effect will be seen in the crime rate and in other aspects of our social life.

The Government have lead the country into the second division in Europe in this aspect as in many others. Their record on crime is a disaster, and it is time they gave way to a Government who have the imagination and policies to tackle crime fundamentally, not at the periphery.

8.28 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): I congratulate the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer), with whom I have debated closely during the past three or four years, on his good fortune in getting this debate at a rather fashionable hour—earlier than the watches of the night—during the Consolidated Fund debate. I think that the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) is as pleased as I that the debate started at 7.15 pm rather than at 4.15 am. I also congratulate the right hon. and learned Gentleman on the style and content of his speech.

It is a sad loss to this House that the right hon. and learned Gentleman should have decided to lay down the burden of representing the electors of Warley, West. He looks, sounds and acts youthful, and it is a great shame when someone like him decides to retire absurdly early. Doubtless he will spend a certain amount of his time enjoying himself. After his retirement, I might try to persuade him to enjoy himself by accompanying me to whatever seaside resort the Conservative party attends for its conference next October—I will ensure his safety of passage into the hall—so that he can see how few pinstripe suits there are, let alone the mythical hats of which he spoke.

I hope that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will forgive me if I answer first the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler), who supported the Government's position, before answering the remarks made by Opposition Members, who took a rather different line.

My hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North characteristically set the record straight about manpower allocations in the police force and about the critical role of Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary in objectively advising the Home Secretary on correct force levels and on the identification of posts suitable for civilianisation—for that releases policemen and women from desk jobs and puts them back on the beat, which is what the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West wants. He rightly paid tribute to the West Midlands police for what they have done in this process. Would that other forces had briskly followed the excellent example of the West Midlands force——

Mr. Archer: Perhaps it is churlish of me, after the kind remarks of the Minister, to venture to comment on what he has just said, but at the risk of being tiresome, may I point out that what I said before was that it does not follow that a decision made by the Home Secretary

[Mr. Archer]

corresponds with the advice that he receives from the chief inspector. Lest anyone be misled, I should be grateful if he would confirm that.

Mr. Patten: I can confirm that the ultimate decision is ministerial. Ministers must accept our responsibility for decisions. But the Home Secretary benefits from the objective advice of HMCIC, a distinguished policeman, and of his colleagues, who are all serving policemen and who can therefore speak from both sides of the fence.

The other important point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North concerned looking at English and Welsh crime in the context of the international scene. I agree with Opposition Members that what matters to our electorate is crime in this country. The people in my constituency are concerned about what happens there, not in America or France. Still, it is important to point out that Britain is not a violent country compared with almost every other western European country. Opposition Members like to make great play of comparing our unemployment rates with those in certain west European countries, of course. I do not suggest that, just because Britain is less violent and less prone to crime than most other west European countries, that diminishes the necessity to concentrate on the picture at home, but let us not frighten people unnecessarily by comparisons with the rest of Europe and the United States.

My hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North also mentioned car crime in his short but excellent speech. I agree with what he said about the Association of British Insurers, the insurance industry and the motor car industry, here, in western Europe and increasingly in central Europe—not to mention Japan and Korea. Those industries are scrutinising much more what they can do to make cars more secure and less easily stolen.

Yesterday, the Home Secretary and I saw representatives of car manufacturers and car importers in the United Kingdom for the second in a series of meetings. Considerable progress is being made, and we have agreed a three-point agenda for improvements in car manufacture, not just in this country but in western Europe. Happily, the message is also being carried back to Japanese manufacturers.

The first significant area for improvement concerns visible vehicle identification numbers, which are critical in stopping the international trade in car crime. Secondly, we must continue to work on introducing deadlocking for all cars. Thirdly, we must introduce effective and efficient immobilising devices. We were delighted yesterday to obtain the agreement of the manufacturers to concentrate on these three key areas. I pay tribute to the increasing attention that the industry is giving to these aspects.

The right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West first discussed the causes of crime. Any sensible policy concerned with reducing crime—crime can never be abolished—needs three components. First, we need a tough and hard-edged law and order service. The right hon. and learned Gentleman sits in court and passes sentence himself, so he has seen the issue both from these Benches and from the Bench he adorns when he sits as a recorder. That is the traditional part of British law and order, and it is what people think of when they mention it at Tory or Labour conferences. I do not know what they talk about at Liberal party conferences on law and order, and the party is not represented here this evening.

Secondly, we have added to the traditional approach the new approach of crime prevention. There has been an extraordinary growth in neighbourhood watch schemes. In 1982, there was one such scheme; now there are 92,000—a great tribute to people, for instance, in the right hon. and learned Gentleman's constituency.

There is a great deal of co-operation between the police, the fire service, the social services and South Staffordshire water board, which has devised a crime prevention package which home helps from the social services department distributed to about 5,000 homes in the area. Some of the information was printed in large type so that elderly people could read it. From such little things, considerable advances can accrue. I pay tribute to all who work in these services for what they do.

The third element, on which we have not yet concentrated enough, is criminal prevention—trying to stop people becoming criminals in the first place. Last week I was in the north-west and in Salford, where I toured a number of places, among them a primary school—it would be wrong to name it here—where the head teacher, who was clearly devoted to her inner-city children, told me that there were 260 children in the school.

I asked the sort of questions that visiting Ministers always ask: how many people worked there, what kind of classes they had, what activities and problems there were. She began to talk about the problems. Without my prompting, she said, "I have a lot of people here who I can predict are going to get into trouble." I asked how many. She said, "I have about 30 here who will get into trouble when they reach their teens. They are all right when they are five or six—they are protected then—but between seven and eleven they start becoming"—her phrase is burnt into my memory—"clones of their elder brothers and sisters who have got into trouble before." She was cheerful enough, but she was saddened when identifying those children whom she thought at risk.

It is surely important that we begin to concentrate our efforts on trying to find ways of helping such children before it becomes necessary to punish them, and to prevent them from becoming criminals in the first place. I hope that the Labour party would agree with that.

Mr. Michael: It is hardly our place to agree with something that we have been trying to tell the Minister for a long time. If he is serious in what he is saying now, it is rather like a conversion on the road to Damascus. I hope that the Minister will address seriously the comments that he has just made. Will he now take the sort of steps that people such as myself, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Warley, West (Mr. Archer) and my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) urged on him before, during and after the passage of the Criminal Justice Bill, or is that apparent conversion just another anecdotal experience? Did he really experience a conversion, and will he now respond to the remarks that he has just made?

Mr. Patten: The hon. Gentleman is impertinent, because it was all those who thought like the Opposition who did so much in the 1960s and 1970s to undermine some of the messages which used to come from schools,

teachers, park keepers and others who were part of the warp and weft in helping people grow up straight rather than crooked. But that is a debate which will continue.

Mr. Michael *rose*——

Mr. Patten: I am trying to reply, but I have only five minutes in which to do so.

I agree with the right hon. and learned Member for Warley, West that we need more officers on the beat. That is why, when my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary recently announced 1,000 additional officers, he specified that 80 out of every 100 should go straight on to the beat. However, I shall certainly draw to the attention of my right hon. and noble Friend the Earl Ferrers the right hon. and learned Gentleman's views on police manpower in the west midlands.

The hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) drew attention to the lack, as he saw it, of adequate policing in south Wales, and I shall also draw the points that he made to the attention of my noble Friend. He and I also share an interest in obtaining better secure accommodation for youngsters, particularly for those who are awaiting trial, to which the Government have given considerable priority.

I am concerned when I hear reports from the police on a number of things that trouble them. I was concerned about reports of attacks on the police, which is why the Government commissioned research into that problem. I am also concerned that some police forces are reporting apparent large-scale reoffending by those on bail—bail banditry, as it has been called by at least one policeman. The Home Office is conducting in-depth and rapid research into those suggestions, and I hope that we shall be in a position in the not-too-distant future to tell the House what we intend to do about the problem of reoffending on bail.

The speech of the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) reminded me of the late and unlamented Senator Hughie Long at his worst. I have never heard such a rant. His attack on my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North was disgraceful. People not just in this House but worldwide now listen to what my hon. Friend has to say on law and order issues. I wish that my hon. Friend was remotely biddable in the way in which the hon. Gentleman suggested. I still bear the scars of his report on the criminal injuries compensation scheme. It took me a long time to recover from the mauling that he gave me on that. I registered my protests with the Whips, but that has done no good whatever, and my hon. Friend goes from strength to strength.

The hon. Member for Huddersfield provided more equivocal support for the law and order measures which we have debated in the House in recent weeks. We have introduced the Prison Security Bill. That received a welcome from the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) which was equivocal in the extreme, and the Labour party does not support it. Earlier this week, we debated the Aggravated Vehicle-Taking Bill, to deal with those youngsters who take vehicles, causing mayhem, injury and damage with them. As always, the Labour party tried to have its cake and eat it by not voting against the Bill on Second Reading but tabling a series of wrecking amendments to destroy the Bill.

Mr. Sheerman: That was for exactly the same reason that I would criticise the right hon. Gentleman's speech tonight. It contained not one word about the fundamental problems that cause crime, but was all peripheral nonsense.

Mr. Patten: Let me end on a cheerful note. The hon. Gentleman must get himself a better brief. His speech was erected on the idea that juvenile offending had increased. Since 1985, the number of known juvenile offenders—that is, those cautioned and found guilty—has declined steadily year by year. If it is to be worth while to deal with the hon. Gentleman's arguments, they must be erected on a sound factual basis. His speech was based on the premise that juvenile offending is increasing, on which the hon. Gentleman is entirely wrong, as he was throughout his speech.

Pension Funds

8.45 pm

Mr. Kenneth Hind (Lancashire, West): I am grateful to have the opportunity to discuss this subject tonight. This debate could be regarded as a continuation of the previous debate on crime.

I have two major concerns. The first is the long-term need to protect pension fund contributors, and the second, which has worked as a catalyst, is the appropriation from the *Daily Mirror* and Maxwell Communication Corporation pension fund, of between £300 and £500 million by the major shareholder, the recently deceased Mr. Robert Maxwell. That in itself points to the need for closer consideration of the matter and probably for reform.

Earlier today, in support of this debate, I introduced a Bill to provide a framework of protection for contributors to and beneficiaries of pension funds. In future, large occupational pension funds will be a major source of British wealth. It is not without significance that we have obliged the public to contribute to pension funds to provide for their old age. We must also provide a framework which will protect them and ensure that those funds are available to benefit them when the time comes.

As the population ages, pension funds will become more significant as support for large numbers of workers in their old age and will play an important part in investment in the economy. We need only look around the City and at company reports to see the importance of pension funds as a form of investment in our major companies and in the economy.

First, I want to address the problems of Mirror Group Newspapers and the Maxwell Communication Corporation. This debacle—that is the only word to describe it—must under no circumstances be allowed to happen again. That, as much as anything, is what this debate is about.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): I hope that my hon. Friend will not take it amiss if, as somone with an open mind on the matter, I ask him whether he has had any dealings with the Maxwell empire in any shape or form and is now seeking to cleanse his spirit and soul this evening. I make that point because it is abundantly clear from statements made by many people who seem to have spent years toadying the the great man that they are now seeking to cleanse their souls and spirits by saying that they never had anything to do with him. I am sure that my hon. Friend is not such a person, but he probably has had parties in Blackpool and may well have enjoyed the odd tincture with the great man so that he now feels that he is almost obligated to his conscience to present a case this evening which is probably not true to his natural form. I await his reassurance on that.

Mr. Hind: I have no need to cleanse my soul. Perhaps those who need to do so will recollect the words of Mark Antony at Julius Caesar's funeral:

"So are they all, all honourable men."

Mr. Robert Maxwell, a former Labour Member of Parliament, was the subject of an inquiry in respect of his company, Pergamon Press. The inspector's report said of him:

"This man should never be allowed to control a public company."

How right that inspector was. How foolish we were not to take due note of that incisive comment, by a man who read Mr. Maxwell's character extremely well.

In the past, Labour Members criticised supporters of this Government and right hon. and hon. Members for financial mismanagement, but that is not the exclusive preserve of Members of every party other than Labour. No one can point a finger at anyone in this debate in that regard. The guilty have an equal share in that respect.

Robert Maxwell helped himself to the Mirror pension fund. While professional journalists—rightly, in my view—investigated the financial misdeeds of others, Maxwell had his hand in their pocket and robbed them blind. That was not all. A more serious aspect is that, after Robert Maxwell's death, we are led to believe by the newspapers that a further £300 million went missing from the group's various pension funds, which suggests that such activities went deeper than just one man, and that others were involved. They too must be called to account, and we know that those matters are now being investigated by the Serious Fraud Office.

The existing law has failed us in respect of the proper control and management of pension funds. The law is clearly defined. It is based on the law of trust—and most pension funds are trusts. There was a major judgment on that subject in 1883. In the case of Speight, the judges held:

"Trustees also have a duty to act diligently and prudently . . . in selecting an investment the trustee must take as much care as a prudent man would take in making an investment for the benefit of persons for whom he felt morally obliged to provide."

They were saying, in the language of the Victorian era, that a trustee should be as prudent in his selection of investments as he would be in dealing with his own.

More recently, in the case of Cowan *v.* Scargill in 1984, the same sentiment was repeated in modern-day language:

"Trustees are required to exercise their powers in the best interest of present and future beneficiaries; trustees must put on one side their own personal, social, or political views".

Those are clear guidelines to the way in which pension funds should operate. The Maxwell affair has clearly shown that a coach and horses was driven through that law, so we must consider carefully the need to change it.

Mr. David Martin (Portsmouth, South): My hon. Friend makes a significant point about the duties of trustees. Will he deal also with the trustees themselves, and say whether there should be better legal rights—to provide for a more significant number of ex-employees to serve as trustees, so that the interests of all members of a pension fund can be better protected?

Mr. Hind: My hon. Friend leads me to my next point. My Bill would not allow a director or shareholder to serve as a member of the pension fund trust of the employer company. Control of the pension fund should be at arm's length, by independent persons who are not involved in the management of the employer company.

Robert Maxwell proved the undesirability of having directors or chairmen who are in control of both the company, as majority shareholders, and the pension fund. He was a fund trustee, along with his two sons, so effectively he controlled both the company and the fund. That led to the problems that the fund faces today.

If one individual holds a dominant commercial position in respect of a pension fund, he or she will be able to direct those who operate the fund, in the same way that he or she manages the company—and will be able to select those

persons who are to serve as trustees and manage the fund. That clearly happened in respect of the MGM and MCC pension funds.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): My hon. Friend's views will be shared by many pensioners. Does he agree that pension fund assets would be easier to identify if they were held in the fund's own name rather than in the names of nominee companies? Although nominee companies are perfectly legal, do they not present a determined manipulator such as Robert Maxwell with opportunities to cover his tracks as he goes along?

Mr. Hind: My hon. Friend makes a good point. My Bill advocates that there should be no nominee companies, and that a pension fund should be a recognised legal entity. The people who control a fund should be clearly defined, as should the rights of contributors. I will return to that aspect later.

If one person dominates the fund, directors are appointed by this majority shareholder, as well as the trustees. On 31 January, Lord Williams of Elvel, Labour's deputy leader in another place, and a director of Mirror Group Newspapers, addressed their Lordships on that very point—on corporate governance. He raised questions on comments made by my noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Technology, saying——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. The hon. Gentleman is, I think, aware that hon. Members are not allowed to quote directly what has been said by a Member of the Upper House unless that Member is a Minister. I should be obliged if the hon. Gentleman would paraphrase.

Mr. Hind: Lord Williams of Elvel was talking about chief executives, and about non-executive directors confirming what he described as the outrageous ambitions of a chairman or chief executive. Now, the outrageous ambitions of another chief executive, unfortunately deceased, have been revealed for all to see. Perhaps Lord Williams and one or two others should take their own advice.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): Is it not particularly extraordinary, in the case of Lord Williams——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Perhaps I could give the hon. Gentleman and the House a little guidance. The Chair is not prepared to entertain criticism of Members of the Upper House unless there is a substantive motion before this House. There is no such motion this evening, and I therefore hope that the hon. Gentleman will observe the correct procedures.

Mr. Butterfill: I am grateful for that guidance. I did not intend to express a direct criticism; I merely wished to comment that it was extraordinary that someone with such a distinguished record, who had been a managing director of Barings and, I believe, chairman of Ansbacher, should associate himself with the gentleman whom we are discussing.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have given my guidance. Hon. Members are enjoying themselves: let us keep it at that level, provided that it is within our procedures. I know that they will follow the procedures of the House, and stay in line with the guidance that I have given—and that given by Mr. Speaker, which will have been heard by hon. Members who were present earlier.

Mr. Hind: An important aspect of the relationship between directors and trustees is illustrated by the closeness of the relationship between the Mirror Group Newspapers pension fund and the companies. The accounts for last year contain an interesting section headed "Investment Report". It states

> "As part of this process, the following changes were made in the structure of the Scheme's investment. Due to uncertain stock market conditions and relatively high interest rates, the Trustees instructed its investment managers to sell stocks, and hold an average of 20 per cent. of their portfolios in the form of cash deposits".

The trustees and directors must have been aware—as it was in the report—that they were converting stocks into cash, which the company could subsequently borrow and invest in other Maxwell companies. As we know, that is probably what happened. It almost seems as if preparations were made for what subsequently took place.

The report continues:

> "a further £12,034,000 was invested in the Common Investment Fund . . . this fund is managed by Bishopsgate Investment Management (BIM) in conjunction with other pension funds managed by the Pergamon Group Pensions Departments. The Scheme's participation in the CIF remains crucial to the Trustee's overall strategy".

The management of a pension fund must be independent of the employer company. BIM—a company that was charged with the management of a large proportion of the pension funds—was a private company wholly owned by the Maxwell family. Effectively, they were appointing the directors and staff, and, therefore, handling all the funds from the pension schemes.

We are not discussing an arm's-length transaction. If legislation is to be drawn up, as I advocate in my Bill, that is precisely the sort of abuse that we should set out to prevent.

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Is it not slightly ironic that various investigative journalists such as Paul Foot and Alastair Campbell, who spend considerable time investigating corruption in other parts of the business world, should find that their own pensions seem to have been pinched from their own company over their heads?

Mr. Hind: I made that point earlier. While those people were investigating other people's pockets, Robert Maxwell had his hand in their pockets and was robbing them blind. That is a fact of life. I feel deeply sorry for them, and hope that their experience will be a salutary lesson that will help the rest of the country to avoid repeating it.

We cannot avoid the fact that the people appointed to manage the funds must carry some responsibility. Sycophants and nominees of the dominant majority shareholder of the employer company must not be in a position to manage the company.

Lord Donoughue, a Labour peer, was one of the directors of Bishopsgate until fairly recently. Interestingly enough, Madam Deputy Speaker, he is reported to have said in another place—*[Interruption.]*—I mean, Mr. Speaker. I apologise—it was the wig that threw me.

In the other place, Lord Donoughue said that tame directors were often appointed—friends of the majority shareholder, who would not ask too many awkward questions.

Mr. Roger King: Flunkeys.

Mr. Hind: That is a good word, and I shall adopt it. We must ensure that no more flunkeys are appointed to pension funds. It is not in the interests of the general public.

Mr. Butterfill: It might have been better if the company had been called Billingsgate rather than Bishopsgate. Then everyone would have known that there was something fishy going on.

Mr. Hind: My hon. Friend makes his own point.

The fourth matter to which the House should give serious consideration is the proportion of any pension fund that can be invested in the employer company. I shall listen with interest to what my hon. Friend the Minister says about that. I know that the Government are giving serious consideration to restricting to 5 per cent. the proportion of a total fund that may be invested in the employer company. I would certainly advocate that as a sensible course. It would prevent a pension fund from collapsing should a company go into receivership.

A recent example from the north-west was provided by the Lewis's stores group, which has recently gone into receivership. It was the subject of a motion under Standing Order No. 20 on which, with your permission, Mr. Speaker, I spoke some months ago. The receivers found that in February 1990 the company had sold an empty building in Bolton to the pension fund for £2·4 million. That building has not returned any profit to the pension fund and since then, I am told, it has declined in value.

In April 1990, £250,000 worth of contributions to the pension fund were not paid by the company. The following summer, that company borrowed £1·25 million from the fund. That sum has not been repaid, and since then the group of companies has gone into receivership, been broken up and sold. The money is probably lost to the pension contributors and beneficiaries. Although the group owned several department stores, it was not a big company. We must act with care to guard against such things happening.

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): While he is talking about tracing assets, does my hon. Friend intend to say anything about the Labour party's failure so far to admit how much money it received from Maxwell over the years, and to offer to restore it, since the donations were clearly funded directly or indirectly by pillaging the pension funds of working people? Early-day motion 365 refers to the matter. Perhaps my hon. Friend, having introduced this debate, has heard from the Labour party about its intention to reveal how much money it has received.

Mr. Hind: My hon. Friend makes a good point and I have no doubt that the House will note the early-day motion to which he referred.

The fifth point to be included in a Bill is that there should be a declaration that the assets of the pension fund are the property of the contributors and not of the employer company. A case has been decided on those lines, but the principle has not yet gained widespread acceptance.

The first time when such a case came to my notice was in the mid-1980s when BTR—the Birmingham Tyre and Rubber company—tried to take over the Pilkington Group, which is one of the major employers in my constituency. On that occasion, it was made clear to me by the employees who worked and lived in my constituency that they had real anxiety that the balances that were oversubscribed in the pension fund would be taken by BTR as part of the takeover and would be used for the benefit of BTR because they would be regarded as part of the acquisition.

It is important that we make it clear that that should not be allowed to happen, and that all payments into the pension fund are the property of the contributors and of the beneficiaries. If that principle were established, even if there were oversubscriptions, the contributions would be carried forward in perpetuity for the benefit of future contributors and future recipients of pensions.

Mirror Group Newspapers is a similar case. To whom do overpayments into a pension fund belong? At Mirror Group Newspapers, there has been a recent holiday payment for the company of the 14 per cent. that should have been made into the pension fund. That means that the company is benefiting from what would normally pass into the company pension fund for the benefit of the employees. I should like such practices to end, and we should take a clear look at the problem. Oversubscriptions should be not for the benefit of the employer company, but for the benefit of the contributors and of those who will receive pensions from the fund.

Mr. David Martin: On the subject of holidays from contributions, does my hon. Friend consider that there should be a duty to make up pensions that have fallen behind in inflationary terms? That would restore them to their original value. Should that be an obligation over the years so that, as people get older, they do not find that their pension is falling in purchasing value?

Mr. Hind: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Surely that must be the responsibility of the trustees and of the contributors to the pension fund in the terms and conditions when a pension fund is set up. Within the framework of legislation, such an aim would be difficult to achieve. It might be regarded, especially in relation to some of the existing pension funds, as quite an onerous burden to take on. However, as an aspiration, it would seem a sensible approach.

The sixth point to be included in a Bill is that the trustees should make annual reports to each contributor. The directors of an employer company are required to produce accounts which are registered at Companies house and which are distributed to shareholders. They know exactly where the company stands. The company provides a balance sheet and consolidated accounts. Shareholders know how a company performs. That same luxury is not provided to the pension fund contributors. Under the legislation that I have in mind, the contributors would be able to deal with those matters. The trustees would then be appointed by the pension fund contributors. If there was any difficulty, the contributors could go, as in company legislation, to the High Court for directions.

The seventh and most essential point is that we must have regulations to make such a system work. There should be a registrar of pension funds who would be appointed to apply to all funds to register annual returns and to distribute them to their members. Such a registrar would have enforcement powers, so that he could deal with those who failed to register and to carry out the duties imposed under the legislation. I appreciate that my colleagues will say that that is another quango. Of course

it is. However, it is an important move which must be taken when we are considering the large sums involved in pension investment and management.

Apart from a home, a pension is probably the largest single item that we purchase in our lifetime. It is also one of our most fundamental purchases, and it is the security for our retirement. Because of that, it is important that it is adequately protected. It should be free from the pilfering or appropriation of the likes of Robert Maxwell and people who want to follow in his footsteps. We should separate the company from the pension fund and protect the workers of this country, so ensuring that we can provide adequately for their futures.

9.15 pm

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) on securing a debate on one of the major live issues. That it has only just become so is incredible, because over the years pensions have been regarded as rather boring and not many people have been interested in them, although 11 million people have rights under occupational pension schemes.

The Select Committee on Social Security, of which I am a member, is currently investigating occupational pension funds in this country. Although it is early days, some things are clear. On the evidence that we have received, the vast majority of pension funds are operating satisfactorily.

The case that has highlighted one of the shortcomings of pension funds, the Maxwell affair as it has become known—or Mirrorgate and Labourgate as it is known in some circles—is the only known instance where a man who was once described in a Department of Trade and Industry report as unfit to be a director of a public company ended up running a pension fund. Maxwellgate is the only known instance where a man with a series of major family companies, both offshore and onshore, based in Liechtenstein and Gibraltar, ended up running a pension fund. That is why we are debating the affair today.

The present system for looking after pension funds and pensioners' money should have been more than adequate. Lawyers draw up constitutions of pension funds and normally operate them to a high standard. The actuaries attempt to assess liabilities while the auditors carry out audits. With the benefit of that professional work and advice, the trustees supervise and control.

One should be able to rely on the trustees. They should be the right kind of people with proper training, qualifications and expertise to carry out the job. I would differ from my hon Friend the Member for Lancashire, West over his reference to trustees. Directors are often the right and proper people to be trustees. The directors must determine what benefits the pension fund should provide. They also have a responsibility, as company directors, for earning the money to make up the deficiencies if a pension fund becomes short of money. That can occur when investment returns are not sufficient to meet the benefits that the directors want to pay.

It will always be necessary with occupational pension schemes to have a relationship between the directors of a company and the trustees. However, I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West that there should be at least one or two directors and trustees, who are non-executive directors with wider experience than just being a director of the company and trustees, who are totally independent of the company. That clearly failed in Mirrorgate.

The Financial Services Act 1986, one of the tightest and most bureaucratic pieces of legislation that the House of Commons has ever passed, should have provided many significant controls to protect the *Mirror* pensioners. It appears to have failed, because the two fund management companies were allowed to come under the control of Mr. Maxwell, his family interests and the Liechtenstein and Gibraltar trusts.

Mr. Michael Irvine (Ipswich): My hon. Friend has rightly referred to the Mirror Group pensioners. Is he aware that, according to my information, it was not just the Mirror Group pension fund that Maxwell was running? He had effective control of no fewer than seven pension funds. Many of my constituents have suffered from his pillaging in another pension fund, and there are other pension funds besides that on which he had his hands.

Mr. Shaw: I thank my hon. Friend for reminding me of that. I am aware that he has been involved in trying to defeat and thwart Mr. Maxwell in his own constituency. I hope that his constituents realise how hard he has fought Mr. Maxwell and his cronies on their behalf. I have every confidence that, at the next election, he will get a result that will show his constituents that he has taken a strong interest in looking after their affairs in this matter.

Besides the professionals and the Financial Services Act, the superannuation fund office of the Inland Revenue takes a strong interest in the affairs of pension funds. As my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West pointed out, the superannuation fund office of the Inland Revenue is an internal organisation, and it is not responsible for publishing accounts. Indeed, today, in answer to a question, the Chancellor of the Exchequer refuses to tell me the latest dates for filing accounts of the Maxwell group of companies pension funds because he regards that as confidential taxpayer information.

Much tax relief is given by the authority of the House of Commons to people who have and run pension funds, yet, with large amounts of tax relief being given, we do not have, through the superannuation fund office, rights of access to very large pension fund accounts for the general public as well as, perhaps, for the people who are interested as beneficiaries. Some form of registration, very similar to that of the Registrar of Companies' operation, is necessary for major pension fund accounts. About £200 billion to £300 billion is now manged in pension fund form. Not only beneficiaries but the general public should have access to those accounts, as happens with private companies that must disclose their accounts to the Registrar of Companies.

We should focus on the main safeguard that Mirror Group pensioners and all other pensioners should have been relying upon—the role of the trustees. The trustees should have been the protection for the Mirror Group pensioners and the Maxwell Communication Corporation pensioners, and for all the other pensioners whom my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich mentioned.

What has gone wrong, and what questions should we ask? I prefer to ask questions rather than give answers and suggestions, because the Social Security Select Committee is still investigating the matter, and other matters

[Mr. Shaw]

connected wth pension funds. How could one man who was unfit to be a director of a public company have so much power?

That is not the only thing that was said in the report. I read the Department of Trade and Industry report extensively in 1981, when I worked in a merchant bank and Mr. Maxwell came on the telephone to say that he wanted to be a client of that merchant bank. I rejected Mr. Maxwell as a client of that bank not only because of the statement that he was unfit to be a director of a public company but because the rest of the report shows that he did not take professional advice. He was not interested in legal or financial advice; he was interested only in the ends of whatever he wanted to achieve.

We must also ask how Mr. Maxwell, with his reputation, could end up running an investment management company that was controlled through Liechtenstein and Gibraltar.

Mr. Butterfill: Mr. Maxwell's track record did not relate only to Pergamon. Before that, a mail order company had collapsed in considerable disorder and disarray. There was therefore a long track record of such problems being associated with Mr. Maxwell.

Mr. Shaw: My hon. Friend is correct. Before Mr. Maxwell became a Labour Member of Parliament there was what one might call a "blemish" in his background, but it got worse over the years. What happened is, therefore, all the more strange given the Liechtenstein connection, which was obviously set up for tax avoidance or tax evasion purposes. Mr. Maxwell was a man who wanted to avoid doing what the rest of us in this country do—pay our taxes—by operating through Liechtenstein. According to a written answer that I received today, nine Departmeat of Trade and Industry reports have been produced in recent years showing that Liechtenstein is a dubious place for any company in this country to have business connections with. However, Mr. Maxwell, who was fiddling his taxes, ended up owning investment management companies that were supposed to be properly regulated in the City of London.

Mr. Roger King: I have been listening to what my hon. Friend is saying and understand the message that he is successfully putting across, that change is required because we need to protect ordinary pensioners from having their pension funds looted by freebooting capitalists. Does my hon. Friend have any evidence of how widespread that practice is? Does it touch every single pension fund? One gets the impression that every pension fund is being plundered by out-of-control behemoths, like the hideous Maxwell. My hon. Friend should look carefully at this case, because Mr. Maxwell was an outrageous and extraordinary creature, who somehow controlled everyone around him, even honourable newspapers such as *The Daily Mirror* and the campaigning journalists who have been mentioned.

I wonder whether my hon. Friend, in seeking to avoid any repetition of what has happened, is going a little too far in seeking all the changes to which he has referred, bearing in mind the fact that vast numbers of perfectly honest and respectable trustees control pension funds. Let us hope and pray that it does not happen again. After all, Mr. Maxwell is buried on the Mount of Olives and we are told that, in the event of a second coming, he will rise up to haunt us all again. Let us hope that, if we get hold of a JCB, we can eliminate that possibility. But let us remember that we shall probably not see the like of him again.

Mr. Shaw: I began by saying that this is a particularly unusual case because Mr. Maxwell was named in a Department of Trade and Industry report and we do not know of any other example in which somebody who was named in a DTI report has ended up running a pension fund or pension fund companies. I think that my hon. Friend was intending to suggest that Mr. Maxwell was probably not a capitalist, but a socialist who liked living off other people's money.

I am sure that my hon. Friend would want us to ask other relevant questions, such as how all this came about. We must ask ourselves how Mr. Maxwell became so desperate for cash that he plundered the pensions of 16,000 people in the Mirror group and the Maxwell Communication Corporation and other pension funds. We are talking about something serious and about a serious amount of money.

We must also ask ourselves why no one stood up to Mr. Maxwell. Why did the trustees not stand up to him? We have heard earlier about trustees in the other House, whom we must not talk about for various reasons of propriety and the rules and regulations of the House. However, we must question how people with titles could turn out to be such a weak lot. Surely it is not simply because they are socialists or members of the Labour party. Surely there is more to it than that.

Why did directors resign from some of those companies in the past year without explanations being given? Why did not the remaining directors, some of whom are members of the upper House and have socialist and Labour party connections, stand up and inquire? These members of the upper House demand enough information of the Government. Why did not they demand the information of Mr. Maxwell and his cronies? One is led to the conclusion that in this case the trustees consisted of a lot of political cronies and that the real questions were not asked because of Mr. Maxwell's political power and connections.

I come to the last and significant question that I want to ask.

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): On the nine o'clock news tonight, we learned that evidence has come out that the Department of Trade and Industry was told about possible irregularities over a year ago and took no action. The hon. Gentleman would do better to address the system and structure that control pensions, rather than make cheap political points. Everyone is worried about irregularities in the City. For a long time, the Opposition have searched for structures and asked the Government to implement them against their friends in the City.

Mr. Shaw: The so-called irregularities of which the hon. Gentleman speaks are being investigated by the Conservative Government and have been investigated for some time. They are being dealt with. I cannot go into the irregularities in detail, because they are not relevant to the debate. However, in all probability the irregularities were financed by pension fund money. The purpose was to create a false market in the shares.

Any decent director of a public company—in the case of Mirror Group Newspapers and Maxwell

Communication Corporation, those directors were Labour party sympathisers and supporters—would take steps to check why the price of the shares in the market was above what it should have been. Clearly, the Labour party supporters who were on the boards of those two companies did not investigate to a sufficient extent their share prices, where the pension moneys were going and what the trustees were doing.

The key questions are: where has the money gone, and what lessons can we learn for the future? The money appears to have been diverted into 400 companies, to end up sometimes in the banks and sometimes in private family money accounts around the world.

But more significantly and importantly, there is a political aspect to the loss of the pension fund moneys. Moneys have gone into publications such as *The European*. *The European* unfortunately brings us close to the question whether the Leader of the Opposition and his family benefited from Maxwell or Mirror Group pension fund moneys. Two children of the Leader of the Opposition were employed at *The European* newspaper. That is very close to the Leader of the Opposition. It is sad, and normally I would not make much of it, but the Leader of the Opposition did not worry about unleashing the dogs of war on Mark Thatcher when my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) was Prime Minister. In the end, Mark Thatcher went abroad to make his money legitimately and properly.

I am sure that the Leader of the Opposition will want to come to the House and make a statement about all moneys that his family may have received directly or indirectly from any Maxwell organisation, whether *The European* newspaper or any other. He should make a statement about the full amount of money and what he proposes to do. He should state whether he proposes to repay it to the Mirror Group pensioners and other pensioners who are suffering and may suffer as a result.

It would be helpful also if the Leader of the Opposition would answer some obvious questions. Has his office—has he—at any time benefited in any way, shape or form from Mr. Maxwell's and other contributions? We know that the Labour party has benefited from Mr. Maxwell. We know that pension fund money may have gone to the Labour party, even if indirectly. We know that £38,000 went to the Boundary Commission fighting fund and that £44,000 went to the Labour party direct. We know that other sums have been used to support advertising and publications of the Labour party.

The suggestion has been made that a Member of the upper House closely connected with the deputy Leader of the Opposition may also have facilitated that person receiving money to finance his office. We all know that politics is tough in this country and that there are not state moneys in that connection, but it is important when something like this happens that, if pensioners' money has ended up financing the offices of the Opposition, that money must be declared openly, and a statement should be made on the Floor of the House. I hope that personal statements will be made.

Mr. Butterfill: Has my hon. Friend had an opportunity to read an article in *The Spectator* which says that one of the directors of the Mirror Group was being seriously considered by the Leader of the Opposition as a future Governor of the Bank of England?

Mr. Shaw: My hon. Friend is right. I am aware of that article in *The Spectator* today, but I had imposed my own self-censorship because the article refers to a Member of the upper House closely connected with the Labour party, and I have taken great pains to remain in order throughout my speech. I accept—one can say this without criticism—that it would have been very dangerous had that person become Governor of the Bank of England.

It seems that the trustees have failed the pensioners and have much to answer for to the Select Committee on Social Security, which has asked them to attend next Tuesday's meeting. More legislation may be required on trustees. At present, case law operates for trustees, and that case law is not as clear as statute law. That is unfortunate, because, until this case arose, by and large we had few problems with pension funds. The vast majority of such funds in this country are run satisfactorily and properly.

It is equally clear that, particularly in the case of the Mirror group, the merchant banks and the professionals—who carefully briefed the City of London to the effect that Maxwell had been separated from control and that Maxwell companies were separated from any influence over the public company and its pension funds—utterly failed the pensioners.

More than anything, the Labour party, its contacts and connections failed the 16,000 Mirror Group pensioners and other pensioners who obtained their pensions through Maxwell-connected companies. The Labour party has a lot to answer for in this case.

9.37 pm

Mr. Michael Meacher (Oldham, West): I congratulate the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind) on obtaining a debate on what is undoubtedly an important subject. I have been seeking for some time to get the issue urgently on the parliamentary agenda, but the Secretary of State for Social Security, whom I have already dubbed the invisible man of the Government, has maintained, and is still maintaining, a deafening silence.

I do not know how he justifies his keep in the Cabinet, when an explosive issue of this kind arises, directly within his responsibility, and he says nothing, apart from suggesting that he may bring forward the regulation on self-investment on which he has already been sitting for over 18 months and which, as I shall show, is in any case irrelevant to the Maxwell saga.

Pension funds currently total £300 billion to £400 billion, the largest single block of funds in the City. The degree of regulation at present is the lightest imaginable. It is true—I did not know that it was Speight 1883, but I am sure that that is correct—that pension funds are run by trustees, who are under a legal obligation to manage the funds in the interest of their members, but in practice the discretion that they exercise is virtually unlimited. Moreover, the trustees are generally appointed by the employer and often—not just in the Maxwell case—the chairman of the company is also the chairman of the pension fund. That may well mean, as has already been said, that the funds are used in highly questionable ways.

There is nothing at present to stop trustees investing in the shares of the parent company. There is nothing at present to stop trustees appointing managers from their own group. There is nothing to stop new owners of a business after a takeover winding up the fund and

[Mr. Michael Meacher]

transferring the pensioners to a new fund and then pocketing the surplus. That is exactly what Hanson tried to do in respect of Imperial Tobacco.

There is nothing to stop employers paying pensioners a miserly 3 per cent. a year increase in their pensions—far below the average rate of inflation of the Thatcher years, which was 9 per cent. a year—while draining off the surplus or taking a unilateral contributions holiday. There is nothing to stop an employer shifting pension fund moneys away from reliable blue chip stock investments into much more risky and speculative gambles. All these things have happened, and they are by no means confined to Maxwell.

Mr. Butterfill: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: I shall only give way a few times, because there is limited time.

Mr. Butterfill: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

While we are on the subject, would the hon. Gentleman agree that Mr. Maxwell clearly had difficulty in distinguishing between personal and corporate assets, and even greater difficulty, apparently, in distinguishing between personal and pension fund assets? Given that Mr. Maxwell was a major benefactor of the Labour party, both corporately and personally, and given that not just the Labour party but perhaps the private offices of some Labour party Front-Bench spokesmen may have benefited, and therefore, quite unwittingly perhaps, benefited from moneys which were tainted and not properly available to be given to them, can the hon. Gentleman give an undertaking tonight that the Labour party will forthwith undertake to repay all those moneys just in case they may have been tainted?

Mr. Meacher: I must say that I find it nauseating hypocrisy for Tory party Members who have for years received hundreds of thousands of pounds from people like Mr. Asil Nadir, the Hong Kong tycoon whose name I cannot remember, and Mr. Latsis, who had a close relationship with the Greek colonels, to seek to lambast the Labour party for receiving money from rich men. It is an utterly disreputable and contemptible attempt to divert a serious debate by those lurid charges.

Mr. Rogers: My hon. Friend is quite right to point out that the Tory party has been the recipient of moneys over the years from the City and has justified it as perfectly proper. As my hon. Friend has said, their hypocrisy is now evident. I do not know whether the bubbles and the heat are bringing up the sewer rats of the Tory party, but some of the statements that I have heard here tonight have been absolutely appalling.

Tory Members, as I am sure my hon. Friend will point out, have opposed the regulation of the City year after year; they have opposed any moves towards the declaration of political funds for political parties. They have dithered like this for all these years, and now, just like sewer rats, they bubble up to the surface.

Mr. Butterfill: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order for an Opposition Member to call Conservative Members who raise legitimate points of interest sewer rats? Is that parliamentary?

Mr. Speaker: That is probably going over the top. I ask the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) to withdraw the phrase "sewer rats", which is not parliamentary.

Mr. Rogers: Under your direction, Mr. Speaker, I withdraw it.

Mr. Meacher: There is a yawning gap in pension fund law. That is agreed on both sides of the House.

Mr. Nicholls *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: I am not giving way. I am sure the hon. Gentleman would only perpetuate the low quality of debate which he generally introduces.

Mr. Nicholls: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: That is not unparliamentary.

Mr. Nicholls: That was not the point that I was about the make, Mr. Speaker. I had it in mind that it was a tradition of the House that, if a Front-Bench spokesman deliberately spoke critically of a Back-Bench Member, it was courtesy to give way.

Mr. Speaker: The convention of the House is that, if an hon. Member does not give way, other hon. Members sit down.

Mr. Meacher: As the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Shaw) rightly said, the superannuation office of the Inland Revenue makes sure that it gets its tax. The occupational pension advisory service makes sure that minimum pension benefits are provided. After that, it is a black hole.

The Government's response has been mind-blowingly complacent. Faced with a national outcry over the Maxwell revelations, the Secretary of State, like the three monkeys, heard nothing, saw nothing and said nothing. Instead, at the end of last night's debate, the Minister of State was wheeled out to mumble a hastily prepared script which purports to be the Government's considered response to a week of angry, blazing headlines. He said:

"but we acknowledge that trustees have a clear duty to act at all times in the interests of the beneficiaries of the scheme. They are required by law to disclose certain facts to their pensioners, the trade unions and the members of their funds. The actuarial valuation of the funds is an important part of that. When we have considered the outcome of the Maxwell situation, we shall consider whether any further changes to the law are needed. I am not prejudging that issue when I say that, if somebody deliberately sets out to commit fraud on a massive scale, there is precious little that the law or regulatory agencies can do to prevent it entirely."

That last sentence takes the biscuit. The Minister says that they cannot stop a deliberate fraudster breaking the law but the Government have not given the regulatory bodies any powers to prevent fraud in the first place. Hon. Members will note that he said:

"When we have considered the outcome of the Maxwell situation, we shall consider whether any further changes to the law are needed."—[*Official Report*, 11 December 1991; Vol. 200, c. 918.]

The Mirror Group Newspapers case is not by a long way the first episode which should have put a shot across the Government's bows. Many well-known companies, including Vauxhall, Decca, Babcock and Wilcox, Imperial Group and Thomas Tilling, have all over the last few years revealed serious flaws in the structure of their occupational pension funds.

Then, of course, there is Hanson. A week ago, I received out of the blue a letter from a person in Stockbridge, Hampshire, whom I have never met. He wrote:

"I should like to remind you of the raid on Courage Brewery pension fund during the short ownership by Lord Hanson prior to the sale to John Elliot of Elders. The business had been rationalised by the Hanson henchmen—staff sacked, businesses sold off, assets transferred, land thought to belong to the sports and social club sold for an industrial estate, then Courages put up for sale. A dispute occurred over a huge cash surplus, £100 million, I think, in the employees' pension fund. This money was to be transferred from the pension fund of Courage employees to a fund in Lord Hanson's control prior to the sale, of course quite legally. The new fund was not to be used for the Courage employees whose contributions made the surplus but lost to the Hanson empire."

I hope Conservative Members will note that it is not by any means only in the case of Maxwell that wrongdoings occur.

Mr. Nicholls *rose*——

Mr. Hind *rose*——

Mr. Meacher: I will give way to the hon. Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind), who made a much more balanced speech.

Mr. Hind: Clearly, there are problems in the industry generally. I use the Maxwell case as an example because it is horrendous. Would both sides of the House agree about introducing legislation on this matter? If it is felt that legislation should be introduced in the near future, will the hon. Gentleman pledge, on behalf of the Opposition, to support it so that it could be taken through the House quickly?

Mr. Meacher: Indeed. I am glad to give that assurance, and if the hon. Gentleman listens to the rest of my speech, he will see that I shall take that line strongly.

In the light of what I regard as cheap party political points made by several hon. Members, I make it clear that Maxwell's actions were inexcusable. But they are not new—such action has been going on for years. Everybody knows that—pensioners, company employees, the media and the public—and everybody wanted action to stop it, except, apparently, the Government.

Mr. Nicholls: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Meacher: No, I shall not give way.

I was interested to read a few days ago an article by Christopher Fildes of the *Daily Telegraph*, who wrote on 9 December:

"The Minister responsible—Tony Newton, caught with his mouth open, and surely not long for high office—cannot say he was not warned. More than two years ago, I told him here that pensions would blow up in his face".

He then quotes a previous article of his entitled "Bomb in Tony Newton's in-tray", of 31 July 1989.

Why has the Secretary of State failed to act in the past two and a half years? Does he realise that, by sitting on his hands and doing nothing about the matter for the past several years, he bears some responsibility for the losses suffered and for the fact that Mirror Group Newspapers pensioners have been cheated of their pensions? He bears some responsibility for the losses suffered by other pensioners and employees in a string of recent notorious cases because of the lack of a law which would have prevented those dubious and questionable practices from taking place. By his complacency and by dithering over his response—or rather non-response—to the Maxwell scandal, he is still causing anxiety and apprehension to millions of pensioners who are genuinely very worried about whether their pension fund is secure.

I mean no disrespect to the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Maidstone, but if the Secretary of State does not come out of hiding soon and come to the Dispatch Box with considered proposals to stop the rape of pension funds, he will have forfeited his right to retain his office and, in my view, he should resign. If he has any doubts about what he should do, I shall tell him.

First, the Secretary of State should enshrine in law the clear principle—I was glad to hear the hon. Member for Lancashire, West make the same point—that the pension fund moneys belong to their members, not to the employers. That is not just the long-held view of the Labour party but was the decision last year of the European Court in the Barber judgment, which declared that men and women should have equal pay. That meant that there should be equal pensions, because pensions are deferred pay.

Secondly, the right hon. Gentleman should legislate—again, I am wholly in agreement with the hon. Member for Lancashire, West—to provide for an independent chairman who is not to be the chairman of the parent company, or a member of the parent company board. He should require—we may differ a little on this, but I insist on it—that there be a 50 per cent. employee representation, consisting of at least one pensioner representative, on the trust board. Those employee representatives must be independently elected, not chosen by the managers or owners of the parent company.

That is exactly the framework that we proposed during the Committee stage of the Social Security Act 1990, but it received the same negligent and complacent response from the Government then, on 6 March 1990, as it does now. The then junior Minister for Social Security said in response to our proposal:

"We feel that it would be an unnecessary intrusion into the way that pension schemes are run and set up, to give the state the power to require schemes to have member trustees".—[*Official Report*, Standing Committee G, 6 March 1990; c. 348.]

It was that folly, due to political dogma—the Government's refusal to require the appointment of 50 per cent. employee representatives to keep a close eye on an errant employer—that led directly to Maxwell's autocratic control of the MGN pension funds and their subsequent misuse.

Thirdly, the Secretary of State should require full and up-to-date disclosure of all relevant information covering the financial state of the pension fund. Every member of that board should be an equal recipient of that information.

Fourthly, the Secretary of State should regulate extremely tightly both self-investment and stock lending—I am surprised that stock lending has not been mentioned more tonight. The 5 per cent. self-investment regulation, which the Secretary of State has already been sitting on for 18 months and has still not introduced, is flawed because it exempts permanently any self-investment in the company's properties, as opposed to shares which exist when the law is finally changed.

More importantly, reference to that much-delayed regulation was the only response made by the Secretary of

[Mr. Meacher]

State to the Maxwell revelations, and it was irrelevant because Maxwell did not self-invest in the parent company, but drained off the funds to an entirely separate set of private interests. Therefore, even if the Secretary of State's regulation had been in place five years ago, it would still not have stopped Maxwell doing what he did by one iota. We await any Government response that is relevant to preventing what has happened, which we all agree involved misdeeds.

Fifthly, the right hon. Gentleman should make statutory provision for the redress of complaints. He should offer recourse to an independent tribunal with enforcement powers—possibly within the industrial tribunal framework—so that the complaints and grievances of pension fund members can be properly addressed.

Sixthly, and most importantly, we need a statutory trust deed to provide a model for the operation and administrative procedures of pension funds. At present, employers can, idiosyncratically, write their own trust deeds. They do not have to conform to a trust framework that guarantees the protection of the proper rights and interests of employees and pensioners. That standard trust deed should regulate the nature and frequency of trustee meetings, establish minimum standards for disclosure, standardise rules for the actuarial calculation of surpluses, which are gravely lacking at present, and regulate investment procedures.

I hope that the Under-Secretary will note that I think that we should look at European procedures and practice. In particular, we should consider the rules in the Benelux countries, whereby about two thirds of pension fund assets must be invested in cash or fixed-interest stock. We should also look at the provision in Germany of a degree of compulsory insolvency insurance so that pensioners are protected against losses suffered from speculation outside blue chip stock investment. I think that the Select Committee is to do so, which I strongly support.

There must be new rules to regulate the allocation of surpluses. It is simply wrong for employers to siphon off surpluses or take unilateral contributions holidays, which amounts to much the same thing, when pensioners are being fobbed off with a mere average 3 per cent. annual increase in pension to protect them against inflation—especially when the average inflation rate in the Thatcher years was 9 per cent. The first duty of the pension fund must be to provide best quality pensions for its members, including adequate inflation protection, which is currently gravely lacking.

I draw attention to the secret protocol to the economic and monetary union treaty which, it was announced today, was signed at Maastricht. In effect, the Prime Minister has signed away equal pension rights between British men and women for the next 40 years, secretly, without warning or consultation, and with dubious constitutional validity because it flies in the face of the Barber judgment of May last year. This is, in effect, the third opt-out from the treaty on economic and monetary union by this outsider Prime Minister.

When that is fully understood, it will cause intense anger among the millions of pensioners and employees who will find that their hopes and expectations of pension equality in retirement have been abruptly and unceremoniously dashed by the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State. However, it raises two important issues.

First, six months ago the Secretary of State suspended the 5 per cent. limited price indexing regulation on the grounds that it could not be afforded with the overhang of costs from the Barber judgment. If that has now been removed by this protocol—I want an answer from the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for Maidstone (Miss Widdecombe)—will he urgently reinstate the limited price indexing regulation? *[Interruption.]* If the Under-Secretary is worried about time, perhaps she should have had a word with two of her hon. Friends, one of whom spoke for half an hour and one for 25 minutes.

If the LPI regulation is introduced, occupational pensions will be slightly better but still inadequately protected against the ravages of inflation. Will the Secretary of State reintroduce that regulation? Secondly, will he use the latest protocol to ditch the hopes and expectations of equal retirement age and equal pension rights in the state scheme? On that alone, he owes it to millions of people to make clear the Government's position.

If there is one good thing about the Maxwell saga, it is the way in which it has highlighted the flaws and gaps in the control of pension funds so that even this Government can no longer drag their feet and ignore them. Procrastination and delay must stop. We must have a new, effective and comprehensive law on the statute book before the election if it is in six months' time. As I have been asked, I give an assurance that, if the framework of protection that I have spelt out is speedily adopted by the Secretary of State, we shall give such a Bill a fair wind in Parliament. If not, it will be on his head and on that of the Government when millions of pensioners and employees give their verdict on the issue in the forthcoming election.

10.2 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Miss Ann Widdecombe): Well, well, well. On the night when we were discussing matters of supreme importance to millions of pensioners, where were the Opposition? On the night when we were discussing the fears and anxieties of employees—past and present—who worked for years for a major Labour newspaper, where were the Opposition?

It is worth recording that, for the first three quarters of an hour of this one-and-a-half-hour debate there was no one on the Opposition Back Benches, whereas, on the Conservative Back Benches, interest has been shown not only by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancashire, West (Mr. Hind), whom I congratulate on obtaining the debate and on the eloquent and reasonable way in which he opened it, but by my hon. Friends the Members for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), for Teignbridge (Mr. Nicholls), for Dover (Mr. Shaw), for Wyre (Mr. Mans), for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King), for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle), for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Martin), for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill), for Ipswich, (Mr. Irvine) and for Nuneaton (Mr. Stevens). But where was the Labour party?

I find it rather nauseating—I think that that was the phrase used by the hon. Member for Oldham, West (Mr. Meacher) that he should criticise my right hon. Friend the

Secretary of State for inaction when we have taken consistent action, not just in response to some very large headlines but since the passing of the Social Security Act 1990.

That is only the most recent measure. I could also mention the Financial Services Act 1986 and its importance for this matter, but it is worth recording that the Social Security Act 1990 provided powers enabling restrictions to be based on the extent to which the resources of occupational pension schemes may be invested in the sponsoring employer and—this will interest the hon. Member for Oldham, West—in an associate employer or connected employer. The hon. Member for Oldham, West has rushed in with his mouth open to say that the Act had severe limitations, when in fact we should examine carefully the extent of the Act and make careful judgments on the basis of that.

Mr. Rogers: Will the Minister give way?

Miss Widdecombe: In due course. I apologise, but the hon. Member for Oldham, West did not leave me much time.

Shortly after the passage of this Act the Government commissioned independent consultants—they did not just pass the Act and have done with it—Ernst and Young to report on the extent of such investment and on any problems that could arise in restricting it. We wanted to be sure when we brought in the regulations to follow the Act that they would be sensible and would stand up. That is not inaction: it is sensible action.

Following the report, draft regulations to achieve such restrictions were then referred to the Occupational Pensions Board. That is not inaction either. After consultation with interested bodies, the board reported on the draft towards the end of July. So my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not been sitting on this for 18 months; there was solid action right up to the time when Parliament rose for its summer recess.

Having considered these representations, together with others received subsequently about the need for appropriate provisions to avoid causing unnecessary difficulty to companies and pension funds in respect of existing self-investment, we intend to lay the regulations shortly.

Mr. Rogers: I agree that the Government have, under considerable pressure, introduced legislation. If the legislation, however, is as good as the hon. Lady suggests, why did it not stop Maxwell criminally diverting funds from pension funds?

The hon. Lady invoked the Financial Services Act. I remember Opposition Members frequently suggesting that we should set up a structure to control the City and its financial dealings. Tory Members said that the City can regulate itself. That is the problem—without control of the City of London there will always be these scandals.

Miss Widdecombe: It is extraordinary that the hon. Gentleman asks why these measures did not stop Mr. Maxwell when, as we have just said, they are about to come into force. They are not retrospective and they would not have bitten on the Maxwell problem.

The protection of pension funds is of importance to the vast majority of people, and the Government have worked consistently to strengthen safeguards for pension funds and to protect scheme members. The bulk of what has been said tonight notwithstanding, I feel that I cannot comment on problems to do with the Maxwell group of companies' pension funds——

Mr. Rogers: Why not?

Miss Widdecombe: Because at best that would be speculative and at worst it could be seen as prejudicing the outcome of the Serious Fraud Office investigation.

In general, we should first consider the legal basis for the vast majority of pension schemes—in the main, it is trust law. This ensures that a scheme's assets are held separately from the employer's assets. This is a requirement for approval of the scheme for tax purposes. Under trust law, the trustees of the scheme, including those appointed by the employer, have a duty to act at all times in the best interests of all the beneficiaries under the trust, in accordance with the trust deed and the scheme rules.

As we have discussed the independence of trustees tonight, it is worth rehearsing their main duties. They must act in accordance with the trust deed and rules of the scheme within the framework of law. They must act prudently, conscientiously and honestly and with the utmost good faith. They must act in the best interests of beneficiaries and strike a fair balance between the interests of different classes of beneficiaries. They must take advice on technical matters and any other matters which they do not understand and they must invest the funds.

The duties of trustees in relation to investment have most concerned the House tonight. Under the Financial Services Act 1986, it is a criminal offence for an unauthorised person to carry on investment business, and that includes the day-to-day management of pension scheme investments. It is most unusual, therefore, for trustees to seek authorisation under the Act. Instead, trustees mainly delegate the work of detailed investment management to an authorised investment manager. However, they must retain control over broad strategic decisions such as the proportion of the total funds to be invested in particular categories of investment.

Mr. Butterfill: Does my hon. Friend agree that, in the Maxwell case, that work was delegated to Bishopsgate, which is an authorised investment manager—regulated by the Financial Services Act and a member of the Investment Management Regulatory Organisation, and that there may be a claim against IMRO as a result?

Miss Widdecombe: As I have said, I shall not comment on the details of the Maxwell case, pending the outcome of the specific investigation. It would be prejudicial for me to do so, but I shall take on board my hon. Friend's point.

In stating what the Government have already done, there is no suggestion that we are not interested in other representations. Not least among those representations must surely be the outcome of the Select Committee's deliberations. It would be wrong for us to rush in and take precipitate action without making judgments based on the important representations of the Select Committee and others which we shall receive.

If a trustee carries out some act in relation to the trust which is not authorised by the terms of the trust or a statutory obligation, or fails to do something that he should have done, there is a breach of trust. If that causes a loss to the fund, the trustee is personally liable unless the scheme rules exempt the trustee from liability—for instance, where there is some entirely unintentional error,

[Miss Widdecombe]

which could be something as minor as paying a pension to someone who, upon examination, is not strictly entitled to it. Most pension schemes contain a provision binding the employer to indemnify the trustees against any liability or costs resulting from the proper exercise of their functions, but that would not apply to fraudulent transactions.

The trustee body sets out the procedure for the appointment of trustees and who is eligible. It may include people who are members of the board or senior executives of the company. It may include members of the scheme or the pensioners. The trustee body may be a company with individuals as directors of the compnay and it may include one or more persons with no direct interest in the scheme.

It is interesting that there are about 160,000 such schemes, of varying size and complexity and with different memberships. One of the difficulties in taking the sort of action being recommended by Opposition Members and one or two of my hon. Friends is that we have to devise schemes that will not have an adverse impact on genuine operations by smaller companies. It was precisely that sort of consideration which led us into such detailed consultation on the self-investment regulations and which would lead us again, however worthy a proposal might seem at first sight, to investigate the effects thoroughly.

We do not want to lay regulations only to find that we then have a string of amending regulations because, owing to the varying types of schemes, exceptions keep coming to the fore. Membership of those schemes now totals 20 million. It is a serious business. With all due respect to Opposition Members and to my hon. Friends, it is not something into which we can rush without full and proper consultation.

To improve understanding of the role and responsibilities of trustees, the Occupational Pensions Board, in its report to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on protecting pensions, expressed the view that a brief statement of the principles of trusteeship should be prepared and that the disclosure requirements, which have not featured much in tonight's debate but which are important, should be extended to include information on whether each trustee has received a copy of the statement.

My right hon. Friend accepted the board's recommendation—again, action not inaction—invited it to prepare a booklet and undertook to extend the disclosure requirements as soon as it was published, to include information as to whether trustees had access to that booklet. My right hon. Friend will then be in a position to extend the disclosure requirements accordingly.

Trustees are governed not just by trust law in that respect but must comply with legislation enacted by——

In accordance with MR. SPEAKER'S *Ruling—[Official Report,* 31 January 1983; Vol. 36, c. 19*]—the debate was concluded.*

Homelessness

10.15 pm

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): The time is 10.15 pm, and all over the United Kingdom people are getting ready for bed—not all in the comfort of their own homes, and certainly not in two, three, or four-star hotels, but in shop doorways, on park benches, and in derelict buildings.

The homeless of the United Kingdom—our country—are men and women of all ages. This evening they are sleeping rough, as they do on many nights, on the streets of this country. That is the United Kingdom of December 1991—be it in the cities of London, Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow, or Bristol. The list is endless.

Those are some of the principal cities of our country, but a survey undertaken in February shows that, even in small towns, people are sleeping rough tonight, as they were at the beginning of the year. The survey revealed that the number of people sleeping rough in Andover was 50; in Cambridge, 60; in Luton, 50, and in Blackburn, 25. Not half a mile from this building—the mother of Parliaments—hundreds of people are sleeping rough tonight.

Early-day motion 304, "Homeless people sleeping rough in severe weather outside London", was signed by more than 70 right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House. I have over a long period tabled questions on that issue. I did so in June 1990, February 1991, and November 1991. As long ago as December 1989, I put this written question to the then Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher):

"To ask the Prime Minister if she will visit the Crisis at Christmas centre in London during Christmas."

She replied:

"I have at present no plans to do so."—[*Official Report,* 19 December 1989; Vol.164, c.*122.*]

And she did not.

That is the background to the homelessness that stretches throughout the country, but there are other aspects. Official estimates suggest that some 40,000 homeless households in London are in temporary accommodation. Many of those families include young children. The figure for homeless households in the whole of the United Kingdom is estimated at 145,000.

We all know what such accommodation offers: a roof over one's head, but very little more. People must live in a single room with all their belongings. I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House have visited such accommodation, and seen suitcases and plastic bags piled high on wardrobes or cupboards. There is nowhere for youngsters to play, and what facilities there are—bathroom, toilet and kitchen—are shared. Often, the accommodation is some distance from where the occupants have been living, and the move involves a major upheaval.

As I have said, there are 40,000 homeless households in London. In 1979, there were 2,750. Both figures reflect a pattern that is repeated throughout the country.

Why do such conditions exist in 1991? There can be no doubt that the position has worsened every year since the Government came to power in 1979. Since then, however, the country has gained enormous wealth through North sea oil and the sale of state assets. Where have those vast sums gone? How much of the money has been spent on trying to tackle the tragedy of homelessness, which many would describe as not only a tragedy but a national scandal?

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): The point about privatisation is important. We should bear in mind the fact that the assets resulting from the sale of council houses total more than £23 billion—more than the assets from all the other privatisations put together—while investment in housing has been cut from £11 billion to £6 billion. That is a measure of the extent to which resources have been wasted.

Mr. Cox: My hon. Friend has considerable experience of all aspects of housing, and, as always, he has made a telling point. I intend to develop it further, and, if he catches your eye, Mr. Speaker, my hon. Friend will no doubt do so as well.

New elements have entered the problem of homelessness. It has been estimated that, in the first half of this year, well over 36,000 properties were repossessed. We know the reasons for that: high interest rates and ever-increasing unemployment have caused the break-up of marriages and families, and have introduced tensions.

According to official figures, so far this year 162,000 people have incurred mortgage arrears of between six and 12 months, with over 59,000 being more than 12 months in arrears. There can be no doubt that the position is worsening month by month. I had a letter earlier this week from the all-party group on homelessness. It is dated 10 December, and gives notice of a meeting in the House next week on the subject of mortgage arrears and how to prevent homelessness arising from repossesions.

In *The Observer* last Sunday there was a major article about repossessions headed: "'Homes catastrophe brewing' as losses soar". The report gave harrowing details about what happens when people lose their homes, not because they are idle or could not care less but simply because they have lost their jobs and cannot get others, so they cannot keep up the payments that they were making before the loss of the man's job, or that of his wife.

Housing experts estimate that there will be between 80,000 and 90,000 repossessions this year. I have here a Public Accounts Committee report on homelessness which was published in May. As I expect hon. Members know, the PAC is chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon). On the extent and causes of homelessness, the report says:

"We are gravely concerned that homelessness has more than doubled over the last decade . . . and is continuing to rise at a higher rate than before. Our concern is underlined by the fact that the official statistics may well significantly understate the true scale of homelessness, since they are confined to those applying as homeless and accepted as having a priority need".

Under the heading "On Department of the Environment action", the report says:

"We note the improvements being made in the Department's arrangements for allocating resources to local authorities for general housing purposes"—

I am trying to make my comments as fair as possible—

"and we support the aim of targeting resources increasingly on authorities with the worst housing problems, including homelessness . . .

We regard it as unsatisfactory, however, that the Department have not set clear, quantified targets for the extra homes these substantial expenditure programmes are expected to provide and the impact on the numbers who are homeless . . .

We expect the Department to review their homelessness programmes accordingly, with a view to setting appropriate targets and timescales . . .

We are very concerned about the extensive use of bed and breakfast accommodation which is often very expensive and unsuitable for families".

I described earlier the kind of accommodation that people who become homeless are offered. The report continues:

"a cost of £15,000 per family a year is bad value for money."

I think that all of us would agree. As well as being bad value for money, such accommodation provides bad conditions for the families who, sadly, find themselves put there.

Let us consider the views of organisations that have enormous experience in all aspects of housing. Even Ministers would not sneer at Shelter's comments and, if they did, they would be unwise.

Mr. Sydney Chapman (Lords Commissioner to the Treasury): Who said that they sneered?

Mr. Cox: I merely made a comment, which I have a right to do.

Shelter, in a letter dated 14 November 1991, says:

"People sleeping rough in severe weather . . . Despite the enormous publicity of the plight of thousands of homeless people, the Government took no action outside Central London."

In May 1991, Shelter published a booklet called "Left Out —Sleeping Rough in Severe Weather". It followed a survey by Shelter in February 1991, when, as we are now, we went through a period of severe weather. Shelter made some damning indictments of the Government and their policy on helping homeless people. Shelter says:

"Outside central London (where the Government contributed to a basic—and highly publicised—relief operation) 7,000 'roofless' people were almost entirely dependent on the charity of volunteers. Government and most local authorities refused to accept any responsibility for these people's survival."

I will quote some of the authorities which had to pick up the pieces in February 1991—and which will no doubt have to do the same this December. Cambridge city council says:

"Local authorities were left in an ad hoc and pretty much accidental situation. It was pure luck that ad hoc arrangements actually worked. We would expect the Government to provide funding for what the voluntary sector do over and above normal arrangements. They cannot be expected to do it with no money."

The Shelter housing advice centre in Manchester says:

"Voluntary groups . . . can point to a need but don't have the resources to begin to fulfil it."

The Bishop of Chelmsford said on 18 February 1991:

"Voluntary agencies, including the Church are therefore doing all they can to alleviate the problem but it is vital that in the short term the Government acts quickly in collaboration with local authorities to meet the needs of the homeless in these critical circumstances and in the long term that the underlying causes of homelessness are addressed."

Those comments were made in February 1991. All the evidence shows clearly that, within hundreds of yards of Parliament—in Victoria, for example—people are sleeping in cardboard boxes tonight. Indeed, that is true of others throughout the country. As I have said, that is what happened in February 1991, and it is happening again this winter. More people are sleeping rough and becoming homeless. More pressure is being placed on organisations like Shelter, the Churches and local authorities.

I received a letter from the Association of London Authorities and the London Boroughs Association. They represent Labour and Conservative-controlled authorities in London. The letter was sent on 2 December and it states:

"It is an understatement to say that the growing problem of the backlog of homeless families in temporary accommodation is causing the homeless working party major

[Mr. Cox]

concern. This is reinforced by recent research by the London Housing Unit on behalf of the homeless working party which shows that unless there are some significant changes in Government housing policy the gap between the supply of permanent homes and demand from homeless families will widen even further."

It was signed by the directors of the London boroughs of Haringey and Kensington and Chelsea. Those boroughs are under different political control, but they both make the same damning indictment of the Government's lack of action in respect of a problem that sadly has been with us for far too long.

When the Minister replies, it would be interesting if he would comment on a letter that I received today which questions the future of the resettlement agency. Do the Government propose to close next March four Government-run homeless units? Many people would like to know the answer to that. It would also be very interesting to hear from the Minister exactly what contact the agency has with those who work with the homeless.

What I have said about London as a London Member can, I am sure, be said by hon. Members irrespective of the part of the country they represent. As I have said, the problem gets worse every year. We must ask why it worsens year by year. I have referred to the reasonably new tragedy of repossession of property. That problem ranges across the board in respect of the professional backgrounds of the people who are losing their homes.

I hope that the Minister will be able to tell us about the Government's involvement with the banks and building societies to help people when they have difficulty repaying their mortgages. What discussions have the Government had with the banks and building societies about impressing on them the urgent need to keep families together and to keep people living in their homes instead of repossessing homes which causes people to become homeless?

Within the past month, I heard of the case of someone who had a mortgage with Nationwide Anglia. I took up the matter with the director of that building society. To his credit, he expressed deep concern at the way in which my constituent had been treated. The behaviour of many banks and building societies is an utter disgrace. They should hang their heads in shame at the pressure and harassment that they inflict on decent, honest, law-abiding citizens who sadly have lost their jobs and find themselves in the great dilemma of how to pay their mortgage.

Banks and building societies have much to answer for. It will be interesting to hear from the Minister just what meaningful discussions—not just, "You really should know better, gentlemen"—have taken place. I have mentioned the estimated number of repossessions that will take place not only during what is left of this year but well into next year.

Our great housing problem is that there is not enough affordable housing for people to buy, if possible, or to rent. There has been a massive decline in council house building. The Government have encouraged councils not to build properties.

Let me quote one or two figures to show the enormous decline that has occurred over recent years. In 1974, 120,000 council properties were being built. In 1979, 56,000 council properties were being built. In 1989, the figure went down to 14,000. In 1990 the figure went down further to 7,500. The figure for the first half of this year is 2,412. Since the Government have been in office, 56,000 properties have been built. I am being generous, as the Government would have inherited properties that were in the development pipeline. The figure this year will be even lower. About 130,000 council properties have been sold. Those properties have moved out of the affordable market.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tim Yeo): Perhaps I can help the hon. Gentleman, because I think that he is having difficulty in reading his script. In fact, 1·3 million houses, not 130,000, have been sold under the right to buy. The hon. Gentleman may have left a nought off the end.

More important for the purposes of the debate, the hon. Gentleman has completely overlooked the large and growing contribution made to affordable housing by the housing association movement, into which the Government are pouring huge, ever-increasing amounts of taxpayers' money, and delivering value for money and attractive accommodation with which tenants show themselves highly satisfied.

Mr. Cox: That sounds attractive, but it is not borne out by the facts or by what is said by the various people whom I quoted earlier, who work in all areas of housing and not only in connection with the homeless. They are not saying what the Minister is saying, so I shall not be swayed by him.

Mr. Soley: To put the record straight, the housing associations are only just getting back to the number of housing units that they were providing in the mid-1970s.

Mr. Cox: My hon. Friend makes the point more forcefully than me.

This Government have given people every encouragement to buy their own home. That may be commendable and may help those who can afford to buy. Some can, but many cannot. Who helps them? The Minister will say, "I've just told you who helps them," but why is there such an enormous need for housing in this country if what we are told is true and various organisations—not local authorities—are now providing housing?

Like many other hon. Members, I believe that now is the time for a massive house-building programme. We all know from the letters and documents that we receive that our construction industry is on its knees. Thousands of highly qualified building workers are on the dole—not only for a week or two when the weather is bad, but for month after month. What has happened to some of the big building consortiums? We have seen how their profits have slumped, but why is that happening when we all know that new properties should be built?

A valid criticism to make against the Government is that vacant land throughout the country is being sold—not for affordable housing, but for supermarkets and up-market property—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps the Minister will have his conversation with his hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) privately——

Mr. Steve Norris (Epping Forest): Oh, do let us get on with it.

Mr. Cox: The hon. Gentleman says, "Let's get on with it." Some of my comments are undoubtedly embarrassing for the hon. Gentleman, who is an outer-London Member of Parliament and must have problems similar to those that many other hon. Members are encountering,

irrespective of constituency. Perhaps it is expecting a little much of the hon. Gentleman to ask him to consider the plight of people who are looking for somewhere to sleep or for somewhere they can be with their families this Christmas.

Given what the Minister has said, I ask him where people without large incomes can find affordable housing either to rent or to buy. What discussions are held with the local authorities and hospitals that have a lot of land? The London borough of Wandsworth, for which I am one of the Members of Parliament, contains classic examples. Tooting Bec hospital is now nearly closed and there is demand for a massive supermarket to be built on the site. There is demand for a golf course at Springfield hospital, which also has a great deal of land.

In inner London, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith will know, old Greater London council and Inner London education authority properties and lands are being sold off, not for local needs, but for the most money that can be obtained. One has to ask—this goes back to the point that the Minister made a moment ago—what is the Government's policy to encourage private house building along with local authority, housing association and Housing Corporation building?

When will the constraints on local authority capital spending to which my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith referred be relaxed? Many authorities have substantial capital receipts. When will they be allowed to spend them? It would be interesting to hear from the Minister when local authorities will be allowed to spend that money, the existence of which no one disputes.

If one sadly—*[Interruption.]* I am delighted that the Minister thinks that is so hilarious. I do not know whether the Ministers or other hon. Members were present for the previous debate. I know that you were, Mr. Speaker, but I realise that you are not in a position to comment. The Minister who replied to that debate made the most enormous play of the fact that there were no Labour Members on the Opposition Benches to debate that great issue and what a scandal it was.

But this is a scandal. Conservative Members are laughing their little heads off because they think that is so funny. I hope that when the debate, or possibly a debate in which they are involved, is over, they will take a walk to Victoria and tread over the people. I am aware of the comments made by the Minister for Housing and Planning a little while ago. They have not been forgotten. I will not be unkind and remind him. He knows what I am talking about.

Mr. Yeo: That is a disgraceful slur on my hon. Friend, who is known by people in all parts of the political spectrum as one of the most committed Members of Parliament, with a determination to see an improvement in the housing condition of the country. For the hon. Gentleman to drag that comment in, even by the appalling standards that he has set in the past 37 minutes, is nothing short of disgraceful. I hope that he will withdraw that slur.

Mr. Cox: I did not make the slur. The Minister for Housing and Planning knows the comments that were attributed to him. The Minister should understand a little about the procedures of the House. I did not cast any slur on the Minister. I referred to a comment that had massive coverage. I suggest that the Minister should not pursue it.

Whatever may have happened in this debate, outside the House throughout Britain many people have nowhere to live and are sleeping rough. They have done so for many years. It will be interesting in the time that is left—there is still quite a bit of time left—to hear from the Government exactly what they propose to do. I have quoted the criticisms of the Government made repeatedly by reputable organisations. If they are untrue, let the Government say that they are untrue. Let them challenge the quotes that I have given. I named where they came from. Let them dispute them in the debate tonight.

10.55 pm

Mr. Steve Norris (Epping Forest): I shall find it difficult to comment on many of the points made by the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), for although I tried to concentrate on the thrust of his speech, it took quite an effort. I was impressed with one aspect of it, however, and that was his ability to err in his facts by a factor of 10.

Having misrepresented the number of council houses sold in Britain by over a million, when he was corrected about that, the hon. Gentleman continued with a glissando that was breathtaking and completed his remarks without any recognition of the fact that he might have been pursuing Aneurin Bevan's adage that one should never let a good speech be confused by the facts, and following it rather more literally than might have been advisable.

The hon. Gentleman has only one good point in his favour. That is that he has raised a serious subject of interest to hon. Members in all parts of the House. There is a different dimension to the whole question of housing and the homeless. As we have seen in the past decade, there are a number of issues on which it is appropriate to pay a fulsome tribute to the Minister, his hon. Friends and their predecessors. Less remembered than it should be is the fact that, under Conservative rule, we have attempted to free into the housing market hundreds of thousands of units of accommodation in the private rented sector. Due to no doubt well-meaning but, in the event, totally misguided rent legislation, that accommodation was prevented from being available for tenants to occupy.

Every hon. Member has had experience of elderly owners with available accommodation to let who would have been satisfied with a modest return but who were prevented from letting by the law as it stood and the experience of their peers who had been involved in letting with disastrous consequences. It was extraordinary to hear the hon. Member for Tooting present a picture of housing and homelessness in Britain without recognising the huge impact of the release of property into the private rented sector.

The irony of the work done in that sphere is the possibility that still deters many from embarking on letting property—the vestigial possibility of a change of Government. The prospect of a return to the bad old days under Labour denies the availability of hundreds of thousands of units of accommodation to people who desperately need it from people who are more than happy to provide it.

Mr. Soley: The hon. Gentleman is digging himself into an ever deeper hole. He criticised my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) for not being concerned with facts, when my hon. Friend made more of a conventional slip than the sort of fundamental error that the hon. Gentleman just made. When the Conservatives

[Mr. Soley]

came to power, 14 per cent. of the rented market was in the private sector. The decline continued and has accelerated, to the point where it is now only 7 per cent. There has never been any such suggestion from the Opposition. Indeed, the position has been made clear by me and my hon. Friends—there will be no retrospective legislation, and everybody knows it.

Mr. Norris: The hon. Gentleman is tacitly accepting that our reforms in the rented sector have been in the right direction, and I am grateful for his pledge that retrospection will not be in the mind of a future Labour Government. I am pleased that he accepts that our reforms are appreciated, not just in the inner cities, where they are of particular advantage, but in urban and suburban areas.

Mr. Soley: The hon. Gentleman does not appreciate that the legislation of 1980 reduced rent controls dramatically. Indeed, in Northern Ireland they were abolished in 1956. But in all cases the decline in the rented sector accelerated. The hon. Gentleman will take the figures from the Duke of Edinburgh's report, if he will not take them from me.

Mr. Norris: The hon. Gentleman misses my point, which is two-edged. There is the potential impact of the private rented sector and the extent to which Labour attitudes—as evidenced by their actions when in government and their statements during the last decade—have been a huge disincentive to the release on to the market of many affordable units of accommodation which could be derived from existing single units and which are currently denied to people who have no accommodation.

At the risk of bogging the hon. Gentleman down in argument when I am sure that he will make his own speech, which I look forward to hearing, I suggest that the other great area in which the Government deserve congratulation is the introduction into the housing market of infinitely more creative financing than has been available hitherto.

Again, the hon. Member for Tooting, who has just given us the benefit of his views on housing for 40 minutes, seemed to neglect the marvellous impact that the housing association movement has had on housing in Great Britain. Housing associations have been able to offer shared equity schemes, link equities, rent mortgage schemes, and so on, which have all been of tremendous benefit to tenants in all parts of the country, many of whom are keen to convert tenancies into ownership and who, without the creative financing available through the housing association movement, would never be able to do so.

In addition, the more creative financing which is now available has led to the most desirable schemes for those with special needs—those with handicaps, single parents who would otherwise find it difficult to obtain accommodation, and so on. We all have examples in our constituencies. There has been a very heartening development of this sector and the housing associations and housing corporations continue to make a very significant contribution to meeting the needs in this area.

One thing that is underrated is the extent to which, over the last decade, there has been an attempt to involve tenants a great deal more in the management of their own property. That, again, is something that I very much welcome. The Government inherited the most appalling nannyish tendency to assume that tenants were the last people who should ever be consulted on the way in which their properties were managed.

I look forward to the next Parliament, when I hope that my hon. Friends may both have moved on to higher and even more rewarding pastures. Perhaps the Whip on duty, my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mr. Chapman) will be with us; some good things in life are ever with us and we look forward to his continued presence on the Treasury Bench. I hope that those who will take on our housing policies into the 1990s will continue the very welcome trend of putting more power into the hands of tenants—not just local authority tenants, but housing association tenants and private tenants as well, all of whom deserve to have this extra power in their hands.

This debate is not simply about the benefits that we have derived from housing policy over the last decade. It is also to some extent about the specific issue of homelessness, which the hon. Member for Tooting mentioned. I echo the words of my hon. Friend the Minister in placing on record what I believe to be the incontrovertible record in this field of my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young), the Minister for Housing and Planning.

No one who has taken the slightest interest in the problems of the homeless in London could ignore the beneficial impact of my hon. Friend on this problem, and it is extraordinarily churlish to suggest that he has had anything other than the greatest commitment to this unfortunate group of people, which he has discharged with immense distinction. I place on record the warmest congratulations of Conservative Members and, I suspect, of the vast majority of Opposition Members on the work that he has done.

It is still, however, an immensely disturbing proposition to me and, I am sure, to the hon. Member for Tooting, to his hon. Friends and to mine, that there should be, as he says, as we drive along the Strand or in Victoria, anyone forced to use a shop or office doorway as accommodation on a bitter winter night such as this. That is not something that any sane Member would deny exists, and the hon. Gentleman is perfectly right to point out that it does. The remedy, however, is perhaps more complex than that suggested by the hon. Member for Tooting. It has always seemed to derive from two phenomena, both of which call for attention and of neither of which I fully understand the ramifications.

The first is the extent to which London is still regarded as a magnet by many young people who do not have stable home conditions in their towns and villages, or even in the outer suburbs of their cities. They look to London for excitement, employment opportunity, money or whatever, and so often are sadly, tragically, disappointed and misled when they arrive. There has been a welcome increase in the services available to them. Those services are offered by all the agencies concerned, from the police through the voluntary sector, the social services, and so on.

There is no merit whatever in allowing people to stay in doorways in those circumstances, simply because it may seem a more convenient solution; quick intervention is needed. I say that against the background of the knowledge that my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning made available extra hostel accommodation, and that in many cases the problem in central London is

not technically the availability of beds, but rather a question whether the various agencies have chosen to intervene, and on what basis.

My simple observation is that it is in everyone's interest to intervene sooner rather than later. It would be better if the young people could be caught on the first day away without a stable roof over their heads, and returned to their homes. I appreciate that it is not always possible to return them, so if they could be counselled about how to find their feet independently, that would be in everyone's interest.

I do not want to enunciate a philosophy that people who live in doorways are making the place look untidy and should be removed for the sake of it. Most of us would have more charity in our hearts, particularly when the weather is so cold, but we have to recognise that if a young person is allowed to develop the habit of seeking refuge in that way, it is a desperately difficult habit to break. Early intervention, despite the fact that it might be thought by some to be heavy-handed, is therefore important.

The second obvious source of homelessness in London is even more tragic, because its origins are in schizophrenia and other mental illness. Such people find it hard to accept the confines of institutional housing, and are very difficult individuals with whom to deal. My heart goes out to all who have to deal with them. I pay tribute to their work and to the commitment of volunteers, as well as people in the national health service and social services, to those who are mentally disordered and whose behaviour patterns occasionally cause the most disturbing incidents. We have to deal with those people at a slower pace than in the past.

None of what I say is new to my hon. Friend. I merely state it because it is the most important element in the debate about homelessness. Surely we are now in a position to deal with the consequences of our enthusiasm to decant people from the large, long-stay institutions, as part of our genuine commitment to a community care policy which had all-party approval when it was introduced.

It is as clear now to the Secretary of State as to the whole House that there was clinical over-enthusiasm to decant from long-stay institutions people for whom there was not adequate personal planning. It left such people with a tenuous link to social services and to those who had a medical input into their conditions. I urge those with competence in such matters to think again about the extent of decanting, although it may not be a matter for my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning.

I appreciate the desire to achieve a large capital receipt from the closure of a long-stay institution. Incidentally, having been involved, together with the health authority, in Borocourt, an institution for the mentally handicapped just outside Reading—I suspect that my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State know that institution—I shall never regard it as desirable to keep such places a day longer than is necessary, but there may be a day on which it is necessary. However wrong it may have been for a person to be incarcerated in such an institution 30 years ago, it may be better for a person to be retained there, with care, warmth and at least some sort of regime of supervision, before he or she embarks on a life outside where there will need to be adequate support services.

I say in all good humour that we have often listened to the hon. Member for Tooting with interest and he makes a conscientious point. However, it is not sensible to describe the entire private sector market as littered with repossessions and tragedies. It is extraordinarily sad that some young people bought their houses at the top of a market which has declined and that they are now experiencing difficulty. I welcome the fact that the Government have considered creative ways of avoiding repossessions wherever possible. Nevertheless, 99 per cent. of mortgages are still being paid and kept current. The hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) may have queried my statistic, but I assure him that it is accurate.

In the context of the worst recession in many years—that is not even a matter for debate—and substantial reductions in house prices, that statistic is a tribute to the flexibility of the system and to the way in which many building societies have already recognised that their long-term interests lie in trying, wherever possible, in helping home owners to stay in possession of their dwellings, even if it means a slight elongation of the repayment period.

I commend the efforts of my hon. Friend the Minister to ensure that an increasing number of people who find it difficult to pay their mortgages are allowed a scheme of, for example, temporary rental or contributions from their local authority. It is desperately sad and pointless to make a family homeless because they cannot afford to keep up payments on their house, especially when they can pay something, in order then to have to find far less satisfactory homeless accommodation for them at public cost. If families can be kept in their own homes, so much the better.

I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in this debate. It has given me a chance to correct an understandable bias in the remarks of the hon. Member for Tooting and to suggest that, even now, when the housing market generally has never been more difficult, my hon. Friend the Minister and his Department have much to be proud of.

11.13 pm

Mrs. Lila Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): I wish to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) on choosing this subject for debate tonight, when the cold weather is with us again and the misery of the homeless increases.

About three weeks ago, I was told by a voluntary worker for the homeless how she had found a 15-year-old girl, five months pregnant, sleeping on the concrete steps of a doorway in Charing Cross. She did not even have a blanket, she had no money for food, and no idea of where to go for help. She had been sleeping on the same step for three nights.

Despite all the publicity that the homeless receive and the many organisations set up to help them, there are still desperate people who do not know how to get help. There are many people who suffer due to lack of affordable housing to rent and inability to cope with mortgage repayments.

However, as the bitter winter weather approaches, I should like to concentrate my speech on the basic problem of enabling people to find shelter so that hon. Members do not again have to face the awful reality of stepping around people huddled under snow-covered tarpaulins, lying in shop doorways in the streets of our city. The Minister announced the setting up of a helpline for the homeless. What use is that if people have no money to telephone? If

[Mrs. Llin Golding]

they are fortunate to have enough money, where are they to find out that that helpline exists and obtain the numbers?

Mr. Yeo: It is important for the House to know that the telephone line is free to the users.

Mr. Golding: I repeat: where do people find out that the helpline exists and obtain the number?

I understand that the Minister is talking to London Transport about advertising the campaign, but it needs much more than that. The Government have spent hundreds of thousands of pounds on imaginative advertising for selling off the country's nationalised industries. I am sure that they did not consider just talking to London Transport about that. Many of our people have become homeless as the result of the Government's policies. Is it too much to ask the Government to spend some of the money raised by privatisation on giving much more help to homeless people throughout the country, not just in London?

The homeless are suffering just as much in my constituency of Newcastle-under-Lyme and other districts throughout the country, as in London. Why cannot money be spent on advertising the help available in places where the homeless gather? Could there not be in every tube station, railway station and bus station, and on bus shelters—especially in rural regions—specially prepared posters with information to tell people where day and night shelters exist for the homeless?

I know that the organisations that help the homeless would be more than willing to co-operate with the Minister to help to identify the many places throughout the country where posters would be of greatest benefit to the homeless. I know that the Government have not found it in their hearts to extend the cold-weather provision for shelters for the homeless outside London and the many districts of need throughout the country. That is no reason not to provide an advertising campaign to cover the whole of the country.

Will the Minister put himself in the place of that 15-year-old girl, too frightened to ask anyone for help, alone, desperate and penniless? Will he please help her and others like her to come in out of the cold?

11.17 pm

Mr. Clive Soley (Hammersmith): I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for Tooting (Mr. Cox) and for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) on their speeches. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting displayed the facts well, and it was perverse of Conservative Members to pick him up for a slip of the tongue when he gave an incorrect figure, which it is relatively easy to do. The hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris), although well intentioned, made many mistakes. If he had read the Duke of Edinburgh's report or the reports of the Conservative-controlled London Boroughs Association and Association of District Councils he would know that some of his arguments were invalid—I put it no stronger than that. I believe that he cares, and I beg him to read those reports and read his speech.

My charge against the Government and most of the Conservative Back Bench Members is that the majority of them do not care, and those who do—I include the Minister for Housing and Planning—are too wedded to, too unable to break away from, the principles of the Government who during the past 12 years, have created the crisis. Consequently, they are still driving the figures up. They are not my arguments—they are based on the Government's own figures. The Government yesterday released figures showing a 30 per cent. increase in the number of homeless.

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Sir George Young): No.

Mr. Soley: Yes they did, or they appeared in that light in the newspapers. Perhaps the Minister should issue a correction.

Sir George Young: As the hon. Gentleman has accused my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) of making a mistake, he should not make one himself. The figure of 30 per cent. was not an increase in the number of homelessness acceptances. It was the increase in the number of those in temporary accommodation. Even in London, the numbers in bed and breakfast fell. The figures published yesterday did not show a 30 per cent. increase in the number of the homeless.

Mr. Soley: I am happy to refine that, and say that the figures revealed a 30 per cent. increase in the number of those in temporary accommodation, but is the Minister suggesting that they are not homeless? If not, is he saying that there has been a decline in other forms of homelessness? He knows that, in his borough of Ealing, the figures for acceptances have dropped by 25 per cent. because the council has taken a very hard line on the interpretation of legislation and is turning people away. Even more important, the number of those on the street is going up.

The money that the Minister has provided has been recycled more times than I can count—although he talks about it as if it were new money—and it will run out in April, but there is still no commitment to replace it.

The figure of 30 per cent. to which I referred was an overestimate compared to the figure that I suggested, which was based on the same information. I rang a sample of local authorities, but, because I prefer not to err on the side of scaremongering, I gave a figure of 20 to 25 per cent. In fact, the Government's figures were 5 per cent. higher than mine, and they got those figures from a much wider survey based on all council returns.

The figures alone are not enough. The hon. Member for Epping Forest must take on board the fact that the case to which my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyne referred—that of the 15-year-old girl—is all too common. I have said hundreds of times—in the House and outside—that, in 1979, that girl would not have been homeless. The big turnaround came in the mid-1980s. Never since the first world war have we had homeless teenage children begging in the streets.

Mr. Norris *rose*——

Mr. Soley: Before the hon. Gentleman gets up, let me say that I worked as a probation officer in the King's Cross area, which was one of the most difficult areas for homelessness in the 1970s. Homeless people got off trains at Euston, King's Cross and Paddington and came to that area. At that time, I could have got that girl a bed straight

away in a decent place—I am not talking about a mattress on a floor. She would have been eligible for and would have got local authority accommodation.

That has changed precisely because of the figure of which the Government were boasting—the 1·3 million sales of council houses which were not replaced. The right to buy with a duty to replace is a good housing policy, but the right to buy without a duty to replace is a housing disaster. We have lost 2 million homes from the rented sector. *[Interruption.]* Ministers should argue the figures with the Duke of Edinburgh—I am quoting figures from the Rowntree report.

Mr. Yeo: They cannot bear it.

Mr. Soley: The Minister says that they cannot bear it, but perhaps the Duke of Edinburgh has more feeling. I was using a figure of 1·5 million homes, but his figure is 1·9 million, half of which have gone from the council sector and the other half from the Government's much-loved private rented sector. The hon. Member for Epping Forest should take enough interest to consider the arguments about the decline in the private rented sector, which started before the Rent Acts were invented.

When the Rent Acts were abolished in Northern Ireland in 1957, 25 per cent. of the rented market was private. No party even hinted at reintroducing the Acts, and that sector is now 5 per cent. of the market. There has been a slight increase recently due to the depression in house prices and, to a limited extent, to the 1988 legislation.

When house prices begin to rise again, all the assured shorthold tenancies in properties whose prices have risen will suddenly look unattractive. People who sell will want to sell with vacant possession, and that means asking people to leave. The hon. Member for Epping Forest does not understand that. The argument is about housing finance. As long as we go on subsidising house purchase to make buying and selling so enormously profitable, and to make renting unprofitable for landlords and for tenants, so long will the rented sector continue to decline.

Mr. Norris: There is an argument about whether 2 million homes have disappeared or are still there, occupied, thus contributing to the housing stock. But when the hon. Gentleman referred to the constituent of the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding), he was, I agree, referring to a new phenomenon of which he has personal experience. That problem is not a function only of Government or their housing policy—it is much more deep-seated and complex than that. It is a function of family breakdown, which takes place over generations and whose consequences the Government will have to tackle. We are only beginning to come to terms with it.

Mr. Soley: Conservative Members desperately want to believe that family breakdown is the cause, but the increase in family breakdowns is much smaller than the dramatic increase in homelessness. By removing 2 million homes from the rented sector at a time when families are becoming smaller, the Government have left young people with nowhere to go. Local authorities that could have taken them before cannot now do so.

As a Social Security Minister, the Prime Minister devastatingly took away from young people the right to income support. That was removed from 16 to 18-year-olds who were not on a Government course or in full-time education. They are the people begging in our streets. Almost overnight, they arrived in our streets. That is a function of Government, not of family breakdown. Families were breaking down when I was a probation officer in King's Cross, but then I could get these kids rent money for private accommodation up front. I would not be able to do that now. They are turned away from River Point and Centre Point—by 7 pm or 8 pm, they are closed or full up.

There are beds in warehouses, but many young people will not use them because they do not want to sleep next to someone who is mentally ill or loused up or alcoholic. It is no good the hon. Member for Epping Forest showing concern if he does not understand this, because it will be empty concern. When he expressed anxiety about people who cannot pay their mortgages, he sounded like the Walrus and the Carpenter—weeping tears as he ate the oysters.

There is an answer to the mortgage problem. The Government should never have used high interest rates alone. For a long time, I have been advocating a mortgage rescue scheme that would allow people to stay on in their properties on a short let tenancy. One in eight mortgage payers are in arrears because the Government have launched a drive towards home ownership so powerful that mobility of labour has suffered. They are screwing up the whole economy, not just housing.

I have often spelt out the long-term answer. We need to invest in housing, to set up a national housing bank, to use all sectors. When we go out into the freezing temperatures tonight, we know that we should be doing something. Capital receipts are important, but they are not enough. Local authorities must be allowed to buy selectively in the private sector. We must relax or remove some of the rules on private sector leasing.

We must change the income support rules for 16 to 18-year-olds and under-25-year-olds. The Government must discontinue their stupid propaganda about empty properties and do something about them. I shall say it again: local authority stock is 2·5 per cent. void; 3 per cent. of housing association stock is empty; 5 or 6 per cent. is empty in the private sector—and 16 per cent. of Government properties are empty.

Today in Swindon, I saw 24 houses in a main street —they were attractive properties—all of which had been empty for 20 years. I correct that. Some of them have been empty for the 20 years since they were built, others have been empty for just a few years. There are 35,000 empty houses, not just those in Swindon. One in five police houses in London are still empty. The Wormwood Scrubs prison houses are still empty after 10 or 12 years—I have lost count.

I challenged the Minister to pick up the telephone and ask the Secretary of State for Defence to say that those houses in Naylor road, Swindon, must now be transferred to the ownership or management of a housing association or the local authority. Families who would otherwise spend Christmas in bed-and-breakfast accommodation would then have a house to live in. That is what I call housing the homeless.

11.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Environment (Mr. Tim Yeo): If the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Mr. Soley) and his Labour colleagues around the country,

[Mr. Tim Yeo]

who control far more houses than the Government, showed even a tiny percentage of the indignation that he is now attempting to express about empty houses in Swindon in relation to the 5,000 empty houses in Labour-controlled Liverpool, the 2,800 in Labour-controlled Salford, the 2,000 in Labour-controlled Newham, the 5,500 in Labour-controlled Manchester, the 2,000 in Labour-controlled Newcastle, the 1,000 in Labour-controlled Knowsley, and so on——

Mrs. Llin Golding: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Yeo: No. Conservative Members have had only a fraction of the time in this debate.

If the hon. Gentleman had showed even a tiny amount of the indignation that he expresses about empty houses in Swindon in relation to all those in areas under Labour control, there would be scarcely any problems of homelessness in Britain.

I regret to say that this has been a breathtakingly disappointing debate, even by the standards of those initiated by Labour Members, redeemed only by an excellent constructive contribution by my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris), who made an outstanding speech.

The debate began with a 40-minute speech from the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) which was nothing but a litany of unsupported assertions. In a spirit of friendship across the Floor of the House, I have to say that if the hon. Gentleman really thinks that he advances the cause of housing by denigrating my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning, he displays an ignorance that is staggering even by Labour party standards. I was glad to hear the hon. Member for Hammersmith in effect repudiate his disgraceful slurs against my hon. Friend.

Mr. Cox: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, For the record, I make it clear that I cast no smear or slur on the Minister for Housing and Planning. I simply commented on what has been widely publicised. If the Minister is saying that hon. Members are not allowed to do that without running the risk of being accused of slurs, he is abusing parliamentary procedure.

Mr. Yeo: When it comes to abusing parliamentary procedure, I fail to see what point of order the hon. Gentleman was seeking to make. But I am glad that I provoked him into an unqualified withdrawal of his disgraceful unjustified comments. They will have done him no good in the housing movement, which recognises that my hon. Friend stands for a real commitment, typical of this Government, to the needs of homeless people.

I am sorry to say that the hon. Gentleman did not just stoop to the gutter in terms of smearing my hon. Friend: he used a series of inaccurate figures. To my surprise, many of them were echoed by the hon. Member for Hammersmith.

We have had several exchanges in the House in the past year or so on the number of people sleeping rough. I remember arguments at the beginning of 1991 about the precise number. But we knew, because we were closely in touch with the voluntary organisations which are in the front line, of the efforts that we were making to tackle the problem of rough sleepers. I pay the warmest possible tribute to those organisations, which have made a magnificent contribution. At the beginning of this year, they estimated that the number of rough sleepers was in the order of 1,000. That was borne out by the census that was taken in April, in rather warmer weather.

I am glad, but not surprised, that, after another 10 or 11 months of Government efforts to provide suitable hostels and move-on accommodation for rough sleepers, the voluntary organisations now estimate that the number sleeping rough as of this month is down to about 430.

The hon. Member for Tooting was as wrong about the number of homeless as he was about the number of rough sleepers. He said that there are 40,000 homeless in London. If he had troubled to study figures published a couple of days ago, he would know that was wrong. More importantly, the hon. Gentleman tried to imply that a substantial proportion of homeless are in bed-and-breakfast accommodation, whereas the number is only 7,900—which in London represents a decrease of 5 per cent. over the previous quarter. The number in bed-and-breakfast accommodation in London is falling. That is a result of the Government's £300 million special homeless initiative in London and the south-east last year and this year.

The hon. Member for Hammersmith, who usually knows better, tried to suggest that there had been a 30 per cent. increase in the number of homeless. Again, the statistics published this week—not by the Department of the Environment, but based on figures provided by local authorities throughout the country—show that the figure is not 30 per cent. but 2 per cent. The hon. Member for Hammersmith can flick through his papers, but I have those statistics before me, and they present a very different picture.

Of course the Government are not satisfied with that, but at least it is clear that our efforts are having an impact and are bringing to an end the unsatisfactory increase in the number of homeless in bed-and-breakfast accommodation—which is falling in London, and is virtually stable across the rest of the country. The Government are keen to have a constructive debate on housing policy when they can, but it is a pity when it cannot be based on proper acknowledgement of the facts.

Reference was made to the need for affordable housing. I was deeply disappointed that neither the hon. Member for Tooting, in a 40-minute speech, nor the hon. Member for Hammersmith, except in an intervention, found it possible to acknowledge the contribution made by housing associations. That is, by any standards, a profound insult to the housing association movement, which is supported by people of all political persuasions.

Next year, such associations will house more than 20,000 homeless families, but the hon. Member for Tooting chose totally to ignore that in his lengthy speech. He ignored also the growing contribution made by the private sector, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest rightly drew attention. I was glad that, his skilful speech, he teased out of the Opposition an admission that the Government's policies on the private rented sector are right.

The hon. Member for Hammersmith was at pains to point out, in an intervention in my hon. Friend's speech, how much he supports the Government's policy. Of course I welcome that, but it is a belated conversion. If a similar

statement of support for the Government's deregulation of the private sector had been made in 1979, there would have been no decline—but there was, because that sector continued to feel under threat from the Opposition.

Even today, private landlords within a mile of this building would say that they are nervous of letting their properties to homeless families because, and only because, of the whiff—albeit faint—of the risk of a Labour Government. If, in 1979, the then Labour Minister responsible for housing had given the assurance offered this evening by the hon. Member for Hammersmith, the decline in private rented accommodation might have been arrested.

As a result of the Housing Act 1988 and the introduction of shorthold tenancies, we are witnessing rapid growth in the number of shorthold and assured tenancies being let by private landlords—so much so, that at last they are taking up the slack created by the number of secure tenancies. That is welcome news, and I look forward to further endorsements from the Opposition.

The Opposition bitterly opposed the right to buy council houses when it was first introduced; now they are in favour of it—or, perhaps, not quite in favour, for they become very cross when I point out what a huge success it has been. The hon. Member for Tooting was not reading his brief properly; not 130,000 but 1·3 million houses and flats have been sold under the arrangement. The Opposition do not like to draw attention to that, but the Government are very proud of having created so many new owner-occupiers.

Opposition Members are also changing their minds about housing action trusts. In a Committee debate, they have completely reversed their previous position. No doubt, in due course they will completely reverse their position on the private rented sector, large-scale voluntary transfers and a raft of other Government initiatives. The only speech that mentioned the enormous opportunities that we now offer tenants for participation in management systems was that of my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest. He was the only speaker who thought it worthy of mention.

The Government have doubled the resources available to housing associations, from just over £1 billion last year to more than £2 billion in 1993-94. That amount is topped up by a substantial contribution from the private sector in the form of loans. Under today's construction industry conditions, those resources will buy a much-increased level of output.

In an intervention, the hon. Member for Hammersmith tried to suggest that housing association output had not increased greatly since the 1970s. He will be surprised—I fear that he may even be disappointed—by the figures that we shall announce next week, which specify the output that we expect from housing associations in 1992-93. They are able to combine increased contributions from the taxpayer with an element of private sector funding to take advantage of the exceptionally keen prices now being quoted by the construction industry for new output.

We have two private sector initiatives. We are now operating pilot schemes in five different places, allowing owners of empty property which we wish to be returned to productive use to let that property to homeless families, using a housing association as an intermediary or managing agent. That will give the landlord a degree of confidence about his ability to regain his property when he wants it; it will also give the homeless family a degree of confidence about the quality of their landlord.

We are optimistic about the prospects of the scheme, and I hope that, in due course, the hon. Member for Hammersmith will be able to bring himself to give it an unqualified endorsement. It is difficult to see how even the Labour party, with all its promises to the trade unions and others, can find any possible ground for objection to such a scheme.

Our other private sector initiative involves flats over shops. We believe that there are nearly 100,000 empty flats over shops, and we have therefore embarked on a three-year campaign to try to change attitudes in the commercial sector. We have made £25 million available to local authorities for schemes involving housing associations and private owners; we believe that they have considerable potential in regard to dealing with homelessness.

Even *Roof* magazine—not a magazine normally associated with the Tory party—has acknowledged that the Government's £96 million three-year initiative to deal with rough sleeping is the most determined and comprehensive programme ever introduced to tackle the problem. It is making substantial progress in reducing the number of people sleeping rough in London, and we are optimistic about its continued progress. More places are being made available all the time: last night, a 25-bed hostel was opened in the constituency of the hon. Member for Tooting, to be run by the English Churches Housing Group.

Mrs. Golding: Places are closing.

Mr. Yeo: In view of the continuing cold weather, we have asked Single Homeless in London to see whether other emergency hostels can be opened at short notice. Moreover, despite what the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) has said from a sedentary position, there is no question of places closing.

Since the rough sleepers initiative began, 900 places have been made available in houses and flats, 400 of which are permanent, and 700 more places have been made available in hostels and shelters. There is an important distinction between the shelter to which the hon. Member for Tooting referred and the rather higher quality provision in hostels and in permanent accommodation. Almost 200 places, in addition to those in shelters which I have mentioned, have opened this month, and we expect a further 120 places in winter shelters to open very shortly. All that is on top of the emergency accommodation to which I have just referred and about which we are talking to Single Homeless in London.

The hon. Member for Tooting spoke about mortgage repossessions. As my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest pointed out, 39 mortgage payers out of 40 are not in arrears with their mortgages, and that is after a period of unprecedented expansion of owner-occupation. There have been 7 million first-time buyers since 1979. Even after a period when interest rates were higher than we would have liked, 39 mortgage payers are still up to date. That is the measure of the success story of the Government's expansion of owner-occupation.

[Mr. Yeo]

There are other success stories. We have a range of initiatives which are designed to promote owner-occupation and to widen choice for tenants. All we have from the Opposition is unsupported assertions, uncosted commitments and empty rhetoric. Their policy is confined to giving more money to local authorities—the one group who have proved unable to discharge an adequate housing policy.

Territorial Army

11.45 pm

Mr. Nell Thorne (Ilford, South): We shall now debate the reserve forces and especially the future of the Territorial Army. We have every reason to be proud of the service of the Territorial Army over the years, because we can trace the history of volunteer and reserve commitment back to the Norman conquest. We have a special position in that the oldest regiment in the British Army is the Honourable Artillery Company, which traces its history back to 1537, whereas the oldest regular units go back only to the middle of the 17th century. For that reason, the Territorial Army does not consider itself in any way a second-class alternative.

In the middle ages, all men over the age of 18 were required on Sunday, after attending church, to participate in archery practice; it was from those roots that the Territorial Army grew. The 19th century was an especially important period, for it was then that many of today's Territorial Army units were formed.

I commanded an officers training corps. Those corps came into existence in the early 20th century, when it was discovered that attendance at university did not necessarily mean an ability to lead troops. That was discovered especially during the South African war, when a number of university graduates were commissioned and sent out to South Africa, and it was found that they singularly lacked an ability to act in an officer capacity. It was decided that training was necessary, so the officer training corps were introduced at several universities. I am delighted that they have done so well that it is now proposed, even in these difficult times, to increase their establishment.

At the start of the second world war, there was an enormous expansion in the Territorial Army, as there was in the first world war. It was the custom then to double the size of most infantry battalions and of many gunner and other units. That was done quite simply by creating a new unit alongside the original. The commanding officer, the adjutant and the regimental sergeant major were required to form a parallel unit, while the second in command, the regimental quartermaster sergeant and the assistant adjutant took command of the original unit. In that way we were able to double our Territorial Army forces very quickly.

In two or three months in 1939, territorial units were brought close to the standard of regular infantry battalions and gunner regiments. That was an extraordinarily fine achievement in such a short space of time. It was achieved only because the senior ranks were there and able to provide the infrastructure and necessary training.

Things are more technical today. Equipment is more sophisticated, and more experience is required. However, many jobs require similar skills, and in respect of engineering and signals, the forces can take advantage of the skills that people acquire in their civilian jobs. The same is true in medicine: the TA played a spendid role in the Gulf, where a complete field hospital was made available from Glasgow. That provided support for the regulars in a vital role.

I believe that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence is aware of the situation. He promised in the Chamber that he did not want any volunteers to be turned away from offering their service, and I am sure that he will do his best to keep that promise. He has given me and many of my colleagues the firm impression that he has listened to our recommendations and suggestions, and that he will continue to do that in the years to come. This exercise cannot be completed overnight; it will take many years to accomplish. We must ensure that we get it right and that the alterations that are required take advantage of all the volunteers on offer.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): It is all very well for the hon. Gentleman to say that the Government have given an undertaking not to turn away volunteers, but 102 Royal Artillery in Northern Ireland is at a strength of 103 per cent. I understand that it is to be merged with 105 Royal Artillery Scotland. How on earth is 103 Royal Artillery to be reduced from 103 per cent. to 50 per cent. to comprise one artillery regiment?

Mr. Thorne: As the hon. Gentleman knows, Northern Ireland is a special case. There are already a large number of troops in the Ulster Defence Regiment. I believe that a substantial proportion of the population of Northern Ireland already serve in a reserve capacity with the UDR. The TA there is well recruited, but there are other opportunities for people to serve in Northern Ireland, and I hope that they will use elsewhere the skills that they have acquired in the TA. We need their help.

Over recent years, the TA's establishment has been 91,000. However, the paper strength is only 74,000, of which a smaller number train regularly. The latter figure is thought to be between 63,000 and 65,000. It was originally suggested that the establishment might be reduced to as low as 50,000 to 55,000. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has ensured that that is not the case, and that we will have an establishment of 63,500, because that figure is more in line with the actual number of people available, willing and able to serve.

We must acknowledge that honorary colonels of regiments play an important part. In the middle ages, it was discovered that many regiments were not getting their fair share. When they were asked to turn out and fight on behalf of king or queen and country, some regiments performed much better than others. When an inquiry was carried out, it was discovered that the regiments that had the most influence, either through royal or noble connections, were doing much better in respect of ammunition and supplies than some others. Therefore, a system was introduced which enabled regiments to appoint honorary colonels of their own choosing so that they could speak on their behalf and as a last resort have a direct right to apply to the sovereign in order to make representations on behalf of their unit. The honorary colonel system therefore has an important role to play in the British Army.

It is important that, whenever there is a reorganisation, honorary colonels should be fully and properly consulted. I fear that this has not necessarily taken place in every case. Therefore, I ask my right hon. Friend the Minister to examine the matter, in particular in relation to 151 Royal Corps of Transport Regiment. I am not certain that the honorary colonel of the regiment was given the notice that he could expect. He was apparently told in June that there was nothing to report, and in September, he was told that the proposals were a fait accompli. Clearly, that could not be construed as proper consultation. Perhaps that was the only case that fell through the net, and I hope that it was

[Mr. Thorne]

an isolated case, but I should be grateful if my right hon. Friend would examine the matter and if necessary ensure that such a thing is not allowed to happen again. Honorary colonels, as I have said, have an important role if we are to maintain our fighting troops at the standard that we have come to expect.

It is essential to have a proper press campaign to explain to the general public—particularly those who are interested in serving in the Territorial Army—that the Territorial Army has a bright and promising future. Traditionally, every spring, a campaign is launched, but this year we must hold a special campaign to ensure that everybody knows what the way ahead will be. I fear that, if we do not do that, we will not put the Territorial Army on a proper basis. People will feel that it is threatened, and we shall not get the recruits we need. Those who do not wish the Territorial Army well will point to reduced recruiting figures and make claims for further reductions. That would be most unfair and unfortunate, and I am sure would not be what my right hon. Friend wishes.

We must ensure that, in any future mobilisation of the armed forces, such as occurred in the Gulf and in the Falklands, formed TA units shall be used. We had disagreements in the House about the number of Territorial Army personnel that were serving in the Gulf. At one time, my right hon. Friend thought that there were only 500, whereas I believed that there were 1,000. We eventually managed to reconcile the figures, when we took into account the large number of people who had volunteered to serve on regular engagements in order to participate, but who had been trained as territorial soldiers.

The Territorial Army was therefore entitled to the credit for having trained those people, because there is no way in which, having volunteered off the street, they could have gone out to serve effectively in the Gulf. We must ensure that the territorials have a much more satisfactory and satisfying role in the future and that those who wish to make themselves available in such an emergency have that offer taken up and that they are readily called upon in such times of emergency. I hope that we will not have a two-tier regular and TA system, in future emergencies.

The Territorial Army should provide a basis for the expansion of our forces and as a general reserve. As I have said, it performed extraordinarily well at the outbreak of both world wars, when it provided the bedrock upon which we were able to build. I am not alone in believing that the result of both world wars could have been very different if we had not had those effective territorial forces in place in 1914 and 1939.

I should also like my right hon. Friend to look carefully at what extra help the Territorial Army can give the civilian population in civil disasters. Extensive use is made of reserve forces elsewhere in the world. We could learn from the American experience of using the National Guard not only to help with civil disasters but also with drug enforcement, which are both areas in which we cannot have too much help, provided that it is properly directed and properly trained.

I hope that red tape will not prevent the use of the enormous reservoir of skill and good will that is held in our reserve forces from being available for use at such times purely and simply because Departments might haggle over who will be billed for the cost. Admittedly, this is a Treasury matter, but it cannot possibly be beyond the ability of Treasury Ministers to work out an effective formula to ensure that the Ministry of Defence is properly rewarded for any help that it gives. Such help is certainly required, so I hope that this facility of the Territorial Army will not be wasted.

The Territorial Army provides a reassuring military presence throughout the country. It does so effectively in much the same way as the presence of police on the beat reinforces a sense of law and order. In times of national emergency, it is reassuring to see the Territorial Army around. The Territorial Army also provides important social functions, discipline, comradeship, leadership training, both mental and physical fitness, and a great sense of patriotism, all of which are important and should be encouraged.

One of the Territorial Army's biggest problems in recent years has been the substantial turnover of recruits, which has amounted to as much as 30 per cent. per annum in some units. It is important not only to make the training interesting, stimulating and exciting, but also for the Territorial Army to provide the best possible club in any area. We rely upon the support of the families to retain personnel within the forces.

If the families believe that they can enjoy their social hours with the territorials, they will support their men and womenfolk and encourage them to maintain their membership of the Territorial Army. That would considerably reduce the turnover of personnel, encourage people to serve in the force and enable us to use their expertise in it for much longer, so that less time will be spent on training.

It is extremely important to keep the senior ranks. I explained how, at the beginning of each world war, it was possible quickly to double the number of infantry battalions, gunner and other regiments. That depended on the skill and expertise of those senior ranks. In recent years, we have found that, throughout the Territorial Army, most regiments were undermanned on average by 15 per cent. The 15 per cent. was largely accounted for in the lower ranks. The more senior ranks, such as sergeants, warrant officers, captains and majors, were all in post. Of course, the more junior members of the TA have so many other pressures on their time. They change their jobs more frequently than older people. They get married and move, and may have young children to care for. Those and many other pressures may distract them from remaining for a long period in the Territorial Army.

The more senior ranks are usually more settled. It is very important to keep them, and we would be silly not to provide sufficient places for those more senior ranks to occupy. If we do not provide sufficient places, the necessary skill will not be in the right place at the right time. Moreover, if only a limited number of more senior places are available, very able corporals and subalterns will get tired of waiting for promotion to sergeant and captain respectively, and will be inclined to leave at that stage. We would therefore lose many capable people who have a lot to offer.

The 63,500 places now available should not be allowed to reduce to 54,000 over the next five years, as would be the case if the 15 per cent. rule came into effect. That is why it is so important that we provide challenging and interesting roles to make those senior people keen to remain.

I was encouraged by the Secretary of State's answer to my question on Tuesday that he would be flexible with the extra numbers that were available. I hope that he will find it possible to allow extra ranks to be recruited all the way along the line—not only at the most junior level—to ensure that we do not lose those very able people.

If we are to have a leaner, meaner, keener regular Army, inevitably we shall need a good Territorial Army to support it. After six years of the second world war and 45 years of the cold war, the taxpayer is entitled to a peace dividend. However, if the dividend is to be effectively delivered, it cannot leave us vulnerable to the many other surprises hiding around the corner.

Two years ago, few people could have accurately forecast the possibility of the Gulf conflict. Certainly the trouble in Yugoslavia has been a great surprise to many. Today, we hear that Mr. Gorbachev thinks that his time of public service is near its end. That will raise a number of new question marks throughout what was the Soviet Union. Therefore, we must expect some major changes in that region in the coming years and be prepared for anything that might arise as a result.

Much has been done in recent months to draw those matters to the attention of the Department and, as I said, I believe that Ministers have been listening. I am extremely grateful to the chairman of the Greater London Territorial, Auxiliary and Volunteer Association, Sir Greville Spratt, and to Brigadier Peter Bowser, the secretary, for all that they have done to lead the way in ensuring that the Government have been properly informed that the Territorial Army is adequately provided for in the future.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) is grateful for what has been done to help him with the preservation of his local Anglian Regiment. Many other hon. Members are equally grateful for what has been done to ensure the future of the TA in their areas. I believe that the Secretary of State agrees with us about the importance of the future role of the Territorial Army, and I am sure that he will do all in his power to help us achieve that objective.

12.11 am

Mr. Allan Rogers (Rhondda): I thank the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne) for having initiated the debate and for giving us an opportunity to discuss some of the implications of the Secretary of State's announcement earlier in the week. I thank him also for the history lesson on the Territorial Army, although my recollection is somewhat different. My stint in the TA was as a conscript, and those of us who did our national service in the TA made many friendships that have lasted to this day.

That has been the cornerstone of the TA concept, and many people have protested about the changes because activities in and around the TA and the drill hall created a culture of its own, certainly in many working class communities. That may not be so evident in larger towns, but in smaller towns and villages—for example, in the mining valleys of South Wales—the TA is held in high esteem.

Hon. Members in all parts of the House recognise the valuable role that all arms of the reserve forces have played in defending Britain, and the hon. Member for Ilford, South reminded us that, in the two world wars, it was possible quickly to enrol sufficient numbers to save Britain. More recently, they were deployed in the Gulf, and more than 1,700 reserve personnel, including the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Dr. Goodson-Wickes), served with the British forces in Operation Granby. We should put on record our tribute to those reservists and members of the TA who served in the Gulf. I know that, in saying that, I reflect the sentiments of all hon. Members.

My hon. Friends and I were interested to note that the NATO summit declaration in London on 6 July 1990 called for the alliance to place more reliance on reserve forces, and the Government have emphasised the importance of part-time soldiers. As the hon. Member for Ilford, South said, their skills are extremely high, although the army has become more technical. I think back to the more rigid skills studied by foot-sloggers such as myself. The height of my military skill was the ability to strip a Bren gun blindfold and put it back together in 30 seconds. The fact that it sometimes did not work after that operation was incidental.

The reserve forces were mentioned by the Secretary of State in his "Options for Change" announcement on 25 July 1990. It seems to be a very sensible move by the Ministry of Defence to alter the structure of our forces in the way in which it is at present proceeding.

We are concerned, however, to learn from various Territorial Army representatives that the Ministry of Defence is considering cutting TA and other reserves by a disproportionate amount compared with the regulars. There were at one time, as the hon. Member for Ilford, South said, rumours that the TA could be cut to almost 55,000 or 50,000. I am sure it was the pressure from the warrior class and the impending general election that led to a final figure of 63,500, which is a cut of about 17 per cent. We are not quarrelling with this decision in any way, because I believe that our full-time forces are already overstretched for the roles and tasks that the Government have outlined for them both in and out of area, and that the territorial forces play a vital support role.

As I mentioned earlier, we recognise that, besides the vital role in defending the United Kingdom which the Territorial Army plays, it also provides very positive outlets for the energies of young men and women, many of whom unfortunately are unemployed. That is why, in the defence estimates debate on 14 October 1991, my hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) said:

"We should be careful to preserve the opportunity for as many of our civilians as possible to serve in the volunteer forces."—[*Official Report*, 14 October 1991; Vol. 196, c. 72.]

I was very glad to hear that the Secretary of State, in his announcement on Tuesday, accepted this view when he said:

"we would not wish to turn away willing and suitable volunteers".—[*Official Report*, 10 December 1991; Vol. 200, c. 734.]

I congratulate the Government on the recognition of the need to keep this doorway open.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan asked a number of questions on Tuesday regarding the reserves, and perhaps the Minister could provide some of the answers this evening. I do not know whether it would be proper to extend it a little beyond the army, but I am very concerned in particular about the ex-pilots in the Royal Auxiliary Air Force and the RAF Volunteer Reserve, because, according to a parliamentary answer on 14 June 1991, only 10 ex-RAF pilots are in these organisations. It seems to me that, if we are spending £3 million on training someone to fly a fast jet and if, when he leaves the force

[Mr. Allan Rogers]

—there are a lot of people leaving before their time is up —he is not being used in the reserve forces, that is a tremendous waste of a national resource.

I hope that the Minister agrees with us and his colleague the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), who raised this point on Tuesday. I ask the Minister if he will undertake to develop proposals to encourage greater involvement by ex-RAF pilots in the reserves.

The same applies, of course, to ex-regular soldiers going into the TA. I am not attempting to compare the quality of the Territorial Army now and following national service, but the TA then consisted almost entirely of people who had served for two years on a full-time basis, and the level of skill and general martial ability was very high. Very many men of that vintage had served in action areas such as Malaya and Korea, so it was a reserve of tremendous value, as well as containing the numbers that were required.

Another question that I want to return to is the problem of employment protection. The Secretary of State said that he would note my hon. Friend the Member for Clackmannan's suggestion that the employment protection aspects of the Reserve Forces Act 1980 be extended to cover those TA members have less than two years' continuous employment. I wonder if he could tell us whether he is prepared to amend the legislation in this fashion, and perhaps tell the House exactly what other amendments he needs to make in order to take account of changing circumstances.

Perhaps the Minister could also go into a little more detail about the criteria that are being used when making his decisions. In the White Paper on the Army a number of criteria were listed. It would be interesting to know whether the same criteria were used in the restructuring of the reserves.

On occasion, the Minister has criticised the lack of detail in our overall defence expenditure proposals and what we propose for the Territorial Army and the reserve forces. We suffer a great handicap in dealing with a Government who are obsessed with secrecy. Whenever we put down questions, it is impossible to get answers. That is sometimes the case with the Select Committee on Defence as well. In its recent report, it said that the White Paper

"contains no hint of the Government's financial strategy for defence over the coming decade."

The Minister has also criticised our lack of proposals for individual units, but when we table questions to get information on which to base proposals, which perhaps we will be implementing in six months' time, we cannot get proper answers from the Government. The stock answer to defence procurement questions is that the information is commercially confidential or that the Department does not normally give the information.

When it comes to operational issues and manpower, the stock answer is that information on the running costs of individual units is not held centrally and could be provided only by the use of disproportionate time and effort, yet the Minister criticises us for not being more specific. We cannot be more specific unless we get the information. I assure the Minister that in six months' time, when he is in opposition, we will be kinder to him and much more open with information.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): I am sure my hon. Friend well remembers the Committee stage of the Atomic Weapons Establishment Act 1991 when we had great difficulty in discussing the measure properly because the Department would not release the necessary information. He will remember that we also had difficulty over the Tombs report when again we could not get the necessary information. The Department can be very awkward at times. That makes it difficult not only for Opposition Members but for hon. Members on the Government Benches to discuss matters properly. *[Interruption.]* The Minister is mumbling—I hope that he will get up and clear the air.

Mr. Rogers: My hon. Friend is right. We had great difficulty getting information on the atomic energy privatisation measure. I understand that, because the proposals were so ludicrous, there was no rationale to justify them. As to the Tombs report, that was the correct name for it because the information was buried very deep.

If I may put on my nationalistic hat for a moment, one issue which concerns us greatly in Wales is the disproportionate cut in regular and volunteer troops. The decision to close 217 Air Defence Battery in Cwmbran, leaving only one gunner battery in Wales, concerns people very much. The battery was formed in 1987, and its purpose-built barracks, costing over £2 million, was opened by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and General Sir Peter de la Billiere. It is noted for its very high calibre loyalty and involvement in the local community. My hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) has emphasised those points to me. It provides much-needed jobs and good training for many young people. There has been a great outcry in Cwmbran about its possible closure.

The Secretary of State talked on Tuesday in terms of people moving from one unit to another, and said that it would not be a problem if a unit was closed, because people could simply go to the next one along the road. But that will not happen, because members of the Territorial Army are not so mobile or nomadic in that sense as regular forces. They live at home with their families and, if they should have to travel from Cwmbran to Newport, for example, or from Pontypool further on to Newport, many people would be deterred from getting involved in the voluntary forces. As a result, the loss of trained people and the expense in recruiting and training new people at a new location would be considerable. Many units would suffer a loss of morale and motivation, which may put the operational effectiveness of those units in jeopardy.

The other issue that concerns us in Wales is the future of the 4th Volunteer Battalion the Welsh Regiment. It may be my wish upon them, but this is the second time this year that the two regiments in which I served, the Royal Welch Fusiliers and the Welsh Regiment, have been under pressure. I thank the Minister very much for saving the Royal Welch Fusiliers. May I implore him now, on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain), to save the 4th Volunteer Battalion? My hon. Friend, together with my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson), my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) and the hon. Member for Gower (Mr. Wardell) are extremely concerned.

We are committed to the maintenance of the defence of this country. It is the one issue on which there is a consensus in this House. Every Government since the war,

whether Labour or Conservative, have given a full commitment to the defence of the nation. On both sides of the House, we are anxious to defend the values, traditions and freedoms that we all cherish. The Territorial Army had been a cornerstone of our defence for so many years. It is a civilian army and democracies need civilian as well as full-time professional armies.

Again, I thank the hon. Member for Ilford, South for giving us an opportunity to place on record our tremendous tribute to the TA for the way in which it has served this country over many years.

12.27 am

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Thorne) for giving us this opportunity to discuss the Territorial Army and for demonstrating his prodigious knowledge of the TA, its history and traditions, going back over a number of years. I must admit that I learned a considerable amount just listening to his speech.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear in his statement on Tuesday, the Territorial Army, along with our other volunteer reserves, will continue to make a vital contribution to our defence effort.

The reshaping of the Territorial Army is intended to produce a force that meets the new needs stemming from the radically transformed European security environment and the more flexible and mobile force structure which the Alliance is introducing. The new structure that we have designed for the TA also reflects the changed requirements of a smaller mobilised Army and the need for volunteer reserves to be able to complement our regular forces.

In developing the restructuring plans, we consulted widely with those with an interest in, and knowledge of, the TA. In addition to senior serving volunteers, that included regimental colonels and the Council of Territorial Auxiliary and Volunteer Reserve Associations. The advice of local associations on deployment and accommodation issues was also sought. We endeavoured, so far as it was possible, to accommodate those various and on occasion, conflicting views in the plans that were developed. May I take this opportunity to express our gratitude to all those who contributed to the exercise for their positive and constructive approach?

As my hon. Friend said, the current establishment of the TA is 91,000, but its actual strength is no more than about 74,000. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said in his statement in July on the restructuring of the regular Army and in the Command Paper "Britain's Army for the 90s" that we envisaged that the long-term future strength of the TA would settle at between 60,000 and 65,000.

The force structure that we have developed takes full account of our likely future operational needs and assumes a peacetime strength of about 63,500. It would be reinforced in war by the addition of regular reservists to a fully mobilised establishment in excess of 71,000. In addition to integrating our regular and volunteer reserves in a way which enables us to make the most effective use of both, the peacetime establishment is set at a level at which we are confident of achieving full manning, in contrast to the present circumstances.

Substantial numbers—approaching 20,000 volunteers—join and leave the TA every year, and the reduction of 10,000 personnel will be achieved by natural turnover. No active volunteer who remains suitably qualified for TA service will be forced to leave. Where units disband or change their role, every effort will be made to offer volunteers an alternative opportunity to serve, if not in the same TA centre, then in another unit in the vicinity; although precise arrangements will need to balance the requirement of the service and the wishes of the individual.

Volunteers will receive assistance with any additional travelling costs that they may incur as a result, and arrangements will be made for them to retain rank and pay classifications. Where necessary, local overbearing of manpower will be allowed.

It may be important for my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South to note that, if we want the figure of 60,000 to be maintained—as we do—it will be necessary for some units to overbear and contain excess numbers to compensate for the units in which numbers will inevitably be lower. There will continue to be a requirement for high-quality recruits.

The restructuring of the TA has been undertaken to ensure its continuing relevance in a very different world. It is self-evidently no longer appropriate for volunteers to train for many of the tasks which previously they would have undertaken in support of 1 British Corps in Germany—those are no longer relevant in a unified Germany or under the new Alliance strategy.

In addition to providing essential logistic and combat service support capabilities, the reshaped TA will have a range of new and demanding operational roles in support of the Allied Command Europe Rapid Reaction Corps. The Queen's Own Yeomanry Regiment will provide a medium reconnaissance regiment equipped with tracked armoured vehicles for the corps. Two TA Royal Artillery regiments will be equipped with the 155mm FH70 towed howitzer, and all three future TA air defence regiments will be equipped with the Starstreak high-velocity missile when it enters service.

Mr. William Ross: Given the experience of the Gulf, where air power was a decisive factor, surely it is foolish to cut our air defence commitment. Is that not the one aspect above all others in any rapid deployment force that should be, if anything, overstrengthened, in order to protect our ground troops from air attack?

Mr. Hamilton: Yes, but we must take into account the fact that the number of units in the Royal Air Force regulars and the stations are being reduced. Therefore, we are merely matching the new requirements for the United Kingdom's air defence.

The TA Royal Engineers, in addition to their traditional roles, many of which will be expanded, will in future take on greater responsibility for airfield damage repair and contribute for the first time to the support of the RAF Harrier force. Some TA Royal Signals units will be equipped with the sophisticated Ptarmigan communication systems to improve the support that they can offer to both ARRC and national deployments. Many of those capabilities have previously been provided exclusively within the regular Army.

The TA will also take on greater responsibility for the direct defence of the United Kingdom. The diminished threat and increased warning times will mean that this role will increasingly be seen as that of a general reserve for

[Mr. Hamilton]

national defence. It will not be limited exclusively to the essentially static tasks previously associated with military home defence.

Overall, there will be a shift of emphasis within the TA towards combat support and combat service support. Whereas, for example, there will be a reduced requirement for infantry, the Royal Engineers, Royal Signals, Intelligence Corps and Army Air Corps will all need to attract substantially more volunteers in order to meet the new roles which they will be taking on. As with the Regular Army, the TA will be appropriately funded and trained to take on the roles required of it. It is also intended to increase the level of support for the TA provided by the Regular Army by the establishment of closer training links between the two, thereby further emphasising that the Army is one Army.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set out the main changes as they affect the combat arms in detail in the briefing pack which supported his statement on Tuesday, so I shall not go over that ground again. Suffice it to note that, on completion of the restructuring, there will be a total of five yeomanry regiments and 36 infantry battalions, of which eight will be earmarked to support the ARRC. All but one of the infantry battalions will in future comprise three rifle companies.

In addition to providing a better basis for expansion in an emergency, this will provide a more manageable span of command. It will also enable us to retain appropriate representation across the country. The TA Royal Artillery will comprise two field and three air defence regiments. A second Army Air Corps squadron will be formed, with its headquarters in Scotland. Significant reorganisation will be required within the Royal Engineers and Royal Signals to accommodate their new expanded roles.

The reduction in the threat to the United Kingdom means that we no longer see a requirement for the Home Service Force as a separate organisation, and it will accordingly be absorbed within the mainstream TA. I am sure the House would wish to join me in expressing appreciation to all who have contributed to the success of the HSF during its short history.

We recognise that, because the TA is a volunteer force, it is important that we implement these changes as soon as we can in order to minimise the uncertainty caused by reorganisation. However, further work remains to be done to develop detailed implementation plans before decisions on regimental titles, affiliations and local estate issues can be taken. All these issues will be addressed in the new year, and restructuring will therefore not begin before 1 April 1992.

I am sure that the House would wish to join me in acknowledging the debt that we owe to the Territorial Army personnel who give so willingly of their time in service of the nation. The imaginative proposals that we have set out for the TA will launch it on a new era. They reflect the need to support a smaller mobilised army and to provide a firmer basis for expansion and a more manageable span of command. They also offer the prospect of full manning for the first time for many years.

There will inevitably be disappointment where changes result in reorganisation or the amalgamation or disbandment of units, but I am confident that the proposals will be welcomed by the volunteers themselves as representing new and challenging opportunities to make an even more significant and professional contribution in the future.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South mentioned 151 Royal Corps of Transport Regiment, whose honorary colonel said that, although he was consulted at the beginning, he was subsequently not consulted about what was happening, but was presented with a fait accompli. I hope that my hon. Friend will allow me to investigate and write to him about it.

He also mentioned—rightly—the need for a press campaign. Such a campaign will be starting shortly and it will combine recruiting for the Regular Army and the Territorial Army. It will remind the country at large that, although reductions are being made in the Regular Army, we still need young soldiers and officers to join up.

We have listened to my hon. Friend's plea that the TA should be more involved in civil disasters. We are looking into that. It has played a role in the past in flood disasters and so on. We see it continuing in that role, and we shall think about whether it has a role to play in combating the misuse of drugs.

My hon. Friend rightly discussed how to make training more effective. That must be one of our ambitions. We want a smaller but better regular Army; similarly, we want a smaller but better TA. It is essential that we increase the number of training days and make the TA's training more effective.

I have already mentioned my hon. Friend's fear that 63,500 will become 54,000, but if the TA goes out to sell itself well and to recruit, and given our enabling certain units to contain greater numbers than their strength, I hope that it will be possible to meet and keep to the 63,500, which we shall certainly pay for.

The hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) brought up again the issue raised by the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill) about former pilots in the Royal Auxiliary Air Force and the RAF Reserve. He should realise that pilots cannot train in the RAAF or the RAF Reserve. It is very expensive to train fast jet pilots, and we do not have the money in either of these reserve organisations to enable them to fly the fast jets that would be the only way to keep their training going.

These people are not necessarily wasted. A certain number of pilots leave the RAF and go off and fly with commercial airlines, where to some degree they maintain their skills. If they have only recently left, the regular reservists of the RAF can be called back into service should they be needed, and they can play an effective role again in fast jets if they brush up their training.

We intend to look into the matter of changes in legislation. Once we have decided what needs to be done, we shall return to the House and make our intentions about call-up legislation clear.

The hon. Member for Rhondda asked what criteria we applied to the TA. One of the most essential criteria during the consultation period was the geographical spread. We recognise the need to go on providing opportunities for people to serve in the TA, even if they cannot go on doing the same duties in the same units as before.

We also had to take into account the future roles of reservists, bearing in mind the end of the reinforcement role in Germany. Some units will, of course, have a role in the Rapid Reaction Corps.

To excuse the fact that the Labour party is incapable of spelling out its policy, the hon. Member for Rhondda said

that the degree of secrecy in the MOD makes it impossible to procure the detail on which to plan Labour policy. That is a pathetic excuse. It is clear that the Labour party intends to cut defence spending further; the Opposition voted for a recent amendment to that effect.

I do not know what effect that would have on the TA in Wales or anywhere else. It would presumably mean further cuts. There is quite enough information in the defence White Paper and in other publications for any party to know in broad terms what sort of defence it wants for this country. It is about time the Labour party stopped being so pathetic, stopped hiding behind a ridiculous claim that it cannot get the information it needs, and started telling the country what plans it really has for the defence of this country in future.

But the Labour party will not do that, because its cuts and reductions, and the risks that it would take with Britain's defence, are too frightening. Labour Members will never tell the people that, because they know that it will lose them votes at the next election.

Rail Services (North Kent)

12.44 am

Dame Peggy Fenner (Medway): Hon. Members from north and north-east Kent are pleased to have the opportunity tonight to raise the important matter of the breakdown in the rail services provided by Network SouthEast to north Kent.

Long before the past few disastrous months of travelling for our commuters, the line to north Kent, north-east Kent and the coast was, self-confessedly by British Rail, one of the worst two lines in the south-east. The other one, the Essex line to Southend, has attracted a great deal of notoriety.

The chairman of British Rail, Sir Bob Reid, has recently taken a much publicised journey on the Essex line and I am sure that, even if he did not visit our line, he would accept that he would find an equally appalling service on that line also. He knows that.

The transport users consultative committee for southern England, entrusted with listening to the complaints of travellers in the south of England, has been inundated with complaints, and in the third week of November it informed me that the daily service performance continued to be bad. On the day of its letter, 21 November, there were heavy delays of 40 to 50 minutes for many people travelling on the line that morning.

That line has been one of the worst for some time, needing new rolling stock and with heavy commuter pressure. But finally, its terrible performance drove the Medway towns commuter committee to issue an invitation to a public protest meeting headed "Kent commuters have had enough." Despite that meeting being the night of the Gillingham football club cup replay, our local well-supported football team, it had an attendance of 500-plus, with some people unable to get in the hall.

Under that heading, the invitation said:

"The past month has been the worst for commuters that many of us can remember."

Yet from 23 December commuters face reductions which have been deferred and are alleged to be the cause of lower income during the recession, and in the new year they face fares increases above the rate of inflation of 7·9 per cent.

The new rolling stock that we were promised was expected early, but is now predicted to arrive in 1996. In their invitation, the commuters, who are now so pessimistic about it, are talking of having new rolling stock in the next century.

From mid-October, the service was monitored during a four-week period by the transport users consultative committee: it was found that only just over 70 per cent. of the evening peak period trains were arriving within five minutes of their due time. Since then, the situation has deteriorated further.

I received a letter recently which claimed that nearly 50 per cent. of the trains were late. Many additional speed restrictions are being imposed, and BR says that the track renewals are deferred. That reduces the standard of punctuality, although one understands that safety must take its full part as well. Once again, delays on the line have been severe as the annual phenomenon of leaf fall strikes again. Surely technology has some response to that.

In a letter to British Rail's chairman, a copy of which he sent to me, a Medway towns commuter wrote that, on 19 November, the 7.53 am Ramsgate to Cannon Street

[Dame Peggy Fenner]

service which stops at the Medway towns was 25 minutes late, and that no explanation or apology was offered. On 20 November, the 8.44 am service to Cannon Street was 20 minutes at London Bridge, and again there was no explanation or apology. On 21 November, the same service was 14 minutes late, and no explanation or apology was offered on that occasion either.

Whatever disputes there may be about funding, a little human communication can be exercised without involving a great budget. There can be no adequate excuse for lack of information to passengers who are so inconvenienced and frustrated.

Fares increases for Essex line commuters from the new year have been reduced to 5 per cent. by way of acknowledging the poor service that they have suffered. North and north-east Kent commuters are fully entitled to the same consideration. My right hon. and hon. Friends at the Dispatch Box have frequently referred to the exceptional investment currently being made in the railways. It is hard for our commuters to accept that when they see no improvement to their daily travel—only a decline.

The cost of the annual season ticket to Medway towns commuters is more than £1,700. The quarterly ticket is comparatively more expensive, at around £500. I say to my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport, that is highway robbery—or rather, railway robbery.

In view of the emphasis that my hon. Friend the Minister places on rail services and his commitment to them, and reflected by public expenditure on them, my commuting constituents are entitled to significant improvements before they are expected to pay even more for an appalling service.

12.51 am

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Medway (Dame P. Fenner) on her success in securing this important and urgent debate on the quality of commuter services serving northern Kent. As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Members of Parliament representing Kent constituencies have battled for many years to secure improvements to the quality and reliability of commuter rail services. I am saddened that we are having to rehearse yet again arguments that we have made on many previous occasions, both inside and outside the House.

I note that the Opposition Benches are almost empty, although it is good to see the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) in his place. I would have liked to see present also the official transport spokesmen for Labour and the Liberal Democrats, but it is left to Conservative Members for Kent constituencies—indeed, there are such only—to make the strong case for the commuter.

We need a commuter strategy. It would have been nice to hear from Opposition Members their proposals, but they do not care because it is late, no media persons are present, and we are out of sight of the cameras. We shall undoubtedly make that known not only to our local media but to members of Kent county council and local councils. When in future Labour and Liberal Democrat Members pay lip service to the problems of our commuters, others will know that in tonight's important subject, none were present to speak up for them but Conservative Members.

I would argue a little with my hon. Friend the Member for Medway, although she was fair in pointing to the two worst lines in the country—the Southend to Fenchurch Street line and the Dartford loop line, en route to her constituency and elsewhere. I believe that the latter is the worst line in the country. That was confirmed at the Dispatch Box by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson) when he was Secretary of State for Transport, and by British Rail.

My constituency contains two major lines, the Chatham line and the Dartford loop line, and I believe that the catalogue of events mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Medway is of significance to my constituents. British Rail should adhere to three principles when providing a commuter service: reliability, quality and fair pricing. On each of those three counts, British Rail's performance leaves a great deal to be desired.

First, there is not much reliability. Often, trains do not arrive; when they do arrive, they are overcrowded and arrive late at their London or north Kent destinations. Secondly, their quality leaves much to be desired—which is not surprising, given that the rolling stock dates back to the 1950s. Thirdly, the price of BR's commuter service is now significantly higher, in terms of the fares paid out of net income by many people who have to struggle to London to earn their living. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Medway: it is highway robbery.

British Rail must improve its service on all three counts. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to ensure that all possible representations are made to British Rail suffer a smaller increase in fares, more in line with that experienced by south Essex commuters.

Another problem is timetabling. British Rail prefers to call its timetable changes "redesigning", which I believe is a euphemism for a reduction in service. As many Conservative Members will remember, in August British Rail slipped into the culture of commuter travel radical changes to services from Longfield and Farningham Road, and from Dartford to Blackfriars. Almost all the services to Blackfriars from Longfield and Farningham Road have disappeared, and services from Dartford and Crayford to Blackfriars were reduced by about 60 per cent. That had a significant impact on many people who work in the City, and who have no alternative means of access to it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Medway also mentioned rolling stock. On a number of occasions, my hon. Friend the Minister has pledged that the Networker 465 rolling stock will arrive for the short-haul inner Kent services. I understand that the first will arrive very soon, and should be in passenger use some time next May. Although that is good news, it represents a slippage: we were promised that the trains would be in use in September, and would be taking passengers soon after that.

We want strong representations to be made to British Rail. We want apologies to our constituents who have suffered, and will continue to suffer. We want a radical examination of British Rail's management structure, and proper consultation about timetable changes now and in the future. We want to ensure that British Rail takes all possible action to minimise the disastrous impact on family life, jobs and marriages. Many people are undergoing extreme stress: they are having to cope not only with problems at work, but with the problems of getting to work and returning home. For them, such problems may be just as significant.

We need to work towards the creation of a commuter strategy. There are large gaps in provision on the north Kent to London service. Many people whom I represent have only either the petrol engine or a British Rail locomotive-drawn vehicle by which to gain access to their point of work. Far more needs to be done as motor car ownership continues to increase.

I hope that we can, from now, start to make progess with and assist British Rail. When there are difficulties, we hope that they will be explained to the people who are forced to use British Rail services.

12.59 am

Mr. James Couchman (Gillingham): On Monday 9 December, Kent Members of Parliament were having our annual meeting with local district councils when we heard about a major disruption to rail services at London Bridge due to a fire. We could not know then that it was to prove to be arson. It seemed to us to be the last straw. My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) erupted and melted the telephone lines between here and Euston house, where British Rail lives. Bob Reid capitulated and agreed to meet Kent Members yesterday at 8 am.

I initiated a request for a Consolidated Fund debate, and was immediately supported by seven colleagues. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Medway (Dame P. Fenner) on hers being the name that came up in the ballot for this debate.

Monday's fire at London Bridge was the last straw in a miserable saga of mishaps for commuters from north Kent and on the north Kent line. The saga goes back for some months—even for years—but it has got far worse this autumn. North Kent's rail services, as my hon. Friend the Member for Medway pointed out, are the worst in the whole of the Network SouthEast area—even worse than the notorious Fenchurch Street to Southend line, which the Father of the House, our right hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine), has mentioned so frequently.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) said, the rolling stock dates from the 1960s and even from the 1950s, and is now completely worn out. It is therefore uncomfortable and dirty. It carries too many people, and a substantial proportion have to stand the whole way into London—for 40 minutes from Chatham and for even longer from the stations of Gillingham and Rainham in my constituency. That is twice as long as British Rail thinks that people should stand. The service is uncomfortable, unhealthy, uneconomic for workers whose employers find that they have tired people arriving for work, and dangerous, as the Cannon Street crash earlier this year proved.

The service has seen a sharp deterioration in reliability this autumn. The notorious leaf fall is blamed, but I believe that that may be a smokescreen for other failings. The unreliability is compounded by the attitude of British Rail staff. Their attempt to communicate the reasons for failure is lamentable. People wait in the carriages in main-line stations when trains are late to leave. They get no explanation. People stand on platforms listening to those awful nasal tannoys giving some sort of notice that trains are late, but there is precious little attempt to apologise or to communicate any sort of explanation to people who are, after all, paying customers.

The most unacceptable of all the delays occur because staff do not turn up for work. They do not let their managers know that they are ill or that they cannot turn up for work. People are left waiting for the next train. Trains are in the wrong place at the wrong time, and the problem escalates out of all proportion.

I have a growing file of letters, as has my hon. Friend the Member for Medway, about the delays that have occurred over the past four or five weeks. The return journeys from the Medway towns to London for a whole week should not take more than seven to eight hours. There have been delays of anything up to five hours during one week. That simply is not acceptable.

Travel on the north Kent line is uncomfortable, unreliable and dangerous. To add insult to injury, as my hon. Friend the Member for Medway said, it is also very expensive. The price of an annual season ticket from Chatham has escalated from £1,464 in 1990 to more than £1,600 this year, and it is to rise to £1,736 next year. The prices of season tickets from Gillingham and Rainham further down the line are that little bit more expensive.

Many people cannot afford a lump sum of that magnitude, so they have to pay the quarterly season ticket rate, which takes their fares to more than £2,000 a year. That is not acceptable for the kind of service that is provided. Price increases over the past two years have been beyond inflation. My constituents have been told that they must pay for increases of twice the rate of inflation to fund investment. That is all very well, but it provokes a hollow laugh among my constituents, who see precious little investment on the north Kent line.

The trains get older, dirtier, less reliable and more expensive. There is a rumour that we will see the new Networker 465 trains on the inner suburban lines as far as Gillingham, but that will do nothing for the people who travel in from east Kent and from the eastern end of my constituency.

Only this morning, the chairman of British Rail told us that the 471 Networker programme, the long-haul Networker programme, is not even in the frame for the next three years. It was in the frame when my right hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Channon) was Secretary of State for Transport. It has been taken out of the frame because, as Bob Reid has said, all his investment this year must go on channel tunnel-related projects and because his income from passengers and his receipts from land sales have fallen, while his debt charges and spend on safety have increased. He tells us that the gap has widened effectively by £1·8 billion. He has also told us that there are no trains ordered for London beyond 1993. The suburban Networker programme is incomplete, and the Kent coast Networker programme is beyond the horizon.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport must surely hold one of life's more miserable ministerial positions at the moment. Can he tell me what I can tell my constituents who travel daily on old, unreliable and dangerous rolling stock which is putting pressure on their health and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford said, on their marriages as well? What hope of better travel do they have? When will their employers be able to rely on their prompt arrival in a fit state for work? When will their spouse or partner be able to rely on their timely arrival home in the evening? When will my constituents who rely on the Kent coast line be able to enjoy the Networker 471 trains for which they are even now being asked to pay?

[Mr. James Couchman]

I have asked many questions. The chairman of BR would not or could not answer them yesterday morning. At this early hour, will my hon. Friend the Minister, whose heart is in the right place and who travelled on the line only last week, give my constituents some hope of better value for money for north Kent's rail services after a thoroughly miserable autumn?

1.2 am

Mr. Roger Gale (Thanet, North): I add my congratulations to those that have already been expressed to my hon. Friend the Member for Medway (Dame P. Fenner) on securing a debate on a subject that is of burning importance to those of us with constituents who use the north Kent line.

I must express my thanks to my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport for taking a personal interest over a long period in the problems we face. We have discussed the problems of the past few months, but some of us are aware that the Minister took the trouble to come down to Kent some months ago to unveil the mock-up of the new Networker train at Margate station to allow the public to express their views about the design before the trains were built. We appreciate that, and the trouble that the Minister took last week when he spent a considerable time—it was not a publicity stunt—on platforms where he spoke to constituents and commuters. He then travelled by train to see the problems for himself. I only wish that BR's senior management had taken the trouble to do the same thing this week.

We have faced problems on that line over many months. My hon. Friend the Member for Dartford is right to say that we have been pursuing the matter for a considerable time. We regard with some distain the Johnnie-come-lately publicity-seeking activities of some hon. Members trying to cash in on a real problem.

What are the problems? Commuters on the north Kent line are late to work in the mornings because the trains are unreliable. Commuters on the north Kent line are late home at night because the trains are unreliable. For employers, that is a nightmare. It means that they cannot rely on their staff. It means also that people travelling on the north Kent line do not get jobs in the City of London these days, because employers know not that the employees are unreliable but that the train service that they are required to use is unreliable.

Employees who travel, and have done for weeks since June, suffer enormously from stress. My hon. Friend the Minister stood on the platform with me only last week, when a lady and her two young children waited for the best part of 40 minutes for her husband to come home, not being told by British Rail when that train might arrive. It was not just the fact that the train was late but the fact that no information was provided. That is a daily occurrence for families whose breadwinners travel on that line.

Trains are overcrowded for much of the journey between north Kent stations and the centre of London. Passengers are standing to and from work. At the end of a hard day's work, that in itself is difficult to bear. It is also dangerous. My hon. Friends have referred to recent rail disasters. Unless something is done, it will be only a matter of time before a another similar occurrence takes place. Only tonight, we read in the London evening paper of the widow of the train driver who was sadly killed on the outskirts of London not so long ago. At a memorial service, she said that not enough had been done to put things right since her man was killed driving a train.

The service on the train is unusable. Some time ago, we prevailed upon British Rail to introduce a trolley service—a trolley service that is run with great pride by people who take pride in their work and who seek to serve their customers. The problem is that the ride is so bad that the coffee they serve is not holdable or drinkable. That is also very sad.

Last weekend, a group of my constituents came to my surgery to complain yet again about the standard and the quality of what passes for service on the north Kent line. My hon. Friend the Minister has seen the trains that travel from Ramsgate to Cannon Street. He knows, because he has seen them for himself, that the front four coaches on the trains are non-corridor. Travellers in the mornings are aware of that. Passengers boarding at Ramsgate board the corridor part of the train, and those joining in the Medway towns have the inconvenience of travelling in non-corridor trains, but only for a relatively short period, from Medway towns into the centre of London, albeit overcrowded.

Coming back at night is a different case altogether. Those running for trains that may or may not be leaving on time find themselves jumping into the first four coaches of the train—the first four coaches become the last four coaches—they go in at the front and they come out at the back. That means that many of those passengers, many of whom are travelling to the Thanet towns, find themselves in non-corridor trains.

One of my lady constituents told me last week that she was sharing a compartment with a man who was in absolute physical agony and sweating because he needed to go to the lavatory, on a train that had been sitting in a siding or on a railway track—it was delayed and doing nothing because of the signalling outside Cannon Street—for three quarters of an hour. That man had to apologise to the ladies in the compartment, and he urinated out of the window to relieve himself. That is—I hesitate to say it—the pass that we have come to. Those are the circumstances that our constituents face.

British Rail told us at an early hour today that it had lost 7 per cent. of its customers. Is that surprising? Of course the recession has cost customers, but some of my constituents tell me that they will not travel on the railways because they are not reliable and they cannot get to work on time. Now, they drive the 70 miles to London or they use coaches instead of British Rail.

British Rail's response to that is to say not, "We must improve our service," but, "We have suffered a 7 per cent. reduction in the number of travelling passengers, so we will cut 7 per cent. of the capacity." No thought was given to the fact that it might be possible to generate more business by improving the service. The logic of that argument is that one should cut all the passengers and all the trains. That is the downward spiral that we are now experiencing on the suburban lines.

The quality of the transport infrastructure affects jobs in my constituency. The Government have put many millions of pounds into the dualling of the Thanet way, the main arterial road down into my constituency. It was my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell) who first committed money to that, at the same time as he was dealing with the channel tunnel legislation.

There has been a tremendous commitment to the roads, but we need the railways as well—not only to get our constituents to work in the morning, but also because we want to create jobs in our own constituencies. I want to see north-east Kent opened up. It is an area with tremendous investment potential. However, if it is to develop, business men from London have to be able to get into Kent. We need two-way traffic, not one-way traffic. The failure of the railways is having a significant effect on the economic development of north-east Kent.

What is the cause of all the problems that we have been having? Yesterday morning, British Rail helpfully provided us with a pie chart, showing that 12 per cent. of delays are caused by signalling equipment faults. The chairman of British Rail told us that the software for the new signalling at Cannon Street, into which millions of pounds of taxpayers' money has been put, does not work. That is not a lack of investment; it is investment in the wrong product. Seventeen per cent. of delays are caused by faults in trains, which may or may not mean manning faults, and 11 per cent. are caused by civil engineering problems.

The chairman of British Rail lays all those faults at the door of a lack of investment, but although money is being spent on signalling and on new trains on the line covering the constituency of my Friend the Member for Dartford, British Rail Engineering Ltd. apparently cannot deliver those trains either on time or to quality. We were told by the chairman of British Rail this morning that the lavatories and the lighting do not work. Again, that is not lack of investment—it is investment in the wrong product.

Autumn leaf falls account for 6 per cent. of delays, but 6 per cent. over the narrow autumn period means a tremendous impact on passengers in that short time. As my hon. Friend the Member for Medway has said, it is time that we managed to get to grips with that problem. I am not sure what "cancellations of other trains" means, but that accounts for 5 per cent. of the delays. Another cause of delays are the "external factors outwith BR", such as the incident at the beginning of this week when an arsonist burned the signalling at London Bridge.

We cannot and will not blame British Rail for that, nor would we wish to blame British Rail for acts of God or for the tragic attempted, and sometimes successful, suicides. Those are external factors that none of us can control. However, 28 per cent. of the sector of that pie chart deals with operations and retail staff. British Rail tells us that that means management, but not once this morning did the chairman of British Rail, for all his bluster, tell us what he was going to do about most of that.

If a train breaks down on the north Kent line, the driver has to get out of the stopped cab, climb across live rails to the railway equivalent of an AA box and find a telephone so that he can report what has gone wrong. The chairman of British Rail has a telephone in his car because he needs one. Many hon. Members, including myself, have telephones in our cars because we regard them as an indispensable tool of modern business, but the driver of a railway train, with people behind him for whose safety he is responsible and who needs to convey information to people who are waiting on platforms to meet their relatives or to tell signalmen and others what and when something has gone wrong, is not provided with the basic tools to do his job. The train driver does not have a simple radio telephone. Those are matters with which British Rail can and should get to grips. If there is one thing on the line it is the reputation of the chairman of British Rail.

I now come to investment. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman) said, the chairman of British Rail told us this morning that all his capital allowance for this year and the foreseeable future would be taken up with channel tunnel-related undertakings. When British Rail put through the channel tunnel Bill, the House was given assurances over and over again in one form or another, either direct or by innuendo, that the construction of the channel tunnel and the rail-related expenditure would not have a detrimental effect on the commuter services of Kent. It is patently clear that those undertakings were ill-founded and that that is where the money is going.

I do not dispute with the chairman of British Rail that that is where he is spending his money but I question whether British Rail is spending all the money on the channel tunnel because it has to or whether it is spending all the money on the channel tunnel project because it is aware that it will be the poor bloody infantry—the commuters—who will bear the brunt and shout and make the Government cough up yet more money.

There is clearly a case for more investment, and quick investment, in new rolling stock for the north Kent line. No one would dispute that. Through British Rail, the Government are already spending many millions of pounds, more than has been spent for many years, on new signalling, new stations, new platforms and in some cases new track. But we need new coaches. *[Interruption.]*

I hear the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape), who came in late and speaks for the Opposition, intervene from a sedentary position. I am sorry that his hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) is not here tonight. Last week, he took the opportunity of a photo opportunity on the train to all the television audience that he had a letter from my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport saying that there would be no new investment in rolling stock for three years.

The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East told me that he would send me a copy of that letter, so I wrote to him that day and asked him for a copy. It has still not arrived. He also told the television station that he had a plan. His plan was that British Rail should lease for £50 million a year the necessary rolling stock. But he did not say who would pay for that rolling stock in the first place or whether that formed part of the Labour party's public expenditure plans. So I wrote and asked him to answer that question too. Perhaps the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East will take the message back to him that I still have not had a reply to that letter and that I would welcome a response and a copy of the Secretary of State's letter which he says exists.

Mr Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): When the hon. Gentleman has finished griping and whining, which is all he ever does about commuter services in Kent, perhaps in the interests of accuracy he might reflect on something that he has just said. He said that the Government are spending more through British Rail than they have ever done. If we are to have a debate, it must be based on some accuracy in the hon. Gentleman's statistics. His statement is not true: British Rail is borrowing more. That is why the hon. Gentleman's commuters are paying more.

Mr. Gale: No one would dispute that, under this Government, more taxpayers' money—it is not Government or public money—has been spent, even on the lines that we criticise, than has ever been spent before.

Mr. Snape: I dispute it, because it is not true.

Mr. Gale: The hon. Gentleman came to the debate late. Perhaps he would like to listen to what I have to say. Undoubtedly he will make his own speech in a moment.

There are certain things that my hon. Friend the Minister can do to help us. First, it is clear that the programme for the new train sets for the north Kent line must be introduced as quickly as possible. I do not know anyone who disagrees with that. I hope that it will not be too long before he can come to the House and tell us that that programme is back in the frame and on stream and that those trains will be built not only quickly and on time but to a quality that apparently has not existed in recent months.

Secondly, I hope that my hon. Friend will ask British Rail to review the timetable of the programme. The thought of more trains being taken out and more passengers being put on to yet more overcrowded trains is not acceptable to any of our constituents. Lastly, I hope that my hon. Friend will persuade British Rail, in the light of the appalling performance that it has offered our constituents in the past few months, to make financial recompense and, above and beyond that, to guarantee reliability and quality for the future.

1.25 am

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Medway (Dame P. Fenner) on leading the debate. It is significant that at 1.25 am there are present in the House six hon. Members who represent north Kent constituencies, all of them Conservative, making the case for our railway line.

It is also significant that, in recent months, we have had heat, but no light, and not a little language from the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) making party political points on television. Here we are, in the House of Commons, where the power lies, debating the issue of service for our commuting constituents, and where is Labour's principal transport spokesman? He is at home in bed.

Mr Snape: Presumably he is in the same place, though one hopes not literally so, as the Secretary of State, and where any sensible person would be at 1.25 in the morning—in bed.

Mr. Arnold: The Minister is here——

Mr. Snape: So is his opposite number.

Mr. Arnold: Whereas the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East can be relied on always to turn up on time in the TV studios, when it is less convenient for him to turn up—in the House—to debate issues of importance, where is he? He is abed.

My hon. Friends have emphasised the poor service that our constituents have had to suffer for a long time. But it has been getting noticeably worse in recent weeks. Like my hon. Friends, commuters have written to me. I will cite a few of them to exemplify the type of service that thousands of commuters in north-west Kent and elsewhere in north Kent have had to put up with. Mr Brian Sangha of Gravesend writes:

> "I have been commuting for some 20 years and during that time have noted the declining standards of service, combined with substantial fare increases and increases in government funding."

He writes that, in the week beginning 11 November, he carried out an analysis of the performances of the trains that he uses. He reports that, for 20 per cent. of the time, the trains were cancelled, for 60 per cent. of the time they ran between 10 and 15 minutes late, and the advertised journey time was not achieved on one occasion.

Mrs. Lewis, of Lower Shorne, in my constituency, did a similar survey earlier this month and reports:

> "Out of 20 trains, only six arrived within five minutes of their scheduled times, and of the remaining 14, seven were between 17 and 48 minutes late."

That is for a 25-mile journey scheduled to take about 47 minutes, so what price the kind of statistics that British Rail has been issuing about the service?

The effect that that is having on commuters at a time of difficulty over jobs can be summed up by a lady from Meopham who, having gone into similar detail as other letter writers, adds:

> "I count myself lucky to work as a secretary for a gentleman who is extremely understanding."

Employers must indeed be understanding, given the timekeeping that my constituents have to put up with.

Such service is not confined merely to the most northerly lines through north Kent, through Gravesend. It also applies to the line to Meopham and Sole Street in my constituency. Not only must commuters on that service suffer the bad timekeeping and lack of cleanliness which has been particularly evident on British Rail in recent months, but they must also suffer the new timetabling.

British Rail says that the volume of commuters in north Kent has declined by about 7 per cent. of late, so it must trim costs accordingly, as any good business must do. I find it completely inexplicable that in the face of that 7 per cent. it saw fit last August, when many commuters were on holiday, to sneak out the announcement that the autumn programme would involve scrapping 100 per cent. of the services in the rush hour to and from the city on this line. All three trains up and all three trains down were scrapped. After much ado and going into some detail, British Rail somewhat grudgingly, late in the day, replaced one up train, but not one to come back.

We should also look at the kind of cattle-truck conditions that our constituents are supposed to put up with. The carriages on the north Kent line date from the 1950s and the new Networker carriages are long overdue. We in this House know that the Government have given British Rail the largest rail investment since the Conservative Government of the 1950s. It is significant that the occasional Labour Government that we have had since then did not bring a single new carriage on to the routes serving north Kent.

We know that the vast bulk of the Networkers are now being constructed at British Rail Engineering Ltd. and at Metro Cammel. We know that the first such unit is to be delivered next week, with weekly deliveries thereafter. We must, as north Kent Members, insist that British Rail keeps to this programme so that it properly introduces the passenger service of Networker trains early in the spring.

We welcome our hon. Friend the Minister here tonight and we hope that he will insist that British Rail delivers

these Networkers trains on time. The overwhelming bulk of them have been authorised and ordered and are coming in. I ask my hon. Friend to make sure that British Rail does not continue to divert its capital investment into channel tunnel services but orders the remaining tranche of 188 Networkers for the north Kent line and makes sure that the system is completely re-equipped. It is high time that we had a 20th century or even a 21st century quality service for the commuters of north Kent.

1.31 am

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): I begin by agreeing with the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) and his proposition that most sensible people would be in bed at this time. I am delighted that he is here because he has been a consistent advocate of more investment in the railways and we should give him credit for that. I always remind him of the many very severe criticisms that he levelled at the Labour Government, most of them justified, about the lack of investment between the years 1974 and 1980.

The hon. Gentleman knows that this is not a new problem. In the 20 years that I and some of my hon. Friends here have been in the House, the problems of bad commuter services for north Kent have constantly been with us. There was a flashback in one of our local papers the other week to an item in the news 25 years ago when my predecessor, now Lord Boston, met a large number of very irate commuters and, according to the report, was rather surprised at their intemperate language. I think that most of us are very surprised at just how patient and forbearing many commuters have been in the most incredibly difficult travelling conditions that they have had to put up with in recent weeks.

Terry Boston's predecessor was another Labour member, called Percy Wells, and there is a story told of him in relation to trains. As we all know, in this House we are always forgetting things. We forget where we park our cars, briefcases and papers. It is a fairly well-known characteristic. But on one particular occasion Percy Wells excelled himself. He was travelling back on the last train to Faversham, as was his normal practice, when he remembered that he had left his wife sitting in the Gallery.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) referred to the visit of Sir Bob Reid to the House this morning. We should put on record the fact that we are grateful to him for coming early in the morning, with other senior managers of Network SouthEast. It was courteous and helpful of him to do so. It was a useful meeting. While it is right to level harsh criticisms at times like this, one should also appreciate it when the effort is made. They are doing their utmost to respond. There is general recognition of the tremendous problems. Having got to that meeting at 8 o'clock this morning, here we are debating the position at nearly 2 o'clock the next morning. I feel like many of our commuters, that some of the hours put in are unreasonable.

It should be understood how angry, frustrated and fed up so many commuters are. Journeys that should take an hour are taking two hours. Commuters get no explanations and complaints are legion. The suffering is real and the hardship is very great. I do not need to reiterate that because we all understand it and regret it very much.

I have a bigger worry. The problems over the past few weeks because of leaves on the lines, ice or whatever, have been dreadful, but we could be facing much worse conditions in coming weeks and months because we have not hit the hard winter. We have not had snow yet. The prospect is depressing for tens of thousands of people making the daily journey into London or desperately trying to get home.

What is to be done? The first problem is the old rolling stock. We have had a graphic description of travelling in non-corridor trains without toilets. One can cope with that for a journey lasting an hour, but if one is there for two hours or two and half hours, as can happen, one can appreciate the sheer misery that that causes. No one in any part of the House can justify that. That has not just happened. The problem of inadequate investment goes back a long time.

The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East was crossing swords with my hon. Friends about who spent the most money. I could probably find some words on the record from him, but the only time there was a significant cut in railway investment was under a Labour Government. That was regrettable, but under-investment is still regrettable. Given that it is a nationalised industry, there is always a shortage of investment funds and there are always clashes of priority for extra money. So year after year after year there has been inadequate investment in that line.

The conclusion I reach is different from that of the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East. We have to find a different financial structure. It could be privatisation or it could be separating the railway into different management structures. There is no simple way of raising the billions of pounds that we need if we are to modernise the railway. The fascinating thing is that the hon. Members for West Bromwich, East and for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) realise that, even if there were a Labour Government, they would not get the necessary capital investment from their Treasury spokesman. So they have come up with the idea of leasing. The significance of that is that they know that they would not get capital funds.

We all face that problem. The commuters are entitled to new rolling stock and somehow we have to get it. If we do not order it now, the prospects for the line are dreadful. One way or another, we have to find the resources and commit ourselves to a programme of new trains on those long distance lines. We are talking about big money —£7 billion. It cannot be conjured out of thin air but it is the first basic requirement.

However, that is a long-term prospect and several measures should be taken immediately to help our commuters. My hon. Friend the Member for Medway (Dame P. Fenner) made this suggestion and it is not new, but communications could be improved and information given out quickly. It is wonderful how quickly a high-grade, high-quality letter can be produced with modern photocopiers to explain to all commuters exactly what went wrong. Most of them are very supportive of British Rail and knowledgeable about the railways, and they want information but they do not get it. That measure can be taken tomorrow. Most passengers understand the problems and are ready to make allowances for the sort of problems that occur on that rail network, but for heaven's sake, let us get on with improving matters right away.

The next measure concerns fare increases. If the Southend line can achieve recognition of the fact that its

[Mr. Roger Moate]

service is poor and if passengers on that line have had a lower fare increase, the same should have been applied to the Kent line. If, as we are told, it is too late to reduce those prospective fare increases from 7·75 per cent. to 5 per cent., in line with inflation and comparable to the Southend line, the Government should find another way to make a concession to passengers in recognition of their suffering. One way would be to reduce fares; another would be to extend season tickets for a period. But let us do something in recognition of the serious problems.

As soon as new rolling stock is available, may we please have more standby stock ready so that it can no longer be claimed that there is inadequate stock in the wrong place when problems occur?

All those measures involve capital and, one way or another, we must create a larger investment programme. Frankly, I do not care whether that is done by leasing or by more Government investment, but it must be forthcoming. The leasing method is fudging the issue because it is cheaper for the Treasury to raise that money than to borrow it from the City. Unless we lease into a privately financed railway where there is genuine risk capital, it is simply Government borrowing by a different name.

We have a long-term investment problem and a short-term winter problem, coupled with short-term management problems. Those can be dealt with, given the right approach by my hon. Friend the Minister and British Rail management. We have the exciting prospect of a White Paper to be issued shortly on the new structure of British Rail, which can offer the right solutions for our passengers in the long term. That means smaller management units and a much better responsiveness to local customers. Only in that way will the hundreds of thousands of people in the south-east get the first-class modern railway that they deserve.

1.43 am

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): I apologise to the hon. Member for Medway (Dame P. Fenner), who initiated the debate, for missing her speech. I had expected the debate to start later, and I hope that she accepts that, although it is my responsibility to be here at the correct time, I did not deliberately miss her speech, and I meant no discourtesy to her.

I arrived in time to hear the speech of the hon. Member for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman). The first phrase that I heard bemoaned the state of the railway service in his constituency, and he asked what he should tell his constituents. I understand that he is desperate for something to tell them. After all, we are approaching a general election and, as he canvasses in the snows of February or March or even in the sunshine of July—none of us know yet—they may say, "Well, after 13 years, shouldn't you have done better on those services?"

I shall try to tell the hon. Gentleman what he should tell his constituents in a minute or two, but first I shall comment on the speech of the hon. Member for Faversham (Mr. Moate). He and I have spent the bulk of the past 18 hours in various Committees, so we have probably heard more than enough of each other. I hope that I shall not damage his career prospects by saying that I found his speech thoughtful, in direct contrast to some of the others that I heard this evening.

The hon. Member for Faversham rightly spoke of the investment problems that have occurred under successive Governments, both Conservative and Labour, for many years. He was right—I was critical of some of the policies of the last Labour Government. I shall probably be telling tales out of school about myself when I say that I once wrote a letter to *The Guardian* of all newspapers about the Labour Government's railway policies. The matter was taken seriously, because I was then a Whip. I was new to the post and professed ignorance of traditions, but I understand that neither the Ministers involved nor their civil servants were overkeen on my departure from the normal customs.

The two senior Ministers in the Department of Transport at that time were Mr Bill Rodgers and Mr John Horam, and there was precious little socialism in the railways policies from that quarter. One of them, having spent a few fleeting years in the SDP or whatever it was called, is now running the Royal Institute of British Architects. I understand that the other former Minister has been selected as a Conservative candidate for Orpington, in Kent.

Let us hope that if, in the far distant future, the nation is unwise enough to select another Conservative Government, Mr John Horam is not once again appointed a Transport Minister. If he is, I fear that the griping that we have heard tonight from Conservative Members about rail services will be redoubled. Mr Horam is no friend of the railways and the fact that he is a member of the Conservative party merely proves something that most of us long suspected when he was sailing under false colours.

The hon. Member for Faversham made some relevant comments. He rightly talked of the need for British Rail to improve communications. There is nothing more annoying for passengers than to sit in trains or wait at stations without being given information. There is a management problem in British Rail. I appreciate that modern communication equipment has not yet been installed in many stations in north Kent. When it has been installed in other parts of British Rail, it is often not used properly.

Therefore, not only is investment needed, but a little more managerial competence must be brought to bear when that investment is provided, to ensure that information is made readily available. Passengers are much more prepared to accept delays and problems if they know what is wrong and how long it is likely to take to put right. All too often, the most annoying aspect of a delayed railway journey is having to sit in trains, whether with corridors or not.

The hon. Member for Faversham talked about new ways of raising finance. There is no magic method of financing commuter trains. If, in the unlikely event of another Conservative Government being elected, British Rail were privatised, I do not think that there would be too many bidders for the north Kent rail services, whether modernised or not. It is a simple fact of financial life anywhere in the world that running a commuter railway is not, by its very nature, a profitable business. As on any other commuter line, many of the assets on the north Kent line—which are, in these modern days, expensive—spend

18 out of 24 hours doing very little. It is at the twin peaks—the morning and the evening—when those assets are put to full use.

It is difficult to imagine anyone outside the railway industry rushing with cheques to purchase commuter railway lines in view of the fact that peak travel is the most expensive transport provision imaginable. I should have thought it pretty unlikely—but I am prepared to listen to Conservative Members, despite the fact that I rarely believe them on such matters—that there would be a great rush to buy their railway.

The hon. Member for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale) talked about the railway problems affecting his constituency, and complained about the recent reduction in capacity. Where has he been? British Rail or Network SouthEast must cut its commuter coat in accordance with its financial cloth, and it is this Government who have drawn the financial guidelines so tightly. The necessity of living within a budget has led railway managers to reduce capacity on trains, because otherwise they would run over the budget for their sector or route.

The hon. Gentleman should talk to the Minister—publicly or privately—about the reduction and tell him that running the railway system—especially Network SouthEast—in such a parsimonious manner has caused many of the problems that he has graphically if somewhat over-dramatically outlined. No one would feel anything but anguish—

Mr. Jacques Arnold *rose*——

Mr. Snape: I shall come to the hon. Gentleman in a moment. He has not listened to what I said, because he was turning the other way.

Mr. Dunn *rose*——

Mr. Snape: I did not hear what the hon. Gentleman said, although I understand that he had a few things to say. Let me deal first with the hon. Member for Thanet, North, who told the—admittedly sad—story of the commuter forced to urinate out of the window because of delays. Everyone can understand that, and sympathise with the person involved. One could find oneself in such circumstances on any mode of transport.

I know that the railway system in Kent—especially in an election year—is set up to be an Aunt Sally, but if hon. Members decided to drive to and from their constituencies they would be aware of the fact that their arrival time, especially at this time of year, would be likely to fluctuate widely, depending on the traffic and the number of accidents on the trunk roads and motorway. They could end up in a traffic jam lasting an hour or an hour and a half.

Mr. Dunn: Perhaps I could be fairer to the hon. Gentleman than I was when he was not here. I accept his apology to my hon. Friend the Member for Medway (Dame P. Fenner), but he did not listen to my speech either. However, I accept his apology in the spirit in which it was given.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) and I mentioned that British Rail argued that it has lost 7 per cent. of its customers because of the recession and that, consequently, it had to make cuts. Why did it have to cut 100 per cent. of the line from Chatham—in our constituencies—to Blackfriars and 60 per cent. of services from Dartford to Blackfriars? A 7 per cent. loss followed by cuts of 100 per cent. and 60 per cent. does not make sense.

Mr. Snape: The hon. Gentleman must accept that I am unable to give a detailed answer.

Mr. Arnold: He is trying to justify it.

Mr. Snape: From a sedentary position, the hon. Member for Gravesham makes a fool of himself as usual. I am not trying to justify the cuts. I am agreeing with hon. Members that a great deal is wrong with the commuter services from their constituencies. I am making what I hope the Minister will accept is the relevant point—that railway finances, and especially those of Network South East, play a part in the illogical trimming of services, to use the words of the hon. Member for Dartford.

I hope that he accepts that British Rail will say that services have been cut so that it can stay within the budget imposed by its financial straitjacket. Those cuts might be said to be unfair and to bear down unfairly on those who live on the line, but British Rail managers say that they have to make cuts somewhere because they have to live within their budgets. None of us wants cuts that affect our constituencies, but that is what has to happen.

The hon. Member for Gravesham dripped and moaned about services from his constituency. His only consolation must be that he will not have to put up with all this much longer, because he will not be here to complain about the railway after the next election. I know that his Labour successor will do a better job than he has done to improve services from that part of the world—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman is obviously obsessed by that successor, because he keeps mumbling about him. I have no doubt that, when he arrives, he will make a better fist of fighting for his constituents than the hon. Gentleman has.

I gathered that the hon. Member for Faversham did not feel that leasing was the right way forward. As he correctly said, it is cheaper to borrow money from the Treasury than from anyone else. He fairly conceded that any Government will have spending priorities governing the borrowing of money, and what British Rail needs to borrow is likely to be beyond the capacity of the Treasury to meet in full.

Leasing is not new. The 1970-74 Tory Government went in for quite a bit of it with British Rail. Deltic locomotives and some rolling stock were leased at that time. By leasing, British Rail can spread the burden over up to 20 years, and that means coming up with much smaller sums at the beginning.

I hope that Conservative Members agree that something drastic must be done. The desperately needed class 465 trains for north Kent have still not been ordered, despite the pleas from Tory Members. I do not think that the Minister of State will be able to pledge that those trains will be provided. That means that British Rail will have to spend £50 million on maintaining and improving clapped-out 40-year-old rolling stock for another four or five years. Apart from the problems that that causes the constituents of Tory Members, it does not make financial sense in the long term.

Some better way must be found. I hope that the Minister will tell us that the Government will do something to provide the rolling stock that his hon. Friends demand. That rolling stock will bring relief to passengers, improve efficiency, relieve congestion and

[Mr. Snape]

reduce maintenance costs. In the long term, not renewing rolling stock on north Kent lines will be far more expensive. It is expensive to patch up stock that ought to be in the railway equivalent of the knacker's yard.

I hope that the Minister has good news for his hon. Friends. They need it. After all, it is not just the railways and the commuters that depend on better rolling stock and services: it is the necks and the survival of many Conservative Members with Kent constituencies that depend on them. That is the reason behind this debate and it is why these Tory Members, who have so slavishly followed the Government for 13 years, now ask them to come to their rescue. I hope that the Minister will come to the rescue of the railways. It is too late to save his hon. Friends—but I am not too worried about that.

1.59 am

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Roger Freeman): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Medway (Dame P. Fenner) on initiating the debate and my hon. Friends the Members for Dartford (Mr. Dunn), for Gillingham (Mr. Couchman), for Thanet, North (Mr. Gale), for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) and for Faversham (Mr. Moate) on their contributions. They have felt strongly for some time about the north Kent line, but particularly during the past three to four months, which have seen a clear deterioration in the service provided. They have made their points forcefully at this extremely late hour, and I am sure that their constituents will note that they have taken the trouble to attend the debate and speak so forcefully in it.

On behalf of the Government, I acknowledge the problems on the north Kent line, particularly during the past few months, as does British Rail. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North for accompanying me on the 7.2 am service from Ramsgate to Cannon Street and the night before on the station platform at Herne Bay, when I talked to a number of commuters, which I found helpful. On the train, I was able to talk at some length and in some depth not only with commuters from Ramsgate but with those who joined the train at subsequent stations. My hon. Friends the Members for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) and for Faversham also travelled with me.

My hon. Friend the member for Dartford summed the matter up accurately when he said that commuters want a reliable service. That is the most important thing. It must also be a quality service, and that is related to the age of the rolling stock. I use a station that is 90 miles from London, and the journey to London takes me one hour and five minutes. I suspect that Ramsgate is approximately 90 miles from London, but that service takes twice as long and it is a bumpy ride.

Before I make what I hope will be regarded as some positive statements, I should say that improvements are partly up to British Rail and they are partly a function of investment. British Rail has to make the best possible use of its resources. It has to control its costs and live within the external financing limits set by the Government. On behalf of the Secretary of State for Transport, I accept responsibility for setting that limit, but British Rail must make the most productive use of those assets.

I draw the attention of the House to a statement made by London Underground about two weeks ago on the launch of an imaginative plan to make effective use of its manpower by having fewer people but paying them more so that they provide a quality service.

I agree with my hon. Friends the Members for Medway, for Gillingham and for Faversham, particularly about information services. It surely must be elementary that prompt information is necessary not just for the people on the trains, but for the people waiting to depart and the relatives or friends waiting for trains to arrive. Such information must be prompt, audible, apologetic when that is appropriate, factual and honest.

It costs some money to put in a proper information system, but it does not cost tens or hundreds of millions of pounds. It is a simple management procedure, and we want British Rail to follow not only my hon. Friends' advice and guidance but mine.

Investment is clearly part of the solution. I am well aware of what is needed on the line in terms of the 471s. As my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North said, I went, together with his other hon. Friends to see the mock-up at Margate. It looks an attractive train.

I am also aware of the need for the Thameslink 2000 improvements in order to widen the throat of the main London termini, and allow more trains to get in at the peak. I support Sir Bob Reid's proposals for Thameslink 2000. They are important, and when resources permit, I am sure that those proposals will proceed, as they must.

The investment programme is large. My hon. Friend cited Sir Bob Reid's remarks this morning. The wrong impression may have been given about investment in channel tunnel services squeezing out Network SouthEast. For 1991-92—we are three quarters the way through that year—investment will be approximately £1,080 million. Channel tunnel investment will be £390 million; Network SouthEast, £290 million; and non-Network SouthEast outside London and the home counties, £400 million.

Investment in Network SouthEast this year will include £75 million on the new turbo trains on the Chiltern lines, and on Networkers for the Kent link lines. If one wants to deliver new rolling stock, one has to put the cash up front, and that totals £610 million. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford said, the first new coach will arrive in December, and I hope that he and others of my hon. Friends will join me in examining the new rolling stock when it is tested. It will enter service in the spring.

Much must depend on the manufacturers—BREL and GEC—delivering that new rolling stock on time. As to finance for future years—a reference was made to the £50 million investment in resignalling on the London to Tilbury and Southend line—that for resignalling in Kent will total £80 million.

Dame Peggy Fenner: If the manufacturers do not deliver on time, will there be a forfeit in the shape of a reduced payment?

Mr. Freeman: Yes, in certain circumstances. If production and delivery schedules are not met, British Rail would be right to withhold payment.

In the few minutes remaining, let me sound a slightly more positive note, to try to help my hon. Friends.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): They are desperate.

Mr. Freeman: As to the hon. Gentleman's sedentary comment, I would respond in the same constructive and helpful way whatever the debate, and whatever the line. I would address the issues on their merits—and that is what I am doing.

I want to make five points about the north Kent line. —[Hon. Members: "Oh."] I am taking this debate seriously, even at 2 o'clock in the morning. As to the 471 investment programme, British Rail must produce its corporate plan by 31 March 1992, and it must be consistent with the external financing limit settlement of £2 billion for 1992-93 that we announced.

That is an increase of £1 billion; it increases the public service obligation grant to £900 million this year, and it will probably be about £1 billion next year. I assure my hon. Friends that, by 31 March, we will clarify the ordering and delivery of the 471s. The House would not expect me to make a prediction tonight. British Rail must produce its plan for the next five years, consistent with the resources that we are making available.

In response to the request of my hon. Friend the Member for Thanet, North, I will ask British Rail tonight, in respect of Network SouthEast service, to review the new schedules for the north Kent lines for 1992. I appreciate that the service has reduced because of the Cannon Street works, and that there is a desire to stop trains at certain other stations in 1992, so that passengers who cannot currently avail themselves of that service will be able to do so. However, I will ask British Rail to take a fresh look at the service schedules for next year.

The service has obviously deteriorated over the last three months. I will ask British Rail to consider as an immediate gesture the provision of some form of compensation—probably by way of rail vouchers, which is the usual practice—to passengers who have suffered disruption over the past three or four months. That would be equitable, and I am sure that British Rail will consider responding promptly and fairly.

Fourthly, from 1 January, I shall be setting new performance standards for the Kent coastal services in 1992. If British Rail does not meet those standards, compensation will automatically be offered to season ticket holders. I shall not fix the percentage tonight, because the details have yet to be worked out. The system will give British Rail an incentive to provide a better service, and I think that passengers will consider it equitable. As we stated in the citizens charter document published in July, we intend to apply a similar system to all Network SouthEast lines to provide season ticket holders —who are locked into the service—with proper recompense. That will apply to annual, quarterly and monthly tickets.

Fifthly, there is the question of future fares increases. My hon. Friend the Member for Medway asked why we could not do something about the fares increases planned for 5 January. Those increases were set in early October, and I am afraid that adjusting them now is not a practical proposition: it would cause even greater confusion. I can tell my hon. Friend, however, that, had British Rail known then what would transpire in October, November and December, the fares increases proposed for that line would undoubtedly have been different. I give her this pledge: when fares increases are next set for Network SouthEast lines, the differential—particularly in regard to the service on the north Kent line—will take into account not only the service that is prospectively on offer, but the service that is being provided.

After Christmas, we shall be publishing a White Paper on British Rail privatisation. The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) is wrong to believe that we are considering only the simplistic solution of selling off the Network SouthEast lines. He knows that that would not work. The lines are currently heavily subsidised, and a much more sophisticated solution is needed to bring in the private sector. We shall unveil our plans shortly.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: When he checks British Rail's forward programme, will my hon. Friend ensure that it includes the final tranche of 465 Networkers that is required for the north Kent line?

Mr. Freeman: I have already made it plain to the House several times that we must finish the Kent link line services —the inner Kent services—before we can turn to production of the 471s. It would be extremely expensive to truncate production of the 465s to insert the 471s, and then come back to finish the Kent link services. I give my hon. Friend that pledge: we will complete the production programme.

I hope that the British Rail privatisation White Paper will prove helpful. I should value my hon. Friends' comments on it; the House will undoubtedly debate it. Unlike the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East, we have positive proposals to improve the quality of service on Network SouthEast. The hon. Gentleman has no policy, no money and no hope.

Hazardous Waste

2.13 am

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): The Minister for Public Transport said a moment ago that it was rather late. Debates such as these usually run all night; in my experience that does not do any harm, because it means that Ministers have to sit up late and answer for what has gone wrong over the years.

Although the subject that I wish to raise relates to my constituency, I believe that it has much wider implications for the rest of the United Kingdom. I am pleased to have the opportunity to raise the whole question of the disposal of toxic and hazardous wastes once again before the House rises for the Christmas recess. Such waste arises from many sources in the manufacture of materials in widespread use. Most of the materials are so useful that they simply cannot be discarded. I see little chance of any of them being replaced. We shall work with those materials for many years.

We also have the problem of waste that was created many years ago before people realised how dangerous it was. The injury to the health of persons who come into contact with such substances is not new. Those who used mercurous nitrate were not aware of its effects, and they were equally unaware that those effects would echo down through history in the phrase "mad as a hatter". I often wonder whether we should all have so cheerfully followed the holy grail of nuclear energy if those who made the decisions had known far earlier what we know about the subject nowadays.

People believe the scientists and then find out, only by a slow accretion of knowledge, that scientists can get it wrong, just as the ordinary individual can. That has fuelled much of the present doubt about the claims of science today.

I received an answer from the Department of the Environment on this side of the Irish sea in response to my request for a copy of the United Kingdom red list of dangerous compounds. It is an interesting list and one almost needs a degree in chemical engineering to understand it. One or two of the compounds are well known. The first is DDT. What a boon that insecticide was when it first appeared and what a concern its residues are to the whole world today.

I also found on the list aldrin and dieldrin. Like the rest of the agricultural world, I embraced those new discoveries when they first came out. They appeared to be the final answer to the problems of sheep dip, because they were powerful instruments against the diseases in sheep which we were fighting at that time and which we still have to learn about. Those compounds were also used for dealing with potato pests and God knows what else. Yet we now find those compounds on the red list. It is no wonder that people today cry caution whenever they are told that some new and wonderful product has appeared on the market.

I am principally concerned with the residues of the manufacture of man-made fibres and plastics. I am especially concerned about the proposal to build a plant to incinerate such residues and about the effect of the fallout from the plant on my constituents. However, there is a wider implication for the rest of the country. There is a world wide danger from such materials. The residues are long lived and cannot be recaptured once they are in the environment. Not all the effects are yet fully understood.

I have taken a keen interest in the proposal since it came to my notice a year or so ago. Whenever a light is placed outside one's own front door, one starts to wonder about the strength of the light and about its effects. An article in the September edition of *Chemistry in Britain* was brought to my attention. The article refers to PCBs—polychlorinated biphenyls—one of the materials about which I am concerned. The article says:

"Many of these higher chlorinated and mono-ortho-substituted PCBs produce toxic effects and have been reported to accumulate in human tissues. There are considerable species and sex differences, but the toxic effects include the loss of body weight, atrophy (wasting) of the thymus (an important organ in the development of the immune response) skin cell disorders, liver damage, decreased reproduction; diminished immune response".

It was also pointed out that previously the potentially toxic effects of PCBs on man were so little appreciated that they were seriously considered as a substitute for the gum component in chewing gum. That illustrates best just how easily mistakes about dangerous long-lived materials can be made. Heaven knows how many other such materials exist about which we are not worried yet.

According to the article to which I have referred, there is evidence that professional mixtures of PCBs can be carcinogenic and mutagenic when tested on laboratory animals. It is now well established that female rats are more responsive in tests than males.

One really needs a degree in chemical engineering to read the red list, let alone understand it. However, there is enough information in plain everyday English to worry the living daylights out of me. Another article in the same issue of *Chemistry in Britain* states:

"Environmental exposure to PCBs and eating PCB contaminated food can cause PCBs to accumulate in fatty tissues"—

one of which, of course, is human breast milk.

"PCBs can be transferred from mothers to their young during lactation. This finding prompted us to do a small survey of the individual PCBs in samples of breast milk from 10 mothers living in the Reading area. The separation of the individual PCBs by capilliary gas chromatography and their measurement by electron capture detection enabled us to estimate a mean concentration in milk of approximately 1·2 μg total PCBs ml^{-1}, which is at least 20-fold greater than the concentration that can cause adverse effects in humans. Sixty individual PCBs were identified and—were highly chlorinated. Some of these PCBs are thought to promote carcinogenesis in laboratory animals."

That is surely enough to worry any mother or parent for the children and for succeeding generations because these things tumble down the line.

I read in another document:

"EPA has calculated that the tolerable daily intake of TCDD for humans is 0·006 picograms per kg body weight per day. This level would supposedly result in a one in 1 million chance of excess cancer from TCDD. But this level is far, far below the 1 to 3 picograms per kg body weight per day that people are estimated to be actually ingesting. Other nations, using different risk assessment models, have calculated the tolerable intake level much higher. Germany uses 1 picogram, the Netherlands 4, and Canada and the World Health Organisation use 10 picograms per kg body weight per day."

When we stop to consider the wide differences that exist in the information, it is clear that, if the scientists really understood the effects of these materials, they would long since have reached a common standard as to how much the human body can tolerate without serious adverse effects. The reality is that we do not know what we are dealing. The matter has not yet been sorted out that: must be cause for concern and for great caution.

We should be concerned not only with the present generation, but for generations ahead of us. It is clear that experiments have thrown up nasty results, and no doubt the Minister will follow that up.

My constituents are particularly concerned because they are down wind of the proposed incineration plant. I received a letter from the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham), written on 7 November. The letter was written on recycled paper, which gives us some hope for the future. It said:

"In broad terms, Northern Ireland has introduced the legislation required to implement the series of EC Directives."

Of course, they have been broadly implemented across the rest of the United Kingdom.

That letter went on:

"Most requirements of this Directive were introduced here by the Pollution Control and Local Government (NI) Order 1978. In Great Britain the Directive was implemented by the existing Control of Pollution Act 1974."

It was brought to my attention on 21 November that the European Court of Justice judged that EC Governments could be sued in their own courts for failing to implement certain EC directives. That judgment arose out of two Italian cases in which the employees were seeking to recover wages owing to them when the employers went bankrupt, leaving no assets from which the employees could recover their money. They subsequently sued the Italian Government for failing to implement a 1980 EC directive requiring member states to set up compensation funds for people in such circumstances.

One must consider the possible implications. If there are any mistakes in carrying EC directives into domestic law, the Government, rather than the individual, should get the shivers. It could leave them open to heavy compensation claims from their own nationals. Perhaps the social charter is not quite as dead as the Prime Minister thought at Maastricht. There could be ramifications through European avenues, and they could be very costly. Let us hope that the Government have got it right. It is a serious matter. I hope that we shall try to ensure that our people who come into contact with those substances and suffer injury are properly covered.

Another problem has arisen. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is not present, because the problems arose in his constituency. Farmers found that some milk had been contaminated with dioxins. The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food stopped the sale of that milk—good for him—because of the danger to the individuals who might have drunk it. The farmers were left to sue the polluter. That is the answer that the hon. Member for Bolsover received from the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Unfortunately, the Department of the Environment did not close the offending plant. I believe that it was the coalite plant in the area. That was not much help to the farmers. They were told by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, "You can sue the polluter." Certainly, initially, they did not receive much help from the Department of the Environment or from the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to identify the polluter.

I always remember the Hanrahan case in the Irish Republic. The farmer eventually won that case on a technicality. His entire milk herd had been wrecked. The case went on for years. It was a telling mark against how Governments deal with the problems that citizens come up against whenever they are injured by insidious, long-term, dangerous materials. It is not a light matter; it will continue to affect our constituents over the years unless we take action.

I now refer to the time that it takes for dangerous materials such as dioxins to go out of an incinerator chimney stack and into the human body. Some people think that it is a long time. However, in certain circumstances, it is a very short time.

I ask the House to consider a situation that I, as a farmer, can well understand. I do not know whether any one else present is a farmer. Let us suppose that, on a dull, quiet, overcast Friday evening, something goes wrong in the local incinerator. A dumpstack is used. When I first heard about dumpstacks, I thought that they were a sort of recycling system, but that is not the case. Whenever something goes wrong, it is dumped into the atmosphere and it flops down on to the grass over a 20-mile radius.

If the farmers' cows are out and eat the grass, they will convert it into milk. When the farmer drives them in in the morning, he milks them and that milk goes straight into the tank. Nobody will know that there is anything wrong with it. When the farmer brings in the cows in the evening, he milks them again. Still nobody knows that there is anything wrong with it. The tanker takes the milk to the dairy next morning and within 24 or, at most, 36 hours, everyone who has bought and drunk the milk has dioxins in their body—and there they stay. It is as quick and as dangerous as that.

There is no escape unless there is total honesty about the burning of the materials by the people operating the incinerators. I fear, however, that the polluters will often try to hide what has happened because the costs are colossal. In the scenario that I have described, the dioxin is on the herbage, the grass. I do not know about dioxins in the ground. I should like to be told whether, if there are dioxins and fluorants in the soil, the herbage that the cattle eat will absorb them and whether the pollutants can enter the human food chain by that path. We need a clear answer on that. There is far too much secrecy at present. The problem will not be solved without public debate and unless people think seriously about it.

Facts such as those that I have described give me grave concern about the burning of those materials. As a result of my investigations, I would be the first to acknowledge that burning such things at the recommended temperatures has, at first sight, a lot to recommend it and many advantages. It is quick and it is certainly much cheaper than any other system of cleaning up those things. But what happens if the temperature control goes wrong? If the temperature falls from the recommended 1,200 to 1,500 degrees, which is mighty hot, to 400 or 500 degrees, the result is not harmless materials.

Incidentally, no one is sure whether the resulting materials that go up the stack really are harmless. However, if the temperature falls, dioxins are created, and out they go into the atmosphere. One knows that they are out once they have left, but there is not much that one can do about it once they are away and in the atmosphere and environment—and they will drift a long way. Parts of my constituency are still suffering from the effects of the Chernobyl explosion, and nobody is happy about that.

Let us suppose that something goes wrong with the burning mechanism and pressures build up. The dumpstack is opened and the pollutants are dumped out into the atmosphere. I am not a technician, but it seems to

[Mr. William Ross]

me, as a fairly practical man, that whenever that happens, the materials bypass a large part of the process. They are probably not quenched and will therefore cool slowly, which is when the dioxins form. We could run into severe difficulties through using dumpstacks, which I understand are frequently used in the United States. This is not a matter to be treated lightly.

The Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Wiltshire, North could not answer the long series of questions that I put to him last winter, spring and summer. The reason why the Minister could not answer was that Du Pont had not told him the outcome of the various experiments.

One of my questions was answered only yesterday. I asked what information the Minister had about

"pyrolysis experiments carried out by Du Pont on the waste to be incinerated at the proposed hazardous waste incinerator at Maydown, Londonderry to determine the products, at what temperatures these experiments were carried out; and what products resulted."

His answer was:

"The Goverment have no information on any such experiments."

I should have thought that, before the Government could give a reasoned answer on whether the thing should be built, they would need access to such information. Even at this stage, it is not too early to ask such questions. It is long overdue that the Northern Ireland Office should have the information.

I do not know the position of the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry), but I hope that Ministers at the Department of the Environment are better informed than their colleagues at the Northern Ireland Office. It might not be the fault of Ministers. Perhaps our legislation is not strong enough to extract the information from the firms involved. If it is not, we should introduce the necessary legislation. We need to know.

The Government do not seem to have addressed the point that I made on 10 July about what the position will be if, as some firms tell us, the amount of waste is reduced by 70 per cent. by the end of the century. If the amount of waste is reduced by 70 per cent., all the economics on which the present plans are based will go out of the window. They will simply no longer make sense. I wonder exactly what is going on. The fact that it does not add up to anyone causes me concern, and I must tell the Minister that it is a concern shared by many people in Northern Ireland.

I raised that very point on 10 July, and I did not get an answer then. I am not sure that I shall get an answer tonight, but I am putting down markers for the Government to tell them what they should examine. That has to be done. It is a serious matter. There is tremendous public anxiety in my constituency and an enormous number of objections. Hazardous waste is the one thing that unites north, south, east and west, Protestant, Roman Catholic, Sinn Fein and Democratic Unionist party in the area. I cannot think of anything that unites people so much. The farming community and the general public are involved. The latest groups to voice their anxiety are the Foyle anglers and Foyle Fisheries Commission, who are equally worried about the effect on fish in the Foyle.

Furthermore, at Northern Ireland Question Time today, the Minister seemed unfortunately to be closing the door on the vital suggestion, that the producers of the waste should not be in charge of incinerating it. Financial pressures will be put on management and workers at such a plant by the owners and those who produce the waste. Those who operate the plant will be forced to take short cuts.

In the press at the beginning of the week, I saw horrifying information which has recently surfaced about near misses in nuclear plants. They are enough to make one shiver. It worries me even more that the nuclear plants involved were the Savannah river plants in the United States, run by the very same firm, Du Pont. There were stories of melted rods and God knows what. It was terrifying. In some cases, the workers even ignored the red warning lights and signs until attention was drawn to them by other people.

The Government should not shut their eyes to the point that I make. I have been told—the Minister will correct me if I am wrong—that in Germany incinerators are part Government owned and part industry owned and operate on a non-profit making basis. Such a plant must be built in Northern Ireland. That is the way forward. I wish that such plants could be built in the rest of the United Kingdom, so that financial pressures are not exerted on workers in the plant by the folk who produce and burn the material.

If Du Pont is doing the environmental impact assessment for the plant, who will confirm that work? And what of the methodology used in the work? Many people will be interested to know the answers to those questions, for we believe that it must be checked and rechecked by independent people. It appears that, under EC rules, wastes of this type must be treated at the nearest facility. That reason alone leads one to believe that there will be one plant in Ireland for the whole island of Ireland.

Committee D of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body issued a report in November of this year. That made it clear that the Republic would build a plant. The proposals had been received and were under consideration, and the Du Pont plan then came into view, whereupon the Irish Republic rapidly said that it would shelve its proposal. It was shelved because of the discovery that the location of such a facility in Northern Ireland would be designed to serve the whole of Ireland. I was surprised that the Irish Republic, which was apparently so far ahead in relation to the Northern Ireland facility, was so willing to drop it. In other words, the Irish Republic thought it such a hot potato that it was willing quickly to get rid of it.

I tabled a parliamentary question on 18 November this year—it was answered on the 25th—asking the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to

"clarify the position regarding the proposal for a toxic-hazardous waste incinerator at Maydown, Londonderry, in the light of the recent statement by the Minister for the Environment in the Republic of Ireland that the Republic would have to construct a toxic waste incinerator in the near future."

The reply was:

"The Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland has not received a planning application for a toxic-hazardous waste incinerator at Maydown, Londonderry. A planning application for a major development involving a hazardous waste incinerator would not be determined without a public inquiry held under the terms of article 31 of the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991".
—[*Official Report*, 25 November 1991; Vol. 199, c. 387.]

That did not clarify matters much, and that answer is indicative of the attitude that has been taken by the Northern Ireland Minister throughout this affair; he is sitting on the fence. Perhaps he has to sit on the fence. Even so, there are many answers outstanding, and I would like to have them.

It is clear from a reading of the report of Committee D to which I referred that the promoters of the Northern Ireland proposal

"have now completed their feasibility study and announced their intention to proceed with the environmental impact assessment of the project. A copy of the study has been made available to the Department of the Environment and is being examined."

It seems to me—unless there is something wrong with the language—that not only has the feasibility study been completed, but that the environmental impact assessment may also have been completed. May I be told? I appreciate that the Minister may not be able to tell me, but I hope that he will draw that, and the other matters that I have raised, to the attention of the Northern Ireland Office.

That Committee D report also refers to the importation from the Irish Republic of 15,000 tonnes of hazardous waste and 17 tonnes of toxic waste each year into the United Kingdom for incineration or treatment. That is a fair amount of stuff. Given that there was once a plant in Northern Ireland producing acetylene gas by a known method which produced waste that has now also been found to be not quite so harmless as it was once thought to be, there is a lot of other stuff lying about in dumps in Northern Ireland. I have seen the figure of 250,000 tonnes quoted. Whether or not that is correct, it seems that a lot of material requires to be treated.

While it may seem that much of what I have said applies only to Northern Ireland, I assure the House that that has not been my intention, for I believe that this issue has much wider implications.

Again, the Minister at the Northern Ireland Department of the Environment wrote to me last August. In that letter, he drew my attention to the fact that a survey had been carried out of dioxins and turons of soil samples in Northern Ireland and that the results suggested that those levels were generally comparable with those found in England and Wales. He then went on to talk about the fact that there would be rigorous monitoring by the alkali and radiochemical inspectorate.

I would like to know if the results of the those surveys are available to the general public, or to me in the House. Are the reports of the monitoring mentioned also available? I would certainly like to have a look at them, and so would some of my researchers, to see exactly what is coming out. I would also like to know the methodology that is used so that we can be assured that it is being properly done.

The hon. Gentleman has always indicated that the COSHH regulations, that came into force on 11 July just a fortnight before that letter was written, would be relevant to the emission of substances which might affect persons on the site. It is my understanding that the COSHH regulations cover far more than persons on the site; they cover persons outside the site who have no tie-in with it at all. The Minister is indicating here that they apply only to persons who have a right to be on the site. I do not believe that that is so and I would like the Minister to comment on that.

I would also like to know whether the Northern Ireland Minister has reached final conclusions with regard to the Environment Agency for England and Wales, because he said that that would have an effect on his thinking.

Let us look for a moment at the pressures on chemical companies at the present time. They are very great indeed. I feel sure that the Minister will have had drawn to his attention the two articles in the *Financial Times* yesterday, which are quite interesting. One indicates that there is now over-capacity, that chemical groups are faced with increasing environmental expenditure and that in this country environmental spending is running at 20 per cent. to 25 per cent. of all capital investment, which is a very heavy burden.

In the second article, attention is drawn to the spending on environmental measures and the fact that Europe is estimated to be five years behind the United States in the implementation of these measures. It draws attention to the heavy fiscal instruments to discourage emissions in some countries. It draws attention to the cost in Germany and to the amount that environmental protection measures will cost the whole chemical sector in the United States and in this country over the next few years.

That is not the end, of course. There is also the fact that some companies in the United States have been fined very heavily for illegal disposal of wastes. I read in one publication that the EPA is proposing to fine three New York companies—CWM Chemical Services, General Motors Central Foundry and CECUS International—$35·4 million for violating the Toxic Substance Control Act and illegally disposing of 50,000 tons of sludge contaminated with polychlorinated biphenyls. The penalties proposed are $14·2 million against General Motors, $7 million against CWM Chemical Services and $14 million against CECUS International. That is a sign of how seriously these matters are now being treated in the United States. I think that it is only a matter of time before similar penalties are imposed on such companies worldwide.

The position is serious not only for the general public but for the chemical companies. We need these materials. Nobody will stop using plastics and they will still be made. It is better that they be made in the west where we might be able to exercise some control over them, rather than have them hidden away in a third-world jungle where some of the local people are getting a good backhander and no one knows what is pouring out of the chimneys. We have to keep them in the civilised world. Therefore, we need to be careful about how we handle them.

The incinerator that is to be built at Du Pont is to cost between £40 million and £50 million. If the amounts in use by the end of the century diminish by 70 per cent., the plant will be a dinosaur because it will not be needed. It may well be completely out of date before it is built. Is the money being spent wisely?

The Chemical Recovery Association took an interest in some of the questions which I asked earlier in the year. In a letter to me in July, the chairman pointed out that its member companies

"recover an average 450,000 tonnes per annum of contaminated oils and chemicals, a quantity of which is received from Ulster and Ireland.

I was somewhat aggrieved by Mr. Needham's statement that 'the nature of hazardous and toxic is such that recycling is not an option'. We like to think recycling is the second

[Mr. William Ross]

option after waste minimisation and that advice should be sought from the industry before the final option is undertaken."

I hope that the Minister will note that advice and consult the association about what might be done.

We have to be more radical than that. As a country we should try to seize the initiative by seeking safe alternatives. Apparently this is not new chemical engineering; it is the oldest chemistry. As I said in July, if the chemists can find a way of zipping the materials together, there must be a way of taking them apart. I understand that it is possible to break them down into their harmless constituent parts of carbon dioxide, which may not be all that harmless, and common salt, but that it is difficult to do so.

If the plant is built in Northern Ireland, it will be a national plant because materials will be moved backwards and forwards; certainly it will be an international plant because it will burn material from the Irish Republic. Perhaps we should consider whether it is wise to spend not just Du Pont's money but much of our taxpayers' money on it, because the taxpayer will fund half of the expenditure.

Will the Government consider seriously setting up, preferably in the university at Coleraine, a pollution technology unit, financed properly with the help of the Dublin authorities, Du Pont and other chemical companies, to try to find a chemical means of reducing the wastes to their harmless base components? If it can be done on a small scale, albeit at great cost, surely it could be done on a larger scale. If the amount of money was poured into it that must have spent on sticking the blasted things together in the first place to get the polymers, surely we could find a way of taking them apart thereby rendering the whole process of incineration obsolete and creating a new industry in which we would be a world leader.

The problem will not go away. It concerns every human being not only in this country but on the whole earth. There have been too many accidents in the past and no doubt there are more in the pipeline. We should break out of the cycle of looking for the cheap, quick, easy way of disposal and try to find a real alternative which will do the job properly by getting rid of the waste once and for all in a way which does not cause hazard to the general public or to the environment in which we all have to live.

2.54 am

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): I thank the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) for taking us in some detail through the problems that he and many experts see in dealing with toxic and hazardous waste.

Naturally, the hon. Gentleman is particularly concerned about an incinerator that may be built in his constituency. He pointed out that, when new products come on the market, they are often treated as great blessings, and it is only after a great deal of experience and use that we learn of their dangers and downsides. It is essential, therefore, that we proceed with great caution when handling toxic and hazardous waste.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the environmental impact assessment. I expect that the Minister can reassure him that an environmental impact assessment cannot have been made properly for that incinerator yet, because an application does not yet appear to have been made. When an application is made, the incinerator will face a mandatory environmental impact assessment under the relevant EC directive. In addition to a highly technical assessment document, there is a duty to produce a summary that the public can read.

Some of the important matters that the hon. Gentleman raises have been the concern of several Select Committees. In 1988-89, the second report of the Environment Select Committee was on toxic and hazardous waste. It was a savage indictment of both local and central Government for not taking their responsibilities seriously.

At this time in the morning, I shall not go into the details of the report but will simply say that the Committee was shocked by what it found. It discovered that local government was rather lax and did not appreciate the problems of dealing with toxic and hazardous waste, and central Government were equally lax in ensuring that local government enforced laws under the Control of Pollution Act 1974. We are now more aware of those problems, and there are possibilities under the Environmental Protection Act 1990—some of which are already being followed and others which have yet to be taken up—to deal with past laxity.

In addition to the general comments and proposals that the Environment Select Committee made about tightening up the approach to dealing with toxic and hazardous waste, it said that an environmental protection agency should be set up. The Government have belatedly agreed to do just that, and are currently in a consultation period on the matter.

The Welsh Affairs Select Committee considered toxic waste disposal in Wales. Apart from the general problems that relate to the haphazard disposal of such waste, particularly into landfill sites where little effort is made to seal them off, in the United Kingdom as a whole the land around a third of the 100 sites studied by the Department of the Environment was contaminated.

The Select Committee on Welsh Affairs came across a similar problem in Wales, where, in addition to the general land contamination report—most of the toxic waste has been disposed of to land—a study was also made of incineration. The infamous Rechem plant is located near Pontypool in Wales and there has been widespread concern at its operation. The Welsh Office responded positively to the Select Committee report, and an expert group is currently considering possible contamination dangers to which the public, the land, the cattle and livestock around that plant may be exposed. The result of those studies might have an impact on future incineration policy.

There is also widespread concern in many other districts. Only a week or so ago, most, if not all, hon. Members received a Community Action Against Toxic Waste appeal from Walsall in the west midlands. At Birch coppice, a firm which I think calls itself Leigh Environmental operates some large toxic and hazardous waste sites. What is worse, beneath the landfill sites there were old mining workings. It is estimated that Leigh Environmental deposited 400 million gallons of toxic liquids into the old workings. I believe that, as the law currently stands, Leigh Environmental could surrender its site licences at Birch coppice and Stubbers green, and the residents could be forced to live with the devastation for many years.

Will the Minister say this evening whether the Government intend to implement, if not immediately, at least in the very near future, those sections of part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 that prevent the surrender of a disposal licence until a certificate of completion has been issued by the relevant authority?

By coincidence, the British Medical Association was represented in the House this week to report on its study of hazardous waste in the west midlands in the very same district of Walsall to which I referred. It said that its study had not discovered any conclusive evidence on the damage done to humans by low-level exposure, but it stated that the lack of information and knowledge of the effects of exposure to low doses of the chemicals over a long period had led the working party to adopt the precautionary principle that absence of evidence was not evidence of absence.

The report stated that a study had been made of an incinerator at Bonnybridge in Scotland that suggested an increased level of twinning in cattle, and possibly in humans, that may have been linked with the emission of PCHs and other substances from the plant.

The British Medical Association was sufficiently concerned about that evidence, and other evidence from the United States which showed that PCBs and other toxic and hazardous waste should be treated very seriously, to propose a national waste agency, because it claims that, at present, there is no central guidance and little consensus on the best form of industrial waste disposal, 90 per cent. of which is contracted out to the private sector. The BMA believes that there is an urgent need for a central waste policy to give guidance on the safest form of disposal. It also believes strongly that there should be a ban on the import of hazardous waste into the United Kingdom.

In the report of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, the BMA quoted figures from 1981-88. Those figures showed how the import of what is called "special" wastes —toxic and hazardous waste—had gone up. In 1981-82, 3,800 tonnes were imported, and by 1987-88 we were importing 80,000 tonnes, thereby almost becoming one of the major toxic dustbins of the world. However, I believe —perhaps the Minister will confirm this—that, in the last year for which we have the figures, the import of such waste has gone down to 44,000 tonnes, although that is still 10 times higher than in 1981-82.

The Labour party believes that there are a number of essential approaches to toxic and hazardous waste. The hon. Member for Londonderry, East quoted the experts waste recovery association and said that the first priority should be waste minimisation. We should reduce the amount of hazardous waste that is produced when making products—often useful products—for the market. It is possible, and companies are doing it. If hazardous materials are left after minimisation, there are possibilities for recycling. After recycling, we must find the safest way in which to dispose of the waste.

The first step is to ensure that the waste is disposed of as close to its source as possible. If it is transported over long distances, it can be dangerous. There have been accidents during transportation, which have caused serious pollution. We should also end the commercial trade in waste, except in exceptional circumstances—for example, if there has been a crisis and there is a need for waste to be disposed of somewhere else. By and large, however, we should try to ensure that waste is dealt with as close as possible to its source. We do not believe that the United Kingdom should import any toxic and hazardous waste.

In the longt term, Labour would look to a steep reduction in toxic waste and to the elimination of some of the most dangerous types of waste. It is clear that, as the world becomes wealthier and other countries start to want the things that we want, there is a danger that we shall produce more and more waste. That means that the technologies of waste minimisation and alternative means of disposal are very important.

Towards the end of his speech, the hon. Member for Londonderry, East mentioned the possibility of neutralising toxic waste. Before the products were brought together, they were not necessarily dangerous.

It just so happens that, before I came to this debate this morning, I was flicking through a pile of press cuttings when I came across one from *The Journal* (*Newcastle upon Tyne*), a north-eastern regional newspaper. What caught my eye was the headline: "Speedy Toxic Waste Eater". The story is about a new chemical process which eats toxic waste. ICI has developed it at Billingham, and it will eliminate the need to dump waste from the manufacture of perspex into the River Tees and the North sea—one year ahead of schedule, too.

The project was supported with £300,000 of grant from the EC Commission. ICI has found a successful way of dealing with this waste without causing any harm to the public in the form of emissions from incineration, so perhaps there is good news to come. Perhaps the incinerator will not go ahead as planned in Londonderry, East. The Minister, who has access to more information than I have and who is ably supported by his civil servants, may be able to give us more news on that front this morning.

2.5 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Tony Baldry): The treatment and disposal of hazardous waste in the United Kingdom is an important subject, and the whole House must be grateful to the hon. Member for Londonderry, East (Mr. Ross) for raising it this evening. He and the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) have made some interesting points and useful contributions on the matter.

We must put this important subject in its proper context. There are not enormous amounts of hazardous waste either arising here or coming here from elsewhere to be disposed of in an uncontrolled manner. Since the introduction of the Control of Pollution Act 1974, this country has had a system of strategic planning and site licensing for waste management. The Act set controls in advance of much of Europe's, which were reflected in the Community's own waste management framework directive in 1975. More recently, we have amended the legislation in the Environmental Protection Act 1990, which again places us in the vanguard of Europe, with additional provisions for integrated pollution control for those industrial processes with the most potential for pollution, and for a duty of care for all producers and handlers of waste.

It is estimated that about 80 million tonnes of industrial waste arise each year in the United Kingdom, all of which is dealt with in this country. About 2 million tonnes of that is hazardous wastes. Under the Control of Pollution

[Mr. Tony Baldry]

(Special Wastes) Regulations 1980, movements of defined categories of difficult wastes in the United Kingdom are subject to at least three working days notification to local waste disposal authorities. This system is designed to provide local authorities with opportunities to satisfy themselves that the planned disposal will be satisfactory, but with the delays to industrial operations kept to a reasonable minimum.

The Governments' primary aim is to see significant reductions in the amounts of waste requiring disposal. We are doing all we can to encourage waste minimisation. Indeed, this is built into the statutory requirements for consideration in the issue of IPC authorisations. Under these controls, what emissions are then unavoidable have to be rendered harmless. We therefore have cleaner technology as a main aim, and we see growing recognition by industry of the value of this for its economic well-being and international competitiveness.

Next come our policies for encouraging waste recycling. This requires a comprehensive programme for the development of suitable collection systems and to ensure the creation of reliable and economically valid markets.

However, even with complete success in encouraging waste minimisation and recycling, society will still have a number of wastes to handle. It has to be appreciated that, in a complex industrialised society such as ours, some wastes are unavoidable. We want to see such wastes dealt with to the highest possible standards in ways that are consistent with industrial economics. For any hazardous wastes, that means pre-treatment where necessary.

Industrial waste incinerators of significant size have, in the past, been subject to control by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution, acting under air pollution control legislation, with plant being required to adopt the best practical means for dealing with the materials coming into the sites. But those incinerators are now regulated under integrated pollution control procedures, and HMIP authorisations will be based upon guidelines reflecting the best available technology not entailing excessive costs.

Incineration is the most appropriate disposal method for many wastes which can be rendered harmless only by breaking them down through the controlled use of heat. The methods used and the pollution control systems fitted are sophisticated and provide a safe and sound disposal option, subject to rigorous operational controls and inspection.

The hon. Member for Londonderry, East has raised the specific problems of hazardous waste disposal in Northern Ireland, with specific reference to proposals for an incinerator at Maydown in Londonderry.

There are currently two Northern Ireland public sector landfills suitable for the disposal of certain special wastes —Dargan road, Belfast and Culmore, Londonderry. I understand that currently about 9,000 tonnes of those wastes are dealt with annually at those sites. They consist of asbestos, vanadium grit, acids and alkalis, pharmaceutical wastes, miscellaneous chemicals and treated sludges.

However, some wastes arise in Northern Ireland which cannot be dealt with by landfill. There are three chemical treatment plants in the Province, one of which is for in-house wastes only; so wastes required to be disposed of by high-temperature incineration have to be sent to disposal facilities outside the Province.

Approximately 1,600 tonnes of those wastes are transported from Northern Ireland each year. Until this year, some of that waste went to Finland and the remainder to facilites elsewhere in the United Kingdom. But there will be no renewal of contracts with the Finnish installation beyond this year, and all such waste will now go to United Kingdom facilities. We expect that to continue as long as necessary.

In Northern Ireland, special wastes are subject to the Pollution Control (Special Waste) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1981, which impose the same requirements as in Britain regarding pre-notification of movement of waste to suitable licensed disposal facilities.

The hon. Gentleman has referred to studies by Du Pont (UK) Ltd regarding a possible hazardous waste incinerator. I understand that the company has now completed a feasibility study on such an installation and is considering the appointment of consultants to prepare an environmental impact analysis, including consideration of alternative technology. Those are essential steps in considering any such proposal.

As the hon. Gentleman made clear, the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, my hon. Friend, the Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham), has already announced that any formal proposal from Du Pont would be put before a public inquiry. As the hon. Member for Bridgend said, that would enable those with concerns, including the constituents of the hon. Member for Londonderry, East, to have them aired, investigated and adjudicated upon.

As the hon. Member for Londonderry, East has recognised, one of the constraints on private sector investment in high-temperature incineration in the Province must be the relatively small volume of such waste which may not be sufficient to warrant large-scale investment. A guaranteed baseload tonnage is required for most waste treatment plants to make operations viable.

For that reason, there is a need to consider application of the European Community's proximity principle to the use of facilities by neighbouring countries. That principle is designed to encourage waste to be disposed of at the nearest available facility. We should look closely at its appropriateness to the possible situation with regard to an incinerator proposal in Northern Ireland.

The hon. Member also asked about alternative technology instead of incineration. He referred specifically to a technique developed by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology for rendering wastes into harmless salts, which I understand is in its infancy. Apparently, the institute is considering building a pilot plant, but little is known about its proposals, and clearly we are a long way from that becoming a viable alternative to present-day technology.

Pyrolysis—the imposition of high temperatures upon material in the absence of oxygen—is often presented as an alternative to incineration. That technique has been considered by many interested in waste management, because it achieves considerably higher volumes of reduction than incineration, and seems to offer good prospects for even better pollution control standards.

However, it represents a number of practical operating difficulties, mainly because the process converts material rather than destroys it. That is particularly relevant when one is considering a diverse range of hazardous wastes.

Nevertheless, as I said earlier, Du Pont proposes to ask consultants to examine alternative technology in the impact analysis of the incinerator proposal.

The hon. Member for Londonderry, East asked about emissions from the chemical incinerator at the Coalite works. I dealt with that matter in an oral answer on 6 November.

I am confident that Government policies provide, and will continue to provide, an appropriate basis for meeting the high expectations that society has for the future. We want waste management to play its part in the drive for sustainable development, with a high standard of environmental stewardship in the interests of future generations. That will not be easy, and there will always be areas of difficulty—some of which were usefully debated tonight.

Of course I appreciate the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Londonderry, East on behalf of his constituents. I am certain that we are developing the correct framework for tackling important issues, and that we will be able to accommodate developments in new technology as they become available.

Croatia

3.21 am

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): No one who contemplates the brutal war that has racked Croatia over the last few months can do so without a deep feeling of sorrow and shame: sorrow that such devastation and misery should disfigure our continent in 1991, and shame that we have been unable to do anything to halt the carnage and destruction.

It is not that the west has failed to make an attempt to do so, and I pay genuine tribute to the work done by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and by my hon. and learned Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, who is to reply to this debate, and to the tireless efforts of Lord Carrington and, more recently, Mr. Cyrus Vance.

However, when no real progess is made, the time comes for reassessment, and it seems to me that that time is now. Like many right hon. and hon. Members in all parts of the House, I followed with a mixture of admiration and exasperation Lord Carrington's attempts to negotiate a proper ceasefire, but watched with mounting anger the callous disregard for life and property cynically displayed by the federal forces.

For me, the moment of realisation that something more must be done to identify the aggressor and to hold him to account came last week, when I was invited to open an exhibition of photographs at the building centre in Store street, London, of some of the Croatian buildings destroyed over the past few months. Some were great and glorious, some were humble and small—but together their destruction represents an awful catalogue of misery. Those photographs brought home to me the abomination of desolation that is Croatia now.

In the Croatian conflict, as in any other, there is a background of distributed bitterness. I am well aware of the atrocities that some Croatians perpetrated during the second world war, and of the tensions between Serb and Croat that go back long before that, which left a legacy of hatred and fear. No one would ever suggest that President Tudjman should be awarded a Nobel prize for the tact and sensitivity with which he asserted Croatian independence.

I know, too, that, even during these last months of conflict, acts of unjustified violence have been committed by Croats against Serbs. Only today I received a letter from Prince Tomislav of Yugoslavia listing the Orthodox churches that had been destroyed by Croats. No one can defend such actions.

If we recognise that background, however, we must also recognise the reality, and the enormity, of what has happended in Croatia—and recognise that the great majority of acts of wanton wickedness have been perpetrated by the forces of a state that has, by all normal criteria, forfeited its right to be recognised as a sovereign independent nation. Let me suggest to my hon. and learned Friend the Minister that perhaps the time has come to stop acting as an honest broker between victim and aggressor. The evidence of responsibility for the carnage and destruction is too overwhelming to be ignored.

Many hon. Members will have received, in the past few days, a report from Amnesty International giving details of some of the atrocities that have occurred in Croatia in

[Mr. Patrick Cormack]

recent months. I commend that report to all hon. Members: it is a terrible indictment of the impotence of the federal Government and their inability to control their army. It is a horrifying catalogue of crime and of utter disregard for the Geneva convention.

In September, Unesco's Director General appealed for respect for Yugoslavia's cultural heritage. He said:

"the cities of Split and Dubrovnik are on the World Heritage List and are protected under the World Heritage Convention".

He also pointed out that Yugoslavia was a party to the convention on the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict, signed at The Hague in 1954.

That declaration was issued on 27 September; by the end of October, a document was coming out of Croatia from the Ministry of Education and Culture. I have a translation. It says that, in that short space of time, 317 historic settlements had been affected, 241 heavily or lightly, while 76 had been destroyed or burned down; 358 individual monuments registered or filed as cultural treasures, including 26 museums, seven archives and 13 library buildings, had been damaged. We have all seen, with a sense of sickening horror, the graphic television pictures of the shelling of Dubrovnik, and we all saw the appalling scene of devastation when Vukovar fell. I could go on, but I think that I can make my points simply and graphically by quoting from the documents that I have with me.

I am sure that my hon. and learned Friend the Minister and the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) share my sense of horror and outrage. I urge my hon. Friend to ensure that those feelings are translated into a more positive western attitude. Maastricht is now over; let this be a test of the new Europe's resolve. It is an important test, for impotence will not only be a poor recommendation of Community cohesion; it could make it all the more difficult to stem the tide of bloody anarchy that could so easily engulf large tracts of Europe which we recently rejoiced to see set free.

I know that there are no easy answers, but if we do not at least attempt to act decisively, Zagreb, Dubrovnik, Vukovar and Osijek could be just the first names on a ghastly roll call resembling those unending, poignant first world war memorials that are such a feature of life all over the continent of Europe.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will seize the opportunity provided by his next meeting with his Community colleagues—which I believe will take place very shortly—to reappraise the position, and to see whether the Governments of the Community could now decide to recognise Croatia and to tell the Yugoslavian federal Government that they can no longer be recognised as the legitimate Government of former federal territory.

Everyone says—my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has made the point several times—that Yugoslavia as we knew it is no more. Whether that is to be lamented or not, it is a fact. The federal Government do not exercise proper control. We in the west should be prepared to act in concert to impose sanctions, and to patrol the coast and the skies while a full conference to determine the relationship between the former Yugoslav territories is convened.

It is important that the rights of all minorities within all the territories should be high on the agenda at the conference. One knows of the concern of the 11·5 per cent. Serbian minority within Croatia, but that is no excuse for what has happened and continues to happen. It is a terrible indictment of 1991 to think that such events could happen today in Europe.

Any course of action such as I have suggested is fraught with difficulty, and everyone must recognise that. However, it is as nothing compared with the difficulties that we shall face if the generals, who have effectively staged a coup against civil authority, are allowed ultimate success. In August, the world rejoiced when the communist old guard failed in the attempted coup in Moscow. Too few people seem to have realised that the communist old guard has succeeded in a coup in Belgrade.

There was an interesting article in *The Sunday Telegraph* on 1 December by Mr. Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, in which he speaks about the devastation in Vukovar and what has been happening in Croatia. He ends the article with the words:

"The officer corps of the army is the last relic of the Tito era, divided against itelf, scared of the future, without loyal troops, without strategy, without a creed that anybody, even itself, can still believe in. It is fighting to preserve its privileges and its pensions. When it meets real resistance the army will recoil and break."

I do not know whether it will break as easily as that. Certainly it is an army that has run amok. We must recognise that and we must recognise where the aggression lies.

When he answered questions in the House on 20 November, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary showed an understandable reluctance to move towards recognition of Croatia. He made the point that that could lead to yet greater troubles in Bosnia and in Macedonia. What would guarantee such trouble is allowing the federal army to succeed in extinguishing an entire small nation state with the brutality with which it has already destroyed so much.

I hope that a message will go out from my hon. and learned Friend the Minister when he replies for the Government. This is the first time that we have debated the subject in the House, which is a pity. I hope that a message can go out that there is a new resolve in the west and that we are determined to ensure that the killing, the destruction and the brutality stop, and that, as a new year dawns in a few days' time, it dawns with a new sense of hope for the battered, beleaguered people of Croatia.

3.34 am

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): I naturally commend the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) on his choice of subject for debate. It is a valid subject, and the hon. Gentleman is not to blame for the procedures that the House has foisted upon itself. Having spent 13 years in this place, I still find it truly remarkable that, with regard to such important issues—Croatia is receiving perhaps its first real airing in the House since the tragedy began to unfold—we are having this debate at 3.35 am. The House should not be proud of that, and I sincerely hope that this will be the last all-night Consolidated Fund debate that we will have to put up with.

What the hon. Member for Staffordshire, South said about the tragedy unfolding before us is right. It is shocking and horrible, and it requires a sense of irony almost to reflect on the fact that this is 1991—towards the end of the 20th century. However, on our continent, on the

doorstep of the most civilised part of the world, we are watching human beings killing each other for no other reason than the fact that they live next door to each other.

The waste, deaths, brutality and destruction of property beggar description. All that is happening in a beautiful country which has been the holiday destination of thousands of British people over the years. Many people who have spent their holidays in that country, as I have, shake their heads in disbelief as they watch what is happening.

I spent a family holiday in Dubrovnik last summer. One of my memories of my holiday in that beautiful city in the Aegean is of attending a football match with my brother and our children. The match involved Dubrovnik and a team from Belgrade. Only 15 months later, the participants in that match, which, it must be said, was not full of passion, are now presumably heavily engaged in destroying each other simply because they come from two sides of a divide that dates back to the tragedies, miseries and horrors of the second world war, back to the first world war and into the deep recesses of history before that time.

The point at issue is that what is happening is not only a tragedy of today but a portent of tomorrow. We are witnessing in Yugoslavia what happens when the cap of communism is lifted to reveal the suppressed anger that is contained. That may happen in other countries where the same situation applies. Because we are outraged by the conflict in Yugoslavia today, we should be ready for similar things to happen elsewhere in Europe unless we ensure that we set in place institutions to prevent them.

Despite having visited the country and despite a long interest in the area, even I was not fully aware of the complexities and the depth of feeling in the various component parts of Yugoslavia until I read the quite remarkable book that Chris Cviic wrote for the Royal Institute of International Affairs only a few months ago. Despite the fact that modern history grows old within a week, I commend that book to people who want to understand what is happening in that part of the world. The replaying of historical conflict, brought to our own living room firesides by the miracles of modern technology and displaying the brutality of past years, does not reflect well on our development in Europe.

The hon. Member for Staffordshire, South commented on the differences of view about who is to blame. There are strong feelings on both sides, as my postbag bears witness. It is now becoming clear even to those of a partisan view that the culpability of the federal army, which is no longer responsive to any of the organs of the previous state, must bear a heavy responsibility for what is happening.

I do not want to detain the House or myself for long, but I pay tribute to the role of the European Community and to the monitors who have served with considerable bravery and tenacity during the conflict. Their presence has done much to inhibit some of the wilder excesses on both sides. Their courage in entering into the conflict and their presence of mind in circumstances in which they have been in enormous danger are a great tribute to the individuals themselves and to the institution that sent them.

We must pay tribute also to the United Nations, which has been revitalised over the past 12 months and has started to play its part in trying to unravel and resolve the problems in Yugoslavia. The Security Council took on board some of the challenges. Mr. Cyrus Vance, who stepped into the breach, has made herculean efforts to establish a peace so that, eventually, a peacekeeping force might move into place. Of course, the United Nations has been engaged in the exercise of sanctions against those who perpetrate excesses.

There are some who say that we should involve peacekeeping forces right away. However, we in this country know more than most that, unless there is a peace to keep, putting in peacekeeping forces simply places troops in danger. There are some who say that we should immediately recognise Croatia and Slovenia because they have passed a test in respect of self-standing and self-sustenance. Of course, despite claims about elections —I recently met President Tudjman and Mr. Peterle, the Prime Minister of Slovenia—enormous questions have to be answered.

What borders would we recognise? Would they be pre-conflict borders, the borders on the map, Yugoslav internal federal borders, or the borders that exist after the conflict and the damage that took place during the capture of towns such as Osijek and Vukovar? What would be the implications for the other republics of Yugoslavia, or what used to be Yugoslavia? What of the future of Bosnia, in particular, where there is a very complicated cocktail of ethnic mixes? The problem cannot be solved by the recognition of any number of states.

There are some, including the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher), who say, "Arm one side." She said that we should send arms to the Croatians. Nobody who is sensible or sane would say that we should export more arms to a country that is already awash with them, because it would do little more than increase the bloodshed that has already stained that country. There are those who even dare to say that we should intervene militarily and hope that some form of peace will come about as a result. With conflict going on inside our own borders, we cannot help the world in advising that course of action.

Yesterday, the EC observers in the conflict areas of Yugoslavia made it clear that they were not in favour of rapid diplomatic recognition of Croatia, which they say would wreck the prospects for negotiating a settlement of the war and increase the chance of hostilities spreading to other parts of the collapsed federation. We would be wise to listen to those on the spot who have experience, because they are close to what is going on. The spokeswoman for the mission said:

"Recognition not tied in to the negotiating process is not a sensible thing right now."

Rinelde Steeghs said that that move

"would so infuriate Serbia and the Yugoslav army as to spell an end to the EC peace conference chaired by Lord Carrington."

This House and the wider world should listen to that view.

In conclusion, I make this plea to countries such as Germany—a country for which I have the highest regard: they should be cautious about promising recognition for Croatia and Slovenia by any precise date, and about breaking ranks within the European Community. A decision on the recognition of any of the republics may be on the agenda, but that decision should be made collectively and advisedly. I hope that Germany, which has stood firmly in favour of a common foreign and security policy in the intergovernmental conferences that have just concluded and in the discussions on this week's Maastricht

[Mr. George Robertson]

treaty, will listen to its own exhortations and ensure that, whenever the decision is taken on recognition, it is made collectively, not unilaterally.

This is a horrifying conflict on our own doorstep. In many ways, it is a sad illustration of how little we have learnt from the past, despite the long history of our continent. We must draw careful lessons from it—about the necessity for collective action and for creating new institutions in Europe to deal with the new conflicts that may spring up in our continent. It is a sad warning, and we would be wise to recognise it as such.

3.47 am

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg): The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) has expressed his distaste for these early-morning debates. I share that view. We are discussing a matter of considerable importance—it is difficult to think of a matter of greater importance at the moment in central Europe—yet my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) has been obliged to raise it at an hour that is inappropriate to a matter of such gravity. My hon. Friend deserves our congratulations and thanks for having raised it, but the systems and procedures of the House should not have obliged him to do so at this time—or obliged us to be here at 3.47 am to deal with a matter of such moment. Like the hon. Member for Hamilton, I wish that we would put an end to such proceedings. They do the House no good whatsoever.

My hon. Friend has spoken with a concision and lucidity that does him credit. I am bound to say that I am not in total agreement with what he has said, but nobody could have put his points more clearly or concisely. I for one am extremely grateful to him. In his preliminary remarks, he said that he approached this issue with a sense of both sorrow and shame. I entirely agree with him about a sense of sorrow—this is indeed a tragedy—but I do not agree with his sense of shame. I am a great one for pinning blame where it can properly be pinned, and I do not believe in collective guilt. The fault lies with those who are guilty of the violence. It is not our fault that we cannot persuade them to stop. We should not be ashamed of our inability to persuade them to stop, for the fault is theirs and we have tried hard.

My hon. Friend spoke about where the blame lies between the combatant parties. I agree with his analysis. He correctly said that the Croatians and those who say that they are fighting on the Croatian side have been guilty of various acts of atrocity and provocation. Both those statements are correct. On occasion, the Croatians have been guilty of breaches of the ceasefire. But having said that, if we are to express a view about where the fault primarily lies, I share the view of my hon. Friend that it is with the JNA and Serbian forces.

None the less, there is fault on both sides. Perhaps it is right to say in parenthesis that genuine concern about their future is felt by Serbs in Croatia. President Tudjman was not sufficiently sensitive to those fears at an early enough stage. Certainly he did not address them in a properly positive way.

My hon. Friend began the substantive part of his speech by calling for more positive action on the part of the European Community and, indeed, others. It is right that I should remind the House of some of the positive steps that the European Community has taken. It has deployed the monitors. The hon. Member for Hamilton spoke of the courage and determination shown by the monitors now operating within what was Yugoslavia. I agree with him. The monitors have been courageous and determined, and have made a considerable contribution to the maintenance of peace in some areas within Yugoslavia.

Secondly, as my hon. Friend will have in mind, we took several measures in November designed to put express pressure on those who are in breach of the ceasefire and those who are refraining from making an effective ceasefire. Thirdly, we have brought into existence the peace conference under the chairmanship of Lord Carrington. That is a positive contribution to making peace in Yugoslavia. I shall make further reference to it shortly. Therefore, several measures have been taken which create the circumstances in which the participants to the fighting could enter into an accord or settlement if they chose to do so.

The burden of my hon. Friend's speech was his call for the recognition of the two republics of Slovenia and Croatia. That is clearly a serious case, which needs the most serious consideration. I come to a different conclusion from my hon. Friend, but none the less I recognise that it is a case which requires serious consideration. The traditional criteria that we adopt for the recognition of states probably apply to Slovenia. They do not apply in the case Croatia in the same way, but I accept—my hon. Friend would probably make this point—that one of the reasons why the criteria do not apply to Croatia is that Croatian territory has been invaded by the JNA and Serbian irregulars.

Rather than argue whether the traditional criteria apply, I would like to take a slightly broader perspective on the issue. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has made it plain in the House and elsewhere that we accept the principle of recognition of the republics of Yugoslavia which wish it.

The essential problem is that of timing and pace, and I agree with what the hon. Member for Hamilton said about the desirability of a collective approach. I hope that the EC can remain united on the issue and move together. It is desirable, if possible, that our policies should be entirely harmonious, not only between ourselves but with our friends and allies who have a direct interest in the matter.

The first question that my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South must ask himself—and that I would ask of him—is whether there is any reason to think that recognition would stop the fighting. That is the key question. Is there anything about the quality of the act of recognition that would stop the fighting? In the end, one can only give one's own opinion. I do not believe that recognition per se would stop the fighting. Indeed, the act of recognition would be likely to make fighting in Yugoslavia generally more widespread and intense, so the argument fails on the key point whether it is likely to diminish the fighting.

I also believe that it would be likely to put an end to the peace conference. It is difficult to envisage the peace conference continuing if one or two of the parties have already had their independence recognised, so it is likely to diminish the chance of a settlement being negotiated within the peace conference.

Next, I believe that it is likely to trigger other unilateral declarations of independance in Yugoslavia, and in that context I am particularly concerned about Bosnia, which the hon. Member for Hamilton described as an unholy cocktail. He is right. There are at least three major ethnic or religious groupings—the Croats, the Serbs and the Muslims. If Croatia were recognised as an independent republic, inevitably the president of Bosnia would have to declare independence, and that fact would be likely to trigger fighting between the ethnic and religious groupings in Bosnia. For that reason also, the fighting would be extended rather than confined by the act of recognition.

I believe that the act of recognition would be premature and would deprive us of the leverage we need over the republics in Yugoslavia on such important questions as human, minority and legal and civil rights. Those important questions must be addressed at considerable length, because there is hardly a republic in Yugoslavia which does not have substantial ethnic minorities whose civil, legal and political rights must be addressed. In an ideal world, the act of recognition would follow accord on all the important questions that have been raised in this debate—notably questions of ethnic, civil and political rights.

To summarise my view, although I recognise the force of my hon. Friend's remarks, I believe that the act of recognition is premature and would be damaging in its consequences. We must press on with the policy that we have in place, which is to urge an effective ceasefire on the combatants to be ready to support a United Nations deployment of peacekeeping forces when the circumstances are appropriate—I agree with the hon. Member for Hamilton about the vital importance of ensuring that a ceasefire is in existance before the deployment of a peacekeeping force—and we must urge on all the parties the need to negotiate a settlement within the context of the peace conference, now under the chairmanship of Lord Carrington.

Western Sahara

4 am

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): The subject that I wish to raise is that of the future of Western Sahara, which at the moment, I believe, hangs very much in the balance. As the United Nations plan to try to resolve the long-standing problem there is a danger of running into very serious problems indeed. I obviously welcome the opportunity to raise the matter in the House and to record some facts about the history of and background to the impasse with which the Sahrawi people are faced.

It is a very large area of land: 110,000 sq miles, roughly equivalent to the area of the United Kingdom. It is very sparsely populated, with a population of rather less than a quarter of a million.

The problems for the Sahrawi people have been colonial oppression over many centuries and the fact that the country is rich in some minerals, particularly phosphates, and fish in the sea off its shores. We are talking of the last colony in Africa. Western Sahara became a colony in 1884 under Spain, because the Spanish were very keen to be included in the 1885 Congress of Berlin and by their occupation of Western Sahara they were able to achieve that. Their occupation was particularly oppressive and there were many rebellions against Spanish rule.

In the fullness of time the winds of change swept through Africa and independence was achieved for the colonies that had made up most of the continent. The mass colonisation of Africa took place mostly in the 19th century, and independence was achieved in virtually all cases in the 20th century. Morocco achieved its independence from France in 1956. Mauritania, which is germane to the area we are discussing, achieved its independence in 1961, and Algeria achieved its independence in 1962. However, during 1959, as a side-show to the war in Algeria, France gave considerable help to Spain in putting down rebellions of the Sahrawi people demanding their own independence. That conflict is well remembered.

In all this, the problems of Western Sahara as a colony were rather forgotten. The United Nations committee on decolonisation recognised in 1966 the case for decolonisation and, indeed, a United Nations delegation visited in 1975 to try to promote a settlement. In 1975 Kurt Waldheim, who was Secretary-General of the United Nations at that time, called for a process of restraint and no disruption of decolonisation. Finally, in 1976, following the death of Franco, Spain gave up all pretence of control of Western Sahara, having some years previously withdrawn its troops to the coastal areas. From that day on, 27 February 1976 has been recognised by the Sahrawi people as their day of independence.

Tragically, here we are in 1991 and that independence is not yet a complete reality because the vast majority of the area of Western Sahara is under the occupation of the Moroccan armed forces. In 1975, at the time when Spain gave up its claim to Western Sahara, King Hassan of Morocco personally led the "green march" into the Western Sahara area to establish, in effect, a new colony for Morocco, and the building of the sand wall which surrounds the area where the Sahrawi people were attempting to live. He created a military enclave, which he

[Mr. Jeremy Corbyn]

then attempted to settle in order that independence could be denied and this could be seen as part of greater Morocco.

That whole process since 1975 has led to a very bloody conflict. Many lives have been lost; many human rights abuses have occurred in Morocco as a result of the dynamic of the war that has been going on within Western Sahara.

The leaders of Western Sahara formed a government in exile based in Tindouf, in Algeria, and throughout the war there have been huge numbers of casualties. Human rights abuses have resulted in Morocco. In August this year Amnesty International produced an important statement in which it said that

"it feared that hundreds of western Saharan civilians who 'disappeared' up to 15 years ago are still held in secret detention in Morocco or have died."

Some people had been released. The statement said:

"over 300 'disappeared' Sahrawis have been released after a royal amnesty in June, but hundreds more remain unaccounted for. The Moroccan Government has in the past persistently denied knowledge not only of those still missing but also of those recently set free."

Amnesty said:

"Many of the released Sahrawis suffer severe physical or mental problems after having spent up to a decade and a half in secret captivity. . . . Some are paralysed or blind due to harsh prison conditions, others left their cells insane."

The report continued:

"At least 43 of their fellow inmates have died in custody since 1975, when Morocco first took control of the former colony of Spanish Sahara and began wholesale arrests of people for known or suspected links with the Polisario Front. . . . This year's royal amnesty is the first solid confirmation of the mass 'disappearances'."

Amnesty has produced a comprehensive report which I am sure the Minister has seen and which his officials will have examined.

The battle for independence of Western Sahara is twofold, like all battles for independence. On the one side there is the physical fighting and the casualties that have been incurred. It has always been a one-sided battle in the sense that on one side there is great determination by the Western Saharan people, led by the Polisario, and on the other side there are sophisticated weapons and the conscript army of Morocco.

One interesting point is the degree of international recognition of the Government in exile which has been recognised by 74 members of the United Nations. Crucially, in 1982 the Organisation of African Unity granted recognition to Western Sahara. I say "crucially" because, as the major political organisation in Africa, the OAU is important and it is always extremely reluctant —I underline that—to do anything that could be seen to upset the national borders of individual member states. In Africa the borders are all drawn by colonial powers and the possibility of change is considerable once it is prepared to go down that road. Interestingly, it is the only case that I know of where the OAU has recognised a right of independence from a different country. In other words, it supports the view taken by the rest of the world that the occupation of Western Sahara by Morocco is not only illegal but an act of colonisation.

Agreements were reached with the United Nations, which has taken a consistent interest in the issue, that the case should be resolved peacefully. Obviously everyone wants that, although the recent actions of the Moroccan Government undermine their earlier declarations. In 1988, under resolution 621, the Security Council supported Perez de Cuellar's plan which would have led to the referendum. In 1991 Security Council resolution 690 was supported and later endorsed by the General Assembly. Under that resolution Morocco was to reduce its forces to 65,000 immediately and $200 million was to be voted to finance the referendum; there was to be an exchange of prisoners, and the roll for the referendum was to be based on the Spanish census of 1974. The referendum was to be held in January 1992.

Since then, Morocco has done a great deal to undermine the whole process. Military activity has increased. Morocco has increased the number of troops who are active in the western Sahara. Very recently it has tried to add 120,000 names to the electoral roll. The numbers being added would affect the result greatly, because the people are being bussed in, given names and told to register as Sahrawis. That would clearly upset the referendum process.

In addition, 40,000 settlers have been brought into Western Sahara by the new green march, once again led by King Hussan, and a state of siege exists in the area. His utterly cynical manoeuvres in taking people from the very poorest parts of Morocco, putting them on buses and trucks and promising them a home, a job and a bit of land if they go there, are a desperate attempt to hang on to a colony.

Many people believed that 20 years of war and Morocco's stubborn refusal to accept an international solution to the conflict were over. The "Peace Special" of the "Western Sahara Newsletter" of May-June 1991 uses those very words. It says that the Sahrawi people are now on the verge of the victory and independence that the Polisario has struggled for 18 years to achieve. Obviously, one hopes that that is the case, but serious obstacles remain to be overcome.

The timetable for a referendum began on 17 May last year and shows where the process has gone wrong. Stage 1 was from June to September, when Morocco and the Polisario were to agree on and implement a comprehensive ceasefire. Officials of MINURSO's Identification Commision were to arrive in Western Sahara and the commission was to update the Spanish census of 1974, which would form the basis of the referendum voting list. A preliminary list would then be presented by October.

Stage 2 was from October to November 1991, when the MINURSO military and civilian staff were to arrive in Western Sahara and supervise the withdrawal of half the Moroccan armed forces currently occupying Western Sahara; the remaining 65,000 were to be restricted to designated areas. Armed Polisario units were to meet at established bases in pre-arranged locations. Alongside several hundred civilian personnel, MINURSO was to consist of 1,700 UN troops, rather like the system used for the development of the ceasefire in Zimbabwe in 1981.

Stage 3 was to be carried out in the six weeks from November to December 1991—the present period—when the Sahrawi refugees were supposed to return to their homeland. The 165,000 refugees who fled the Moroccan invasion of 1975 were to be transported from their camps in Tindouf to safe locations in Western Sahara, again under UN supervision with the provision of transport, shelter and food. Voting stations were to be constructed.

Stage 4, of which we should now be in the middle, from December 1991 to January 1992, was to consist of three

weeks of campaigning envisaged under the rules. Stage 5 was to be the referendum, due to take place in a month's time, with voting over seven days. The outcome of that referendum was to decide the future of Western Sahara.

It was hoped that that would be the end of a particularly brutal chapter in Africa's history and that peace could have been achieved at that time, but Morocco's more recent actions suggest that that is now extremely unlikely. There have been extremely disturbing reports which the Foreign Office has doubtless seen. In *The Independent* of 13 November 1991, one such report expressed concern about how some UN officials had been working against the interests of the Polisario. There was a serious allegation that they were not working even-handedly with regard to the protagonists in the conflict.

In November 1991, King Hussan made a speech that hardly belonged to a man who had accepted that the United Nations had a serious role to play in the matter and that the conflict was about to come to an end, announcing that a foreign flag would never fly over Western Sahara. He then commemorated the 16th anniversary of the 1975 green march by promoting a new green march.

The peace plan is being sabotaged—it is as simple as that. This is not the first time that the Western Sahara issue has been raised in the House. More than 100 hon. Members have signed an early-day motion supporting the principles of the UN peace plan and saying that they want the referendum to go ahead. All that is now at risk. Morocco is desperate to keep its colony, despite all the agreements that it has made on many occasions.

We want the British Government to use all their influence with the United Nations to insist that Morocco, which is shortly to become a member of the Security Council, keeps to all the agreements made. We must ensure that prisoners of war are exchanged, there are no more ceasefire violations, and the electoral roll for the referendum is accepted on the basis of the 1974 census so that the voting can go ahead as it should do in a month's time. That should allow those people who have existed in the past 18 years in refugee camps in Algeria to return home, elect their own Government, live in their own country and decide their own future democratically. They should not be denied that opportunity by the presence of the Moroccan army or Morocco's subterfuge in attempting to undermine the process undertaken by the United Nations.

I strongly urge the British Government to use their influence to support the United Nations process and allow peace finally to return to the last colony in Africa so that we can say once and for all that the process of the colonisation of Africa—in terms of the 1885 Congress of Berlin—is over, the last colony is consigned to history and the people are granted peace.

4.16 am

Mr. George Robertson (Hamilton): With the leave of the House, may I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) on his choice of subject for the debate, which is serious and rightly inspires strong feelings among hon. Members and the population in general.

The past few years have seen remarkable changes in the world: many intractable problems finally seem capable of solution. There has been much movement in regional conflicts throughout the world and the United Nations has been given a new lease of life—there was co-operation against an aggressor in the Gulf, remarkable success was achieved in Namibia and progress has been achieved in Cambodia. Now we are begining to see the chance of some success over one of Africa's most intractable problems and the opportunity to bring peace to Western Sahara.

There are also signs that the countries of the Maghreb, which for so long were divided on the future of the Western Sahara, have decided to co-operate to try to find a solution. They were encouraged in that endeavour by the European Community. The Labour party has taken a consistent line on the Western Sahara: that there should be no imposed solution and the decision on the future of that region should be made by the people themselves. It was always our strong belief that a referendum would allow the people of that district to make their own free choice only if it were conducted under the auspices of the United Nations. Therefore, we were delighted when this summer, following the United Nations Security Council's unanimous endorsement of the plan, it seemed that we were on course for such a referendum in January 1992.

However, since then we and many others have been highly disquieted by the number of allegations made about breaches in the agreed timetable and the preparatory conditions for the referendum. As my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North said, serious allegations were made in *The Independent* on 13 November and further allegations about breaches have been made by other organisations and people on the spot. The allegations are all the more serious because they cast doubt not only on the process that is now under way, but on the very credibility of the United Nations presence in Western Sahara.

The anxiety was reflected in an early-day motion tabled on 5 December by the chairman of the parliamentary Labour party's foreign affairs committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross). That early-day motion, on which my hon. Friend deserves congratulations, has already attracted 59 signatures.

Our aim in relation to Western Sahara is to be as constructive as possible. Our county's influence should be used to ensure that the United Nations status and objectives there are met in full. Therefore, I should like to ask the Minister a number of questions, if he is given the leave of the House to speak.

Do the Government believe that there is a realistic prospect of the timetable set by the Security Council for a referendum in January being met? It is an important question and I am sure that the House and the wider world would like to hear the Government's estimation. If the Government do not believe in such a prospect, what conclusion can be drawn? Why is the timetable in question? Is there a lack of resources for the process, a lack of co-operation by the Moroccan Government or by the UN agency? We have heard no allegations about foot-dragging or obstruction by the Polisario who appear to have complied to the letter with the obligations that they took on. Sadly, in contrast, there have been a number of allegations directed at Morocco—the role of the military in situ, the denial of access to observers and repeated allegations of the attempted flooding of electoral rolls by large numbers of Moroccans who have moved —or been moved—into the area.

What is the extent of the Government's support for the referendum process? We know that financial assistance has been given, but perhaps the Minister will illuminate us

[Mr. George Robertson]

as to how much. What is the extent of the Government's commitment and how does the scale of our assistance compare with that of our European Community partners?

In the light of the slippage of the timetable due to alleged non-compliance, is not it time for the Government to take a lead in returning the matter to the Security Council for a reorientation and redefinition of the existing mandate if that were judged to be appropriate?

Finally, there have been repeated allegations of intimidation of electors. I put it no more strongly than that because I and my colleagues are not in a position to do other than repeat those strong allegations of intimidation of electors in the referendum process. The Minister will, of course, be aware that in previous elections hon. Members who have gone to such areas have played a valuable role. With their knowledge, they have been able to assist. Recently, hon. Members went to Bangladesh and Zambia and performed a major task there. Does the Foreign Office think that it would be right for them to do the same in this case?

We are conscious of the success that the United Nations has had in setting up the timetable. We look forward to the people of the Western Sahara being able to make a free and fair decision on their future. We look forward, too, to the United Nations having its reputation reinvigorated by another success in another regional conflict, and we must hope, perhaps beyond hope, that some of the hiccups in the timetable will be relieved and that the people of this area will soon be able to make an historic choice in a free and fair fashion.

4.25 am

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Douglas Hogg) *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Does the Minister have the leave of the House to speak again?

Hon. Members: Aye.

Mr. Hogg: I agree with the hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) that this is an important debate. The hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) is to be congratulated on having selected this matter for discussion although, as I have already said, I do not believe that the Consolidated Fund is an appropriate means of conducting important debates of this kind.

The hon. Member for Islington, North has set out in some detail the historical background to the problem, and I broadly agree with his recital of the facts of the case.

The conflict over Western Sahara has lasted a long time —far too long—and a solution is clearly overdue. As a permanent member of the Security Council, we warmly enclose the plan drawn up by the United Nations Secretary-General and endorsed by the Security Council. The plan sets out a timetable for a referendum for the self-determination for the people of Western Sahara and provides for the establishment of a mission for a referendum in Western Sahara to achieve this end. That mission is being organised by the United Nations.

The United Kingdom has contributed financially to the mission and we have provided about 15 military observers. I am afraid that I do not have to hand the extent of our contribution, or how it compares with that of other countries, but I will respond to the hon. Member for Hamilton on those points in writing.

The ceasefire came into effect on 6 September, as scheduled in the plan, and so far as we are aware it is still holding.

Mr. Corbyn: If the referendum process has to be extended, do I take it from the Minister's remarks that the British Government would be prepared to support a UN proposal for increased funding to enable the monitoring to continue? Without the monitoring and the UN presence, the referendum will not take place.

Mr. Hogg: We are anxious that it should go ahead, but this is neither the time nor the place for me to give a positive and binding commitment of the sort that the hon. Gentleman seeks. If the Secretary-General comes up with more proposals, we shall give them serious thought.

We have been neutral throughout this dispute. We do not recognise the Polisario or the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic. Nor do we accept Moroccan claims to the territory. We have consistently reaffirmed our belief in the principle of self-determination, and that has governed our policies on this matter in the UN and elsewhere.

It is inevitable that problems will arise over efforts to resolve such a long and difficult dispute, and the hon. Member for Islington, North has identified a number of the problems that are said to have occurred.

It is important to keep in mind that the development of the plan and its implementation are essentially matters for the United Nations Secretary-General. Therefore, questions on the deployment of the mission, the drawing up of the electoral rolls or the arrangements for the referendum are essentially matters for the Secretary-General, reporting where necessary to the Security Council.

The hon. Member for Islington, North made a point regarding the probity of the United Nations staff. He quoted an article in *The Independent*. The Secretary-General has denied the truth of those allegations, so I cannot take the matter further. I think that they were the allegations concerning computer diskettes.

If the Secretary-General decides to come forward with further proposals to the Security Council—the hon. Gentleman suggested that that was something that he might wish to do with regard to delaying the referendum —we shall consider them with our partners. The Secretary-General has not said that the referendum will be delayed, but if the date does slip we shall press for it to be held as soon as possible, subject to the important qualification that the conditions for the referendum should be right.

It is important that the parties to the dispute co-operate fully with the Secretary-General in the implementation of the settlement plan. I hope that the hon. Gentleman's anxieties about the Moroccans' conduct is misplaced. If efforts are made to distort the result of the referendum, it will create conditions which may prevent a long-lasting settlement being effective. I listened with concern to what the hon. Gentleman said. I hope that what he said is wrong and that his anxieties are misplaced. These are grave matters and if the results are being distorted, that is bad news for everyone.

The exact criteria for inclusion in the electoral roll which were mentioned by the hon. Gentleman are matters

for the United Nations identification commission. I understand that that issue is still under discussion. If the Secretary-General comes back to the Security Council with recommendations on that point, we shall consider them.

In the end, however, we have to recognise that this is a long-standing dispute. The only game in town is that put forward by the Secretary-General, who has a particularly difficult task. We have every confidence in his impartiality. He has our support. We shall do whatever we reasonably can to help him and we, like the hon. Gentleman, hope that the dispute can be resolved.

Mr. Corbyn: In view of the concern about the behaviour of Morocco and its armed forces, has there been any direct contact between the British Government and Morocco on that? I recognise what the Minister said about neutrality in the dispute, but neutrality would not prevent the British Government from protesting, if that was appropriate, to either side in the dispute before the referendum was held.

Mr. Hogg: I do not know the answer to that question. I do not know whether specific representations have been made to the Secretary-General. I shall look into that point and write to the hon. Gentleman. I will go further and have the allegations investigated. If it seems appropriate to make representations to the Secretary-General—or, for that matter, to anyone else—and we have not done so, we will do so.

Itinerants (Hampshire)

4.33 am

Sir David Mitchell (Hampshire, North-West): I am grateful to Mr. Speaker for selecting for debate a subject that is of considerable importance to my constituents, and to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department for remaining at this hour to hear my remarks and to respond.

The problems that I want to mention arise from people who are variously described as itinerants, travellers, new age gipsies, hippies, and by a few other colourful descriptions not covered by parliamentary language.

The problems fall into three categories. The first is those involving small numbers of such people, usually with caravans, who take up residence on private land or in green lanes that are public rights of way. The second is those attaching to large numbers of such people with vehicles, when they descend on parts of Hampshire—particularly in the run-up to the solstice at Stonehenge, which they are now prevented from approaching. Thirdly, there is the problem caused by large numbers of youngsters who want a noisy musical festival-cum-open-air party, and who attach themselves to the larger numbers of itinerants whom I have already described.

In the first case, four, eight, or perhaps 10 caravans arrive and settle. They create apprehension and unease, and cause a certain amount of fright—particularly among elderly people living in the neighbourhood, who become reluctant to leave their houses. Their arrival is accompanied by an increased incidence of break-ins and thefts. Although one cannot prove who is responsible, one has fairly good suspicion. In many cases, the settlers have no sanitary arrangements, so that the garden fence becomes absolutely revolting, and the loo paper blowing in the breeze is not at all an attractive feature.

Responses to my correspondence suggest that neighbouring householders and the landowner concerned should rely on the normal laws of trespass, but these require the landowner to seek from the county court an order for possession. If I have misunderstood, I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will correct me. The landowner can also apply for damages and costs. However, that is a slow procedure. Can my hon. Friend say how long it takes to get an action into a county court in those circumstances?

That is also an expensive remedy, and it is laughable to assume that any damages that may be awarded will ever be received by the hapless landowner, because at some stage the itinerant will either claim that he does not have the money or will disappear.

However, there is said to be a quick, effective route that costs the landowner nothing. I shall be grateful if my hon. Friend the Minister will confirm that if Hampshire county council fulfils the duty laid on it 23 years ago in the Caravan Sites Act 1968—which became operative in 1970—to provide an adequate number of permanent gipsy sites, it can apply to be designated. I understand that once the county council has done both, it becomes an offence for a gipsy to park on unoccupied land, or for a gipsy or itinerant to park on occupied land without the consent of the landowner.

In those circumstances, I further understand that the local council—not the landowner—can apply to a

[Sir David Mitchell]

magistrates court for an order requiring the caravan or caravans and their occupants to be moved. Thus, there is minimal delay, and no costs fall on the landowner.

I am not suggesting that Hampshire county council has been slothful, for in the past 21 years it has provided five camp sites for 20 caravans, and a sixth is under construction. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will sympathise with the county council, recognising that it is not popular to select a site for a gipsy encampment, which inevitably arouses considerable protest from anyone who lives close by. May I ask my hon. Friend the Minister how many more sites in Hampshire need to be provided to enable it to be eligible for designation, and how long the designation procedures take? If he has not the information to hand, perhaps he will write to me. So much for the small numbers who descend on certain parts of the constituency and stay there, becoming a confounded nuisance.

Much more worrying is the annual invasion of Hampshire, before the summer solstice ceremony at Stonehenge. In the past year, that invasion has been spearheaded by some 200 travellers with caravans, dogs and so forth. They settled on private land—National Trust land, as it happened—at Stockbridge Down. Section 39 of the Public Order Act 1986 was brought into operation.

I congratulate the Government on finding such an effective way of dealing with this aspect of the problem —a large number of itinerants on private property. It worked like a dream. The Act gives discretion to the senior police officer present to direct trespassers to leave, provided that the landowner has taken reasonable steps to ask them to do so, and provided that 12 or more caravans have been brought on to the land. A trespasser who fails to leave, or returns within three months, commits an offence and may be arrested without a warrant.

That worked perfectly well, but now we come to the rub: where do those people move to? Last year, they moved from the private land at Stockbridge Down to Longstock, where they settled on a green lane—a track, or, as it is technically known, a boat: a bridle path open to all traffic. Here the law becomes a toothless tiger. It was designed to deal with obstruction on the highway, and it is worded in such a way that a resident can park his car—not unreasonably—in the road outside his house if there is no parking restriction in the area.

The inadequacy of the present law will be illustrated if I explain what has happened, and is liable to happen again. The "boat" at Longstock has public rights of way, but, as a rough track, it crosses farm land. There is no exact boundary where the farmland can be said to end and the track to begin. It is as if there were no Opposition Benches in the Chamber to define where one side of the House ends and the other begins.

The problem is that the police do not know precisely whether the travellers are on a public right of way, or on private land. Hampshire contains some 5,000 km of such green lanes. They are not fenced; there is no exact definition of where the sides start. So what do the police do? They go up to a group of people and say, "I require you to move by reason of the powers given by section 137 of the Highways Act 1980, because you are causing an obstruction."

The chap says, "I'm not on the green lane. I'm on private property." What does the policeman then do? Does he say, "In that case I will not charge you under that offence, but I will find another offence for you and claim that, under section 39 of the Public Order Act, you are required to move"? The hapless policeman does not know which piece of legislation to use because he does not know which piece of land the chap is on. That is the rub of the matter.

One law applies to one piece of land and another law applies to another. Section 39 of the Public Order Act works like a dream when the offence is committed on private land. It does not work on other land. Notice has to be given. If notice is given to travellers that they are on private land, they will go on to public land. If they are told to go from there and they go on to private land, they must still be given notice first. For those reasons, nothing effective can be done.

I go further. If people move back on to the highway and section 137 is applied, a prosecution may be undertaken, which takes three or four weeks. In the meantime, where is the caravan going to be? Who will look after the wife, the dog and the goat while the man is waiting for his prosecution? For those reasons, it is clear that the existing law, although perfect on paper, does not work in practice.

This year, 200 itinerants set up a stage for a pop concert to which about 4,500 people came. It rained and the whole place was a boggy mess. Thank goodness it rained. If it had been glorious sunny weather, there probably would have been double the number there. I ask the Minister to consider what it is like when 8,000 or 10,000 people assemble on a site where there are no sanitary arrangements. The damage to crops was estimated to be £5,000. The neighbourhood was terrorised, not by specific acts of terrorism, but by the sheer number, which was frightening for those who lived nearby. The pop festival created the sort of noise which is heard over and disturbs a far larger area.

I ask my hon. Friend to consider the future of the festival. Year by year, the numbers descending on Hampshire before the solstice have been growing. Last year's wet weather saved the area from the numbers being much bigger. What will the numbers be like next year, especially if it is sunny? Shall we be able to do nothing more effective in seeking to move people on than we did this summer?

Let us be frank. Those people will not disappear. If 8,000 or 10,000 people assemble in one spot, the police force cannot do anything effective. The time has come for my hon. Friend and some of his colleagues to think seriously about identifying suitable places where such pop festivals can be held with the minimum of disturbance. Such a site should be discreet and away from residential areas.

I have in mind the idea that, now that the Army is contracting, it will not need so much land. It may be possible for a site on what is now military land to be made available for such activity which would enable many young people to enjoy themselves harmlessly without disturbing local people.

Driving away from the camp down Stockbridge high street last year, I stopped and gave a lift to one of the people leaving the party. I discovered that he was returning to London and would like a lift. I gave him a lift most of the way to the station at Basingstoke. I asked him what he was doing and why he was there. He was frank and honest and why should he not be? He was a young Australian and had been earning money in Cornwall

lifting bulbs and had heard that there was to be a huge open-air party and thought that it would be fun to join it. Thousands of young people like him thought the same. That was fine for them, but we should spare a thought for the people who live in the area.

The problem that I have described will not go away and nor will I. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister who is to reply to the debate will consider seriously what can be done to prevent the situation from recurring. In a constructive sense, I suggest that he might like to call a meeting of officials from the Home Office, the Department of Transport and the Department of the Environment, together with the local Members of Parliament who are affected in Hampshire, and have a joint discussion to explore the most effective way forward as quickly as possible.

4.50 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell) on his good fortune in securing this debate, although my congratulations would have been even more enthusiastic if he could have secured an earlier slot.

Like my hon. Friend, I am a Hampshire Member and I understand why he is determined to seize the opportunity, even at 4.51 am, to raise a subject that causes so much distress to Hampshire residents, namely, the incursions of hippies and travelling folk in small groups and occasionally in huge convoys into quiet communities where, as my hon. Friend graphically described, they camp on public and private land and create noise and fear. They often cause damage and usually leave an unpleasant detritus in their wake when they finally move on.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, North-West asked me several questions. He queried the speed of civil law which is obviously the first route for a member of the public who finds his land has been trespassed upon in that way. As I understand it, civil law orders are usually made and executed on those matters within three to seven days. I was interested to learn that my hon. Friend had reports suggesting that the period was considerably longer than that. As I understand it, the courts are prepared to deal with pressing matters through an accelerated procedure and it should not take much more than a week before the court order is handed down.

My hon. Friend also referred to designation under the Caravan Sites Act 1968. He was right to do that because it provides local authorities with a key power to secure the speedy removal of traveller encampments from public and private land. From some of my hon. Friend's remarks, he seemed to believe that there was a great distinction in the law between public and private land. There is not. The only place where there is a real distinction is between highway land and other land.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will designate an area when the county council has provided sufficient official camp sites to accommodate travelling folk normally resorting to the area. Once that is done, a district council may get a speedy court order which the police must execute to remove travellers from any land where they have established an unauthorised encampment.

The Caravan Sites Act 1968 imposed a duty on county councils to provide suitable camp sites for travellers, area by area. Designation is very properly available only for counties that have fulfilled that duty. It does not have to be fulfilled for the totality of the county, which may have been my hon. Friend's impression. The county may be designated area by area, according to the availability of camp sites in those areas. Certainly, it would be wrong to enable an authority to enjoy the convenience of speedy removal under the criminal law when it has not yet provided the minimum of camping sites necessary for regular travellers.

My hon. Friend mentioned Wiltshire and the advantages that it seems to enjoy in such matters. It does so because it provides enough sites to have enabled the whole county to be designated.

Hampshire is making progress, and a site at Peak Copse, at Dummer, which is close to my hon. Friend's constituency, if not exactly in it, is nearing completion. The exact prospects and timetable for designation are matters for my hon. Friend to take up directly with the county and the Department of the Environment. However, I will ensure that a copy of the *Official Report* reaches him.

My hon. Friend also asked whether I would assemble a meeting of Hampshire Members to discuss those matters. I will certainly be willing to do so if that would be useful to my hon. Friend and our Hampshire colleagues. However, it would be sensible to make contact with the Department of the Environment and the county council first, so that the all-important question of the possibilities of designation and when it might come about can be examined beforehand, as it belongs not to my Department but to the Department of the Environment.

As my hon. Friend has said, section 39 of the Public Order Act 1986 gives the police descretionary powers to deal with aggravated trespass. I was glad to hear that he has found it of great efficacy in his part of Hampshire. That section of the 1986 Act is not designed as a substitute for the fast criminal law powers provided by designation under the Caravan Sites Act 1968. However, as my hon. Friend has found, it enables the police to respond to landowners, public or private, who complain that two or more trespassers are being abusive or insulting to the occupier, are causing damage to the property, or have brought 12 or more vehicles on to the land, and that the occupier has asked them to leave and they have not done so.

If the police judge it right to use that power, there will be a number of factors that they will want to consider—for example, the presence of children, pregnant women, and people who are ill. An offence is committed if the travellers do not comply or return within three months.

My hon. Friend said that a shortcoming of the law is that the police are required to give reasonable notice, as though that means that there must be a delay of an unspecified period before the power is enforceable. That is not the case. The police must make a judgment, and they must do what is reasonable. There may be certain circumstances, such as the presence of somebody who is ill, or children, which may lead them to give longer notice than they would normally give. Their power, if they judge it proper to use it, is immediately available to them.

In respect of encampments on highways, about which my hon. Friend has expressed worries, there is plenty of opportunity for action to be taken—my hon. Friend suggested that there was too much. For example, there is summary prosecution under section 137 of the Highways

[Mr. Peter Lloyd]

Act 1980, the county council can sue under section 130 of the 1980 Act, there is indictment for nuisance at common law, and damages and injunction under common law.

I do not believe that that choice confuses the police. They are well used to applying a variety of aspects of the law according to the situation. That is their job. In respect of highways, they have several choices which are appropriate to the number of people, what they are doing and the particular occasion. I accept that, at times, there may be some doubt about where highway land ends and private or public land begins, but it is not beyond the wit of competent police officers, together with county and district councils, to determine that boundary in most cases.

There should not be any confusion about greenways. "Greenway" is not a specific legal term; it is provided to cover rights of way, of which there are many in Hampshire. If the areas are highways, the county will know and if they are not, which is often the case, the benefits of designation or section 39 apply to them as to any other public or private land. There should be few problems of the kind that my hon. Friend understands to exist. If he believes that they do exist, I should be interested to hear about the circumstance of the particular examples so that I can follow them up because I am genuinely puzzled by what he is saying.

Sir David Mitchell: Perhaps my hon. Friend can imagine a field that rises over a quarter of a mile. Where the bottoms of two fields come together, there is a rutted track along which tractors pass. Some parts get boggy in the winter, so the tractors go up on one side, but because it is a bit drier further on, the tractors may then go up the other side. In such a case, my hon. Friend could not say that the central bit was the public right of way. He could not say that a man on the one side was standing on a public right of way, and that a man on the other side was standing on private land. That is the difficulty.

Mr. Lloyd: There is no difficulty. My hon. Friend seems to be confusing a right of way with a highway. A right of way goes over private land. The sort of track that my hon. Friend is describing will almost invariably be on public or private land, but it will not be a highway. Highways are well known to the county council. Any competent authority will know where its public highways are. If the areas are not public highways, they must be public or private land which has a right of way over it. As I have said, section 39 or designation, if designation has been secured, will apply, but not the provisions that apply to the public highway.

Sir David Mitchell: This is a very important point. Under the reclassification that is being carried out by the county councils, many of the green lanes are now being declared boats—or open to all traffic and four-wheeled vehicles. If my hon. Friend is saying that a boat is classed as land upon which section 39 can be applied, there is no problem, but if a different section of the law has to be applied because we are talking about a highway, there is a problem.

Mr. Lloyd: I shall come back to my hon. Friend on this question because the highway and what constitutes a highway is less a matter for the Home Office than for the Department of Transport. However, if the county is specifying particular greenways as highways, the county will know that. If the county has just specified something, the designation of that particular right of way should be no surprise to the police. That which is a highway should be well known to the county council and should be easily ascertainable to the police. If the area is not a highway, it is public or private land to which the law applies, even though it is a right of way, just as it does to any other public or private land.

My hon. Friend's third point related to large bodies of travellers and to the music festivals that have occasionally been a great problem. Large groups cause much greater problems than smaller numbers. A large body of hippies and new age travellers can converge on an area, but I do not believe that the law is insufficient to deal with that problem. The whole range of the civil and criminal law is available and covers all eventualities. The problem is for the police to be able to concentrate sufficient forces to deal with the group. That is an expensive exercise and means that, for a time, other areas will be underpoliced. Even if the police have mustered their strength, they must judge whether powerful and immediate intervention will exacerbate matters and create greater possibilities of violence and nuisance for local people than more restrained tactics. Those are questions not so much of the law and its adequacy as of police deployment and strategy, which are for the chief constable to determine.

My hon. Friend referred particularly to parties with music and thousands in attendance. I am aware that they can create havoc. That is why the law was strengthened last year by the Entertainments (Increased Penalties) Act 1990. The Act provides that if such a party is held, for which a charge for attendance is made, without a licence or in breach of a licence from the appropriate local authority, the organisers are liable to a fine of up to £20,000, the confiscation of profits and related equipment and six months gaol. It is an effective deterrent waiting to be used.

My hon. Friend mentioned Wiltshire rather wistfully as a county that seemed to be advantaged in dealing with the problems that he described. I explained that it was enjoying the benefits of its foresight in having itself designated. But it has also benefited from section 13 of the Public Order Act 1986, which is available to a chief officer of police. It enables him, if he believes it necessary to prevent serious public disorder, and with the agreement of the local authority and the Home Secretary, to ban a public procession such as those which have taken place at Stonehenge.

However, it is clear that whatever problems the new age travellers and hippies bring to Hampshire—sometimes on their way to Stonehenge—the problems are not the result of anything so formal as a procession. So the powers that have been rightly available in the immediate vicinity of Stonehenge have not applied to the difficulties in Hampshire so far.

I hope that what I have said helps to clarify the law in this vexed and vexing area, although the problems are much less vexing if the area is designated. The matter that my hon. Friend has raised is a real problem of not only law but wise and effective policing.

Sir David Mitchell: Will my hon. Friend arrange a meeting of senior officials of the Departments involved —the Home Office, the Department of Transport and the

Department of the Environment—together with the county council and the Members of Parliament whose constituencies are affected?

Mr. Lloyd: I said earlier that I would ensure that my ministerial colleagues at the Department of the Environment read these exchanges. A crucial matter in the whole problem lies within their responsibility. I shall certainly discuss with them the usefulness of a meeting. I cannot commit my colleagues now to such a meeting, but I hope to be of assistance to my hon. Friend and I am grateful to him for raising this important matter.

European Funds

5.7 am

Mr. Derek Enright (Hemsworth): May I first thank Mr. Speaker for choosing my name in the ballot so that I may raise the apparently intractable problem of RECHAR and other European funds.

I begin by filling in a little of the background. The Hemsworth constituency is made up of a series of pit villages. The problem is that there is only one pit left in the constituency. When the communities lost their pits they lost their principal employment. It is no use telling the people to get on their coal tubs and go down the road. Many of them already have gone down the road. They have come down from Scotland and the north-east. Indeed, some of those who are now pensioners came from eastern Europe at the end of the war. But now there is no more road for them to travel. They have reached the absolute end of the line. It is a cul-de-sac. So they are left with a scarred environment, pit heaps rising to the sky and coal dust that has become engrained everywhere.

During the winter, when I worked in Featherstone, I could look out on the beauty of Featherstone Alps. But it was not the beauty of the Alps of Switzerland and the air was not so pure, and once one had taken a ski run, it was coal slurry and sludge beneath one's feet.

Terrible problems of the environment have been left with the departure of the coal. But they are villages with a proud history. Their solidarity has brought its own culture and customs, and I invite the Minister to visit Kinsley and view the historic photographs of the Kinsley evictions at the beginning of the century, when the private coal owners were in collision with the miners. The result was disaster for the miners' families. Children were cast out into the streets and wives were abandoned.

Matters such as that are still strong in the folk memory, as are the stories of the Featherstone riots at the end of the last century, when the military were turned on striking miners, some of whom were shot dead. In a way, that is being repeated in 1991, for there is a feeling of hopelessness as the mainstay of people's employment disappears. But on this occasion the feeling of hopelessness was accompanied by a glimmer of light. It came from the European Community, which recognised the difficulties faced by coal areas. Working with areas in Spain, France, Germany and the United Kingdom, the EC set about a programme to replace the missing jobs. It was a fitting programme for what was originally the European Coal and Steel Community.

That programme was not a solution imposed from above. It had nothing to do with what the other day were claimed to be terrible Brussels bureaucrats imposing their will on Britain. It was a co-operative effort, the local scheme having been suggested by Wakefield metropolitan district council. That suggested scheme was sensitive to the needs of the area. It had been carefully examined by the European Commission in accordance with the rules of the Council of Ministers to ensure that it accorded with EC criteria. All of that gave the area a glimmer of hope.

Wakefield metropolitan district council has lost 14,000 mining jobs in the last nine years. For a council with a relatively small population, that has been a large loss. Due to improved productivity, the one remaining pit in my constituency, Frickley, has suffered a job reduction of from 3,000 to 900, severely affecting three or four small

[Mr. Derek Enright]

villages. The programme that is being attempted, and hoped for by the locality, involves an EC grant of over £10 million. That sum, which might start to put things right, would go on environmental improvements. Unfortunately, the programme is being blocked.

The environmental improvements are specifically the reuse of land and buildings at six former collieries. One cannot get more specific than taking collieries that are no longer in use and attempting to bring them back into use and, over and above that, trying to take the scars away from the area. Putting these plans into action would, it is estimated by the district council, create 600 new jobs. It is not a great Toyota factory; that is not what we are asking for. We are asking for a series of small and medium-sized firms which can flourish. In this programme there will be spoil-heap reclamation and reconversion of the buildings that I have just mentioned. They will be cleared up and the whole outlook of the area will be improved. I should mention in particular the problem of subsidence from which we suffer in west Yorkshire generally. Where a pit has gone out of operation there are very specific and particular problems of subsidence which make it difficult for private operators on their own to start reconverting.

At the same time, under the environmental improvement programme there will be a cleaning up of the village and town centres. In particular I would draw to the Minister's attention the fact that housing estates in that area—not estates built by wicked Labour councils post-1945, but estates which go back to before the war—are in a terrible condition. They are not attractive places in which to live and it is very difficult sometimes to keep tenants in them. So the use of moneys there is very important indeed.

Secondly, we need the renovation of the social and economic infrastructure. Again, that is one of the proper headings that the Minister knows that these communities have put in. In this context, I should like to mention particularly the specific way in which pit villages are built. They tend to be ribbon development and therefore to be isolated to east and west or north and south, depending on which way the roads run. In Hemsworth in particular there is a tremendous problem of road links. We need new road links to bring us into the M62, the M1 and the A1. That is very important.

Over and above that, however, all the other infrastructure—sewerage, and so on—has been neglected for a long time. That, too, means that it is not an attractive proposition for even small and medium-sized firms.

Then we come to the construction of new, advance factory units and workshop premises—nothing very grand, again; we are not seeking a silicon valley or anything of that order, just small business which we can assist and maintain. Great emphasis has been placed in this programme on the creation or development of small and medium-sized enterprises. The sort of target that has been set is very reasonable—to create another 500 jobs.

The measures which are appropriate under that programme include better access to risk capital, the provision of common services—these are seedling firms setting up—assistance with market research, business networks, innovation in industry and, in particular, the establishment of small and medium-sized enterprises which can look to the new technologies.

The Minister should recognise that it is important in terms of planning the schemes that the district council has taken full account of the Government's central schemes. It is proposing to complement them, not to replace them, and to ensure that they fit together properly as a jigsaw.

A small element is the promotion of tourism. I am not suggesting that the Minister should respond to an advert of the sort that reads, "Come to sunny Fitzwilliam." He might be disappointed in sunny Fitzwilliam. More appropriate, perhaps, would be the Hemsworth water park. A huge area of derelict land was refurbished and turned into a splendid water park. It is an attractive facility for the region during the summer. It is not a national asset, but in many ways it is a sub-regional asset.

The parish council was strongly criticised when it decided to go ahead with the water park, but those who had lived for so long with muck on their doorsteps considered that it was a major achievement to get rid of it by creating a water park. Those who took the decision to go ahead with the water park were re-elected. That is the operation of local government at the lowest tier.

I recommend the Minister to give proper consideration to subsidiarity. We are always talking about it in Brussels, so let us give it proper consideration in the context of local government.

I have given the Minister the flavour. He has been good enough to stay up late, so I shall not go into further detail unless he has specific questions to ask.

I am sure that the Minister is familiar with the word "additionality" and has heard it used before, but hearing is not good enough. We want action. Everything that I have read on the topic includes a statement from the Government to this effect: "We have given additionality. We have included it in our general grants all over the place. Our local government financing is so complicated that we cannot show where additionality is." At the same time, non-Government organisations working in the third world can show additionality. Germany can show additionality, and it has demonstrated it clearly. Spain and France can show additionality, but the United Kingdom Government cannot. I know that additionality constituted a problem for all member Governments up to three or four years ago, and it was then that the Commission decided that it would tighten the rules. It decided that it would do something that the Government are always urging, which is to abide by the rules. It is not some nasty Jacques the lad who is telling member states to take that course. It is our beloved Bruce Millan, a former Member of this place, who is suggesting that the rules should be obeyed. Anyone who knows Bruce Millan—I am sure that this is the view of him in Scotland—will accept that he is a thorough administrator and that he abides by the rules. He looks to the book to get things done.

Bruce Millan gave the Government plenty of time to get their books in order, but they have not done so. So-called extra money has floated out from the Department of the Environment, but it has not gone to the coal areas, for which it was meant. On the contrary, I suggest that if extra money has left the Department, it has gone to Westminster and Wandsworth, areas in which people have not seen a pit, let alone worked down one. The money is being used to mask their poll tax. I can think of no other explanation. If Germany, Spain and France can show additionality, so can we, and so should we. We should be seeking to abide by the rules of the game.

As the Government seem unconcerned that money that has been properly allocated and bid for has not been received, I can only conclude that they are waging a vendetta against the miners. Will the Minister assure me that that is not so? I feel certain that, were Hemsworth a marginal constituency—God forbid—we would receive the money and it would clearly be regarded as going towards the Conservative party. One has noticed that happening in Sherwood, where the robbers seem to do well by the Government.

It is interesting, but it is appalling that, unless the Government act rapidly, the money will be lost to the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom was originally awarded the biggest slice of money under RECHAR, but we shall now lose it to Germany, which has the schemes and additional moneys ready and waiting. In the same way, Germany will take the European central bank now that the Prime Minister has decided at Maastricht that we shall no longer be part of EMU. One of the reasons why the Germans are ready and efficient is that their government is less centralised and more regionalised. The next time we debate this subject, we should also debate devolution, because action should be taken at the grass roots, not at governmental, level.

My final plea to the Minister is to show that he believes in the mining areas. The Government have done them enough harm in closing down their pits, but, now that they are closed down, the Government should ensure that we get the money straight away.

5.27 am

Ms. Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): I applaud the actions of my hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) in introducing this debate and I am happy to endorse his comments and agree with the arguments that he put forward. I know that he feels strongly about the matter and that he held meetings on it prior to being elected to the House. It was one of the important issues that he raised during his election campaign. He was right to raise it and, throughout that campaign, his constituents expressed great concern on the matter. They are aware of the issues involved, yet it is clear that they blame the Government rather than the European Commission for holding up the money. They applaud Commissioner Bruce Millan's actions in trying to put pressure on the Government to ensure that, when the money is released, it is properly used to the additional and direct benefit of the areas concerned.

The proper use of European funding is a long-standing interest of my hon. Friend. It is important because RECHAR and this specific scheme are the tip of a large iceberg, and the problem will get bigger rather than smaller if the Government do not act to resolve the problem at this stage.

I shall be brief because my hon. Friend has put forward all the arguments and the hour is very late. The Minister will have an opportunity to give his views and I should like to think that I am giving him an opportunity to tell us that the matter will be sorted out very shortly. However, I have a feeling that he has a job to find a common view even among his governmental colleagues because different Departments seem to hold a variety of views.

We have certainly gained the impression that the Department of the Environment is more flexible and more in line with the Commission's views than is the Department of Trade and Industry. There also seem to be differences of view between the Treasury and the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Wales. The Department of Energy is also involved in the issue. Perhaps the Minister will give us some details on the different views held in government.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth was right: additionality is a vexed issue. Both he and I, as former Members of the European Parliament trying to obtain funds for use in our European constituencies, remember the discussions that we had on the subject over many years. We believe that RECHAR is being used as a test case to try to ensure that the problem of additionality can be solved. A Labour Government would discuss with the Commission ways of ensuring that European funding was much more transparent and that additionality could be demonstrably proved, which it is not now. That is the problem when we try to evaluate the Government's claims on the issue. Given the way that the Government account for their actions at present, there is no way of showing whether additionality exists. The Government's claim that they spend more in the regions than they would otherwise do because they know that they can retrieve moneys from Europe is difficult to prove one way or the other.

We have grave suspicions about the Government's claim, as, during their period of office, spending on regional assistance has fallen dramatically, while European structural funds have dramatically increased. That seems to be a paradox, which greatly fuels our suspicion that additionality is not being respected.

I pay tribute to the work done by the Coalfield Communities Campaign. It has produced an excellent booklet that describes the problems of additionality and how the Government prevent the money from being used as additional funds in the various districts. It describes how each local authority is

"given a 'basic credit approval'. This determines how much it may borrow to pay for capital projects. An authority may also spend a proportion of its receipts from the sale of assets such as land and property. Together, these set a ceiling on each authority's capital spending which the government will not allow it to breach, no matter how much money is coming from Brussels."

My hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth rightly referred to the various schemes in his district that would be able to proceed if the problem of RECHAR and additionality were solved. I know that in other regions of the country, including mine, similar schemes are ready to be implemented if that problem is solved. In my district the problem involves the RECHAR programme in the Tyne and Wear and south-east Northumberland region. The schemes being proposed there are similar to the ones that my hon. Friend outlined in his district.

Those problems represent the tip of the iceberg. Local authorities—I think that 75 of them are involved in the RECHAR programme—are determined to get the matter sorted out. Given the guidelines under which they are forced to operate, it has been difficult for them to use not just RECHAR but other European funding in recent years. Having dealt with local authorities over the issue of European funding for a long period, my impression is that they are more disillusioned now than at any other time. They are finding it more and more difficult, particularly with the Government's spending cuts, which have been forced on them, to fit European schemes into their existing guidelines. As the money does not arrive in the form of extra benefit, the process is acting as a massive

[Ms. Joyce Quin]

disincentive, not an incentive, for them to carry out important economic development programmes in their districts.

I hope that the Minister will take this opportunity to say that the matter will be sorted out quickly. Perhaps he can also say when the next negotiations with the European Commission will take place. I hope that he will not take refuge in the expression that I have heard many Government spokespeople use: "This is our money coming back and we can do what we like with it." This money is not a budget rebate. If it were, the Minister would be right to argue in that way. It is not a budget rebate such as that agreed in the 1980s, so it is not central Government money with which the Treasury can do what it likes.

RECHAR money is allocated to a specific scheme to help coalfield areas. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth said, the scheme was designed to help Britain. It was not designed to be British money coming back; it was a way to offset some of the negative aspects of EC budgeting. It was designed to go to specific areas, not into the central coffers. That is an important point and it is a reason why RECHAR money should be treated in the special way suggested by Commissioner Bruce Millan. I hope that the Minister will tell us that the Government are prepared to accept the Commission's point of view and to work with the Commission and our hard-pressed local authorities to make the best possible use of this important source of money.

5.36 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr Edward Leigh): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Enright) on obtaining this debate on the Consolidated Fund so early in his parliamentary career. The knowledge with which he spoke about his constituency is a tribute to the dedication that he clearly brings to his job as a constituency Member of Parliament. I listened to him with great care.

I shall outline the nature of structural funds and then deal with the problem of additionality. The structural funds are established under the European Economic Community treaty with the general objective of strengthening economic and social cohesion in the Community and redressing the principal regional imbalances. They currently operate on a five-year cycle and the present cycle is due to finish at the end of 1993. The European Regional Development Fund was agreed in principle in 1972 by the European Council in order to reduce the Community's excessive concentration on agricultural policy and expenditure and to provide a more equitable balance in the United Kingdom's net contribution to the Community's budget.

The structural funds are intended to help improve economic and social cohesion within the Community, but the treaty makes it clear that the pursuit of sound economic policies by member states is the prinicipal means by which greater cohesion within the Community can be achieved. The task of the structural funds cannot be more than to provide a considerable but secondary means of support.

During the present cycle—from 1987-93—there is to be a doubling of the structural funds in real terms. That represents an investment by the Community in the economies of the main recipient states comparable with the aid provided under the Marshall plan for post-war reconstruction. As the second largest net contributor to the Community budget, the United Kingdom is entitled to ask whether the funds are being put to good use. In 1991, they will amount to about £10,000 million throughout the Community but mainly in the least-developed regions known as the objective 1 regions. Within the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland is designated as such a region.

United Kingdom receipts from the funds, as a proportion of the total, amount to about 9 per cent., or £900 million. This compares with the United Kingdom's gross contribution of about double that. Two thirds of the difference is refunded through the Fountainbleau abatement, which means that this year about £300 million of taxpayers' money is being transferred by the funds from the United Kingdom to other member states.

I think that it is very important to keep this fact in mind. The hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) foresaw that I might mention it; I must, as it is central to the debate. It is tempting to think of the funds as some kind of free gift from a European benefactor, but they are not that—they are what is given back to us out of our large contribution.

The amount of our receipts is a matter for negotiation. The Government try to maximise the benefit that the United Kingdom will receive, but we have to recognise that many other member states are less well off than we are and they tend to get relatively more out of the fund. I make that point because it is necessary to keep a sense of perspective when approaching the difficulties surrounding RECHAR funds.

As with other member states, the Government are paid the funds by the Commission. The Government then pass them on to their final recipients. They are paid as contributions alongside national expenditures on such purposes as economic infrastructure, vocational training, industrial and tourism development, environmental works, and all manner of other things, according to detailed programmes and consistent with framework documents which are drawn up and agreed between the Commission and the Government.

The Government take a strict view about the need to control expenditure. That applies as much to expenditure financed by money from Europe as to money coming directly out of the taxpayer's pocket. Indeed, as I have already said, the money from Europe is actually our taxpayers' money in any case.

So, for these general reasons of economic policy, much importance is attached to the need to keep a close watch on where the structural funds money is going.

However, there is no question, as I have heard it said and as I have read in the press, of the money not going to the purposes for which it is intended. It is clear—the Commission has not claimed otherwise—that the funds do end up where they are supposed to be, in the case of RECHAR, in the mining areas. The issue is much more complex than that, and I suspect that many more people like to talk about it than actually understand it. I do not level that criticism at the hon. Gentleman, who brings great knowledge to these matters.

The basic question that Mr. Millan has raised is whether the present system in the United Kingdom taken

as a whole satisfactorily transmits the effective value of Community structural funds to the eligible regions. I have already mentioned that over the period 1987 to 1993 the total amount of structural funds is being doubled. I apologise now for having to spend a while on a legal document. I hope that it will be clear to the hon. Gentleman.

Article 9 of the relevant Council regulation 4253/88 states:

"In establishing and implementing the Community Support Frameworks, the Commission and the member states shall ensure that the increase in the appropriations for the funds provided for in article 12(2) of Regulation (EEC) 2052/88 has a genuine additional economic impact in the regions concerned"—

I underline "concerned"—

"and results in at least an equivalent increase in the total volume of official or similar (community and national) structural aid in the member state concerned, taking into account the macro-economic circumstances in which the funding takes place."

That is the only place where any Community legislation currently in force mentions explicitly the requirement for additionality about which the hon. Gentleman has spoken.

The United Kingdom accepted that article when the regulation was adopted and we are bound by it. However, the Commission accepts that the doubling of funds will not benefit the United Kingdom. Receipts by the United Kingdom from the fund are expected to be lower in the current period than they were before. The evidence available to me suggests that we are the only member state in that position. The reason is that the main benefits of the increase have been concentrated on the less-developed southern member states. In those circumstances, article 9 has no practical impact in the United Kingdom. That is the legal point. Our legal position is clear. There is no doubt about it.

However, even though we believe that we are under no legal obligation to do so—by going through the article in detail I shall have convinced the House of our strong legal position—we have made provision for additional public spending to take account of the expected receipt of the funds.

In the case of RECHAR we had enough advance promises of the amounts of money which were likely to be involved to make provision for the grants to be used once they came through, and we did precisely that.

Mr. Enright: Will the Minister therefore identify the amount of money that was given to Wakefield metropolitan district council which was the additional money that he anticipated? That is a relatively simple request.

Mr. Leigh: It is not a relatively simple request, as the hon. Gentleman well knows. That is a question which he should address to an Under-Secretary of State for the Environment. If the hon. Gentleman were to do so, I am sure that the Under-Secretary of State would make it clear that additional funds have been given to local authorities in England to cover the amounts expected from RECHAR.

Mr. Enright: But that was put into the global figure, which is precisely my point and which militates against the legal argument that the Minister cited earlier.

Mr. Leigh: No, because the way in which the funding arrangements for local authorities are worked out for the hon. Gentleman's borough council, as for others, takes account of the borough council's circumstances. For example, it takes account of the amount of derelict land to which the hon. Gentleman movingly referred. So it is not simply that there is a global amount which is distributed equally throughout the United Kingdom.

Mr. Enright: There is a specific case here for the Minister to answer. With RECHAR, the derelict land is specified—it is related to coal—whereas the grants from the Department of the Environment in regard to derelict land make no such distinction. The result is that, for example, Manchester, which is not well known as being an ex-coalfield, gets more money for its derelict land than parts of west Yorkshire which are quite well known as being ex-coalfields.

Mr. Leigh: Although the point about derelict land was one that the hon. Gentleman made in his speech, and that is why I addressed myself to it in answer to the last question, it is a poor example for the hon. Gentleman to adduce in support of his case, because that is subject to 100 per cent grant from the Government. One of the arguments made by local authorities is that they are unable to match those funds when they are received. The hon. Gentleman cited derelict land, but that is not a good example.

I will try to explain the difficult and elusive concept of additionality, which understandably confuses many right hon. and hon Members and those outside the House, and gives rise to many problems. In essence, it is like saying that something would not have happened in other circumstances, and it is therefore impossible to prove from a logical point of view.

Another way of expressing it is to say that money from the structural funds should be used only to finance projects that local or national authorities would not have supported otherwise—presumably because they had higher priorities.

The paradox is that it is necessary to argue that a project is important enough to warrant support from the structural funds, but that it is not so important that it would have been undertaken without them. I hope that I have made myself clear to the hon. Member for Hemsworth. Additionality is a complex paradox, and it is important that the House understands it.

Another way of expressing the concept—which I have written out for myself—is that additionality means that one has done something additional to that which one would have done had one not received any money from the structural funds. It is impossible to say what one would have done if one had not received the money from the structural funds.—*[Laughter.]* I am glad that I appear to have enlivened the House at this late hour.

Mr. Enright: Will the Minister clarify that explanation by putting it in Latin?

Mr. Leigh: I could certainly do so. That would be a mere bagatelle—but I would be ruled out of order.

I am not saying that we do not take the problem very seriously. The apparent paradox that I described is why we are especially careful to ensure that all projects approved for grants from the funds offer good value for money and meet the other general criteria that ensure that the taxpayer's money is put to appropriate use.

[Mr. Leigh]

That condition, coupled with the global increase in public spending to take account of receipts from the structural funds, offers the best guarantee that additionality is respected, while ensuring that only worthy projects are supported.

I have said in Department of Trade and Industry questions that it is our money, and we want it. Commissioner Millan has been quoted as saying that that was a foolish and unhelpful statement. I make no apology to him or to anybody else for calling a spade a spade. It is our money, we contributed to the Community budget, we qualify for the RECHAR grants, and Commissioner Millan is withholding them on grounds that we believe to be spurious and unjustified.

I have received many letters from potential recipients of RECHAR money stressing how much difficulty has been caused by the Commission's refusal to release it.

Ms. Quin: If the Minister's explanation is correct, can he explain why practically all local authorities support Commissioner Millan's case, not his?

Mr. Leigh: Labour-controlled authorities—and they are those mainly concerned—have criticised the Government, but that is not entirely surprising. I am not sorry that Labour has chosen to make a political issue out of the matter, for that does not do it any good. We are not blocking the money. We give more to the structural funds than we receive and we want the grants to go to the regions concerned. The constituency of the hon. Member for Hemsworth would benefit from RECHAR money, and I had hoped that he and the hon. Member for Gateshead, East would use this opportunity to encourage Commissioner Millan to release it. I am sorry that neither of them has done so.

Mr. Enright: The Minister said that the legal arguments are crystal clear. If that is so, why did Commissioner Millan not accept them? He is a very reasonable man—even when he disagrees with me.

Mr. Leigh: I do not know why the Commissioner has not accepted our case. We have taken legal advice; our position is absolutely clear, and we are entitled to take that position. I do not know why Mr. Millan is taking his present attitude. I do not speak for him. He is a former colleague of Opposition Members, and I suggest that they ask him.

Schemes and projects are ready to go once the money has been released, but until that happens they cannot proceed. I do not know what better evidence of additionality Mr. Millan could have. I have been made aware of some concern among local authorities that are potential recipients of RECHAR grants that they may not be in a position to spend the money when it becomes available, because they have already reached their spending limits. That point was made by both the hon. Member for Hemsworth and the hon. Member for Gateshead, East. I am unable to comment in detail on such cases, but if any hon. Member knows of particular problems in particular areas, I am sure that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment would be pleased to make inquiries.

This is really a political dispute. Of course, some local authorities complain about Government-imposed limits on their ability to spend. They always have, so it would be surprising if they were to keep quiet in the present dispute. These authorities are encouraging Mr. Millan to stand firm against the Government, because they see it as a way of attacking the Government's general policies on local government finance.

Their position is in reality a false one. They are free to finance spending by a number of means, and within the limits of the law have considerable freedom to spend their resources as they decide. The hon. Member for Hemsworth mentioned a land reclamation project that one of his local councils had undertaken. It is for the local authorities themselves to decide on their priorities. That is the principle of subsidiarity to which the hon. Gentleman rightly referred. The Government have made additional spending power available in expectation of receiving structural funds money. There is no exact correspondence between this, in the form of credit approvals, and actual grants, because local authorities can finance their aided expenditure by a number of means, of which borrowing against credit approvals is only one. Moreover, basic credit approvals are not hypothecated to individual projects or even particular areas of expenditure. Why? I do not believe that local authorities would welcome being tied down by the Government. That is an important point: it goes straight to the heart of subsidiarity, in which the hon. Gentleman is clearly a great believer.

Another action that the Government have taken is the introduction of "top-slicing" credit approvals in England. This "fine-tunes" the allocation system towards European regional development fund authorities, and was intended to tackle a particular problem which might arise in particular areas where there might be genuine difficulties in utilising ERDF grant because of insufficient spending power. In taking that step, the Government demonstrated a willingness to act and take a positive approach to improving transparency.

I am sorry that, despite the initiative that we have taken to be flexible and to introduce top-slicing—which, I note, is never mentioned by Opposition Members—Mr. Millan has not seen fit to release the money. Despite our efforts to accommodate the Commission's objections and take positive action where needed, he is sticking to his call for changes that would, in reality, involve a considerable change in the approach to central and local government financial control arrangements. That is really a case of the tail wagging the dog, and we are not convinced that such a change is necessary or desirable.

Even more remarkable is the fact that we are not alone in having failed to convince the Commission over additionality, yet the United Kingdom is the only member state to have been singled out for this treatment by Mr. Millan. In the Commission's own very recent document entitled "Annual report on the implementation of the reform of the structural fund", it is stated that acceptable evidence—acceptable to the Commission, that is—of additionality has so far been received only from the Republic of Ireland, Portugal, Greece, Germany and Belgium. To be fair to Spain, it has submitted evidence as well, but the Commission says that it is having difficulty in interpreting it. I will spell it out. The hon. Gentleman did not appear to have his facts entirely right in his speech. In addition to Spain and the United Kingdom, the Commissioner still wanted to be convinced of additionality by Denmark, by France, by Italy, by Luxembourg and by the Netherlands.

Mr. Enright: I mentioned only three countries. The Minister will discover that what the Commissioner said was that France was making substantial efforts to move towards additionality. There were and always have been difficulties.

Mr. Leigh: We are making substantial efforts. The hon. Gentleman seems to accept that we are not alone. Why is it that, having made substantial efforts and despite the fact that we are not alone, we are being picked on? The answer is not clear to me. The hon. Gentleman should address that question to Commissioner Millan.

I have explained the position. We sincerely want RECHAR money to be released by the Commission so that it can be put to good use in constituencies such as Hemsworth. Mr. Millan has had his day in court. We have bent over backwards to try to accommodate his unreasonable views, but one can bend only so far. It is a about time that Mr. Millan showed some flexibility. We have shown flexibility. I hope that he can still be persuaded that it takes two to agree. I urge hon. Members who may have influence with him to try to bring him round.

Shops Act 1950

6 am

Mr. Ray Powell (Ogmore): A very good morning to you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wish that I looked as bright as you look.

This important and contentious debate deals with the emotive subject of the operation of the Shops Act 1950. I know that the Minister is well informed about the Act and about our debates on the Act over the years, especially since 1986. There have been no fewer than nine attempts to amend the Shops Act 1950 since the great debate in 1986. There have been ten-minute Bills, and I presented a Bill myself. Some of the Bills have had little support and have been defeated on their introduction. Sometimes Ministers have taken a blatantly arrogant attitude in attempts to amend the anomalous Act.

The most recent Government attempt to introduce legislation on the subject—the Shops Bill—was rejected on Second Reading, having successfully started its progress in the Lords where it had a protracted and controversial passage. On 14 April 1986, as I remember only too well, I had the great pleasure of announcing the result for the Opposition as the Teller in the defeat of a Bill that the Government led by the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) earnestly wanted to be introduced. The Government were defeated by just 14 votes, despite their built-in majority of 170. I well recall the result. It was 282 in the Aye Lobby and 296 in the No Lobby. Standing by my side was my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes)—I should say hon. Friend, but he deserves to be a right hon. Gentleman because of his activities in the House. He stood beside me as the result of the Division was announced. He was as exalted as I was that we had defeated the Government despite their majority. The result was undoubtedly due to the enormous efforts of a great colleague and friend of mine who was at the time deputy general secretary of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers which sponsors me.

If I could find the quote from *Hansard* from my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, I would refer to it because it is relevant, but, as I cannot find it, I will not quote my right hon. Friend. However, the Minister would find it worth while to read what my right hon. Friend said. He asked the Leader of the House whether the Government intended to proceed further with the Bill. The reply was that the Government had no intention of introducing any such legislation on that very emotive subject.

I recommend that the Minister reads the penultimate paragraph of the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) of 14 April 1986 in which he called for a conference of all interested parties. He said that the representatives should not be called to the Minister's office for consultations; instead, there should be a collective conference and the Government should use their tempering powers to accommodate and reconcile clashing and conflicting convictions. *[Interruption.]* If the Minister is not listening, I will not refer to this point, but I believe that it is important and the Government should bear it in mind. If the Minister had acted on the advice of my right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton, and had implemented that recommendation and request, we might not be in the position that we are in today.

[Mr. Ray Powell]

Today large retailers and small shops are clamouring blatantly to flout the law. The Prime Minister has claimed that the law is bizarre and he has allowed the position to become worse by making no positive attempt to rectify the position after the statement by the Attorney-General of 27 November. The present position is bizarre when the large retailers open on Sunday, using the recession as their excuse and claiming that it has caused sales to be at their lowest levels. They are offering 20 per cent. off all goods to boost their Christmas turnover. However, the traditional January sales will be a universal flop when people cannot afford to buy for Christmas despite 20 per cent. off and Sunday opening which will mean further costs for the retailers and eventually the shoppers.

The Minister's statement to the House following the Attorney-General's response to a private notice question clearly shows that, having burnt their fingers once, the Government have no real intention of trying to solve the problem. On 27 November, the Minister stated that the Government would

"consider measures which fall short of total deregulation of the Sunday trading laws".—[*Official Report*, 27 November 1991; Vol. 199, c. 919.]

That was a great step forward compared with what was said in 1986, but it took five years of constant lobbying by Keep Sunday Special, by USDAW and by several other organisations before that conclusion was finally reached.

Therefore, I look forward to the Minister's support on 22 January, when I shall propose my Bill further to attempt to change the Shops Act 1950, especially as the Act leaves unprotected shop workers who are called to work illegally in shops that should be closed on Sundays during the run-up to Christmas.

The last paragraph of the Minister's statement referred to Community law and awaiting the interpretation of the legal position. I have received many letters expressing deep concern about Sunday trading and law breaking, and the Government's attempt to blame Europe for the mess that they are in because of their inactivity. The evidence presented to me suggests otherwise. I ask the Minister to answer my question of 27 November, reported in column 923 of *Hansard*. If one of my constituents or anyone else takes a packet of biscuits and forgets to pay for it in a store that is illegally trading on Sunday, will that person expect to be prosecuted?

I now wish to refer to Sunday trading and European law. A lengthy document on that matter states:

"The Attorney's Statement on 27th November confirmed that a reference to the European Court of Justice does not suspend UK law. (Hansard Col. 913, 27th November 1991). Therefore the contrary proposition put forward by the law-breaking retailers is seen for what it is—deliberate and planned flouting of the criminal law for profit.

The European Court at any time has hundreds of references from the 12 Member States. It is an absurdity to argue that a mere reference 'neutralizes' the laws of a country pending the Court's decision. If that were reality, there would be legal chaos across Europe.

There have been three cases already brought to the European Court to test whether Sunday laws are contrary to the treaty of Rome. These came from France, Belgium and Britain. In all three cases the court ruled that countries are entitled to make their own Sunday laws and none is in conflict with the Treaty of Rome.

Eleven out of twelve countries in the EC have laws which restrain Sunday Trading or Sunday employment to a greater or lesser extent. Clearly there is a conscensus in the EC that to restrain Sunday trading is in the interests of the working population and has wider social benefits for family life.

Against this background for law-breaking retailers to appeal to Europe as a defence for their actions is totally indefensible.

The reason why the Shops Act is currently unenforceable is due to another decision by the Court of Appeal which requires local authorities to give a cross-undertaking for lost profits when seeking injunctions to uphold the Act."

Regrettably, the Attorney-General has refused to provide the local authorities with the necessary support to make enforcement feasible under those conditions. That is especially embarrassing for a Conservative Government who seek shortly to offer themselves to the electorate as the party of law and order.

To demonstrate even more clearly that the Government have made a highly electorally damaging decision, one of the 10 million leaflets that have been produced by Marks and Spencer, which is one of several household names that has decided to put truth and integrity before profit, states: "it continues to be our firm belief that it is not in the interests of our customers, our staff or our shareholders, for us to compromise our integrity by breaking the law."

There is still time for Parliament to rectify matters, and I should like to suggest several ways in which the Minister could act. She should urge the Attorney-General to take up the matter again. He has the power to seek a nationwide injunction against the multiple retailers. It would require only one court appearance per national chain and, in all probability, the matter could be joined. That appears to be the most sensible mechanism for enforcing the Shops Act. The Attorney-General also has residual powers in the Criminal Law Act 1977, relating to conspiracy to undermine the public law. There is also a common law offence of incitement to breach the criminal law.

At present, local authorities that enforce the law risk huge costs if the European Court decision goes against them, while public limited companies that break the law face no risks if the court decides, as expected, for the validity of the Shops Act. That is obviously unfair.

However, section 71(4) of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 empowers a magistrates court to make a confiscation order against an offender if it is satisfied that he has benefited from the offence. A person benefits from an offence if he obtains property as a result of or in connection with its commission. His benefit is the value of the property so obtained. The powers are limited to the offences that are specified under schedule 4 and do not at present include offences under section 47 of the Shops Act. However, other offences may be added by statutory instrument. Thus, all that is required is for the Home Secretary to make the appropriate order. Is he willing to do so? If not, why not?

I should like to the Minister to request the Government to apply a series of moral sanctions. Law breakers should be denied public recognition whenever possible, such as the Queen's awards, development grants and local authority assistance. Official bodies should eschew anything other than formal involvement with law breakers. Executives involved in illegality should be denied public office, positions of influence and invitations to public functions. Those already honoured should be told that they are placing their honour in jeopardy.

Despite all the hype in the popular press and the media, the Tesco-led assault on the law has had nothing like the commercial success that has been claimed for it. Local press opinion polls and surveys throughout the country

have come out strongly against a Sunday trade free-for-all. Evidence of unacceptable pressure and duress on shop staff, supervisors and managers is steadily increasing. The only day that many families will have been able to share together since 1 December will be Christmas day. Does that help to stem the breakdown of family life and relationships?

Respected market research by A. G. Neilson Ltd. shows that only about one in 20 households went grocery shopping last Sunday. That means that 19 out of 20 households did not. Is it right to stand idly by and allow a small group of directors of retail companies to dictate a fundamental change to our way of life for their benefit and that of fewer than 5 per cent. of the population? Immediate enforcement action and reform of the law is needed, and I trust that the Minister will respond to that request.

My interests in the matter include being the senior Member of Parliament sponsored by the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers. My views on this emotive subject, especially on the protection of workers' rights, conditions of employment and rates of pay and enhanced payments for overtime, have been put on record on numerous occasions. Perhaps those conditions should apply to Members of Parliament too, especially when we are up all night until 6.20 in the morning.

On Monday 25 November Durham university business school, one of the most prestigious in the country, presented in the Jubilee Room its report and findings of a six-month study of women and work. It examined the family attitudes and position of women employees, and the possible consequences of working unsocial hours, especially Sundays. I acted as host and the event was sponsored by the Keep Sunday Special campaign and organised by the operations director, Mr. David Blackmore. We discussed in detail the reform of the Shops Act 1950.

The study concluded that women employees in retailing do not want to work on Sundays. If they are compelled to, they would prefer to work on Saturdays, and to work non-standard hours on weekdays. The report claims that women are not in a strong position to negotiate with employers, most of them being part-time employees. The report also concluded that employee protection was not likely to be effective, whether or not women were members of a trade union.

The report further concluded:

"any reform of the Shops Act 1950 needs to take into consideration

—the needs of the consumer

—the needs of the shopworker and

—the general trend towards the reduction in the hours of working which means more time for shopping will be available during the week".

The overall conclusion is that

"Sunday work should be kept to a minimum and the Shops Act should be reformed but should not permit any major extension of Sunday trading".

That report on women at work is well worth reading. I trust that the Minister has a copy. If not, I can provide her with one.

I have referred to the Keep Sunday Special campaign. Indeed, I presented, with the Father of the House, the right hon. Member for Castle Point (Sir B. Braine), an all-party early-day motion on Sunday trading. The motion has already been signed, without any undue canvassing, by 101 Members from both sides of the House. Had names been canvassed, in all probability more than 200 would have signed by now, and I have no doubt that before 22 January, when I present a ten-minute Bill on the reform of the Shops Act 1950, that number will have been exceeded.

Having referred to the REST proposals put forward by Keep Sunday Special, it might be helpful—especially as those proposals are mentioned in the early-day motion—if I put on the record what the proposals are. The principles behind the proposals are to ensure that consumers' reasonable needs are met; that friends and family spend quality time together; that the freedoms of shopworkers, owners and residents are safeguarded; and that Sunday is kept a special day, as in the rest of Europe.

The REST proposals claim that exemption from basic closing should be based on the type of shop, not on lists of goods, and that exempt shops should be able to sell all their goods, that "type of shop" approach being used in Germany, France, Belgium and the Netherlands. Special provisions should apply to small food and general stores, registration should be administered by local authorities, enforcement should be made simple and cost effective, and there should be full employment protection rights.

Under the REST proposals, shops similar in type to those already legally trading should be allowed to open. They would be sports centre outlets, historic house outlets, newsagents, garden centres, florists and video hire shops. They would come under recreation outlets. In emergencies, allowed shops would be chemists and small food shops. For social gatherings, restaurants, take-aways and off-licences would be included, as would petrol stations, motor spares shops and travel kiosks under the general travel heading.

I referred to the report on women. USDAW, with a membership of 400,000—mostly women shopworkers—would, I am sure, support the findings that I listed earlier from that report on women workers. Assurances about protection are requested whenever any attempt is made to change the Shops Act. My union is worried about any change in the law that might not include negotiated protection for its members. It points out that during 12 years of Conservative rule it has seen the systematic demolishing of employment and wages legislation, the end of wages councils and the introduction of numerous anti-trade union laws, all depriving its members of protection.

Whatever legislation amends or replaces the Shops Act 1950, shopworkers must be given protection for their rights, working conditions and contracts of employment, and if Sunday trading in a limited sense is introduced, employees must be free to refuse to work on Sunday. That right must be paramount in the consideration of, and clearly defined in, the legislation.

A recent ruling of a tribunal in Suffolk has substantiated USDAW's stance against unlimited Sunday trading, when shopworkers would be forced to turn up for work, whatever their wishes. Indeed, in the USDAW journal *Today* it is reported that

"The tribunal ruled that the seed packer Robert George's dismissal for refusing to work Sundays was unreasonable. He had told his employers he wanted to attend church and spend Sundays with his family.

Mr. George had been told that during the harvest season he was required to work 12 hours a day, seven days a week. He requested Sundays off but the company, Plant Breeding International, said it would not allow less than a seven-day working week.

Mr. George said: 'To dismiss me after 16 years was atrocious. I had offered to work 14 hours a day, six days a week, instead.

[Mr. Ray Powell]

"What I did was for the sake of family life, and to get a rest."

Expert advice on the importance of Sundays to family life was given to the tribunal by Malcolm Wickes, director of the Family Policy Study Centre. And Paul Diamond of the Keep Sunday Special campaign described the decision as unique and historic.

'This is a major victory for the principle of Sunday rest,' he said."

I hope that by my remarks in the early hours of this morning I have convinced the Minister that there is need for a revision of the Shops Act 1950 or, indeed, for a new Act. Perhaps my proposal, to be presented to the House on 22 January, if it is supported by the Government, will be a move in the direction of overcoming the dilemma that the Government, retailers, consumers and everybody else are in at the present time, when people are blatantly flouting the law. I hope that every effort will be made to alter the situation as early as possible.

6.31 am

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) on his success in the ballot. I believe that it is a success because there has been an opportunity here to get the Sunday trading case debated in the House of Commons, although it is very early in the morning and we all have difficulty in stringing our sentences together. I am glad that my hon. Friend has given us that opportunity. He has been a consistent advocate of ensuring that the law of the land is adhered to. I know that he feels great distress at what is happening as a result of Government inaction on this matter.

My hon. Friend referred to the opportunity that he had of presenting the result of the vote on the 1986 Bill. I recall that occasion, too. I remember in particular the huge smile that he had on his face when the Government were defeated in a way which can be described in parliamentary terms as nothing short of absolutely remarkable. The Government were defeated despite their huge majority of 130 or 140 votes. The reason why the Bill failed was that the Government were, I think, contemptuous of the House. They had this very unhealthy large majority and they put before the House a Bill which offered total deregulation of shopping hours and to all intents and purposes stripped out nearly all the employment protection which has been a hallmark of Sunday trading legislation, certainly for the past century.

The essence of Sunday trading legislation has always been to protect shop workers, who traditionally have always been abused. The House might recall the Auld report, which referred to our 2·2 million shop workers as people who have been generally abused in terms of their long working hours and poor wages.

Surely the House acted wisely when hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber threw out the Shops Bill, which I considered to be a disgraceful piece of legislation. It deserved nothing short of the wastepaper basket.

In the meantime, the Government have attempted to pull together a solution to the dilemma that arises as a result of the different views that are held by various groups. Some organisations stand for total deregulation while others emphasise the consumer. There are others that wish to retain the feel, as it were, of Sunday, and there is the Christian element.

The Government's attempt to produce a solution has failed. I regret the approach of the Minister of State, Home Office. The right hon. Lady has seen the various groups to which I have referred, and I accept that the list is a long one, but she did not bring them together collectively to discuss a consensus. I am convinced, having talked to the groups, that a consensus could have been reached. A solution—*[Interruption.]* The Government Whip, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick) is making comments from a sedentary position. Is he asking me what the solution is?

Mr. Irvine Patnick (Lords Commissioner of the Treasury): No, I am not.

Mr. Randall: It is unusual for a Whip to comment. Perhaps I should refrain from responding to the hon. Gentleman and continue with my speech.

I have had discussions with the various groups and I am convinced that a solution could have been arrived at if the Minister had arranged for collective discussions to take place. Now that we have moved into what is essentially a total deregulation mode, I think that the opportunity has been lost for ever.

I am sure that the House is distressed that the Minister has failed to make a proper statement. The right hon. Lady made an apology of a statement a week or so ago. I believe that she did so because a private notice question had already been accepted by Mr. Speaker. That statement told us nothing. It was made to save the Government some embarrassment.

What the Attorney-General—not so much the Minister of State—had to say in response to the private notice question was tragic. He decided to take no action. I think that most of us recall the way in which the Attorney-General seemed to expect that no comments would be thrown at him. It was disgraceful. I think—I measure my words carefully—that the Attorney-Generally behaved politically, in party-political terms, before he carried out his responsibility of ensuring that the law of the land is enforced. That is a disgraceful thing for an Attorney-General to have done. The House and the country will have noted——

Mr. Patnick: The hon. Gentleman should withdraw that.

Mr. Randall: The Government Whip is again making comments.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): It is important that I should ask the hon. Gentleman carefully to consider what he has just said about my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General, who set out the legal position as a Law Officer. As the Attorney-General—not as the Government—he took a stand and put his point to the House. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will make it clear that he has accepted that point.

Mr. Randall: I do not accept that point. I hope, Madam Deputy Speaker, that my comments were not out of order or tasteless, but I shall rephrase them. It is a matter of concern throughout the country that the Attorney-General has not used his powers to ensure that the law of the land—the Shops Act 1950—is enforced. He has the

power to introduce an injunction on a company-by-company basis. As the number of companies leading the law-breaking campaign is small, he has a viable means of enforcing the law but he refused to do so—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. Does the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Patnick) seek to intervene so that his interjections may be properly recorded?

Mr. Randall: I am prepared to give way to the hon. Gentleman, but he continues to interrupt from a sedentary position, irrespective of your ruling, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hull city council, which Ministers accept is a good, efficiently run council, wanted to enforce the law, but, in practice, it cannot be enforced. Two courses of action are open to a local authority. First, it can take a company through the magistrates courts in the normal way with the aim of securing a prosecution. These days, that cannot happen because the case is unlikely to be listed and, if it is listed, it will be adjourned, so a local authority has no means of carrying out its responsibilities. Secondly, it can apply for an injunction. My city council did that against B & Q and had to pay a cross-undertaking of £1·2 million. That was for just one company.

I am not sure how the law-breaking campaign is working or whether other companies would have joined B & Q, but the chief executive of my council felt that he was not in a position to commit the poll tax payers of Hull to what could have amounted to several million pounds, and a deal was finally struck that Hull city council would refrain from taking out an injunction and the cross-undertaking was therefore withdrawn.

That is what councils are confronted with in practice. My remarks about the Attorney-General were strong because he has not faced up to his responsibility to enforce the law. He has copped out of his responsibilities. How would the Minister advise Hull city council to go about enforcing the law, bearing in mind that it cannot go through the magistrates courts because of the cross-undertakings required? She is bound to answer that there is no possible action and that the Shops Act 1950 is an unenforceable law. That is what is causing so much distress on both sides of the House.

The Government do not support law and order. There is a record level of chronic law breaking throughout the country and they are prepared to allow companies to break the law for profit. That is nothing short of irresponsibility, and inflicts severe damage on our democracy.

The upshot is that——

Mr. Patnick: What is the hon. Gentleman's solution?

Mr. Randall: The Whip is interrupting and asking for my solution. If he will be quiet I shall tell him what the Labour party proposes to do.

The Government have allowed law-breaking to continue. They have not used their powers and there is now total deregulation in this country. Any company can do whatever it wishes—it is easy. The various lawyers acting for the pressure groups that advocate the law breaking are saying that the Shops Act 1950 is not extant and that the referral to the European Court of Justice implies that the 1950 Act is suspended. That is nothing short of stupidity. If that were to happen every time there were a referral to the European Court the laws, not just of this country but of all other members of the EC, would be in chaos. A number of test cases on Sunday trading and the possible conflict with the treaty of Rome have already come before the European Court and all have been referred back to the various countries involved.

The defences that have been used to justify the campaign of law breaking are disgraceful. At the general election we shall be justified in saying that the Conservative party cannot again claim to be the party of law and order. Its credibility has been severely damaged and its attempts to find a solution to the problem have resulted in abject failure.

The fact that there is now total deregulation will have a serious effect on small shops. The advice that I have received from those who understand the issue better than I is that it will drive many small convenience stores out of business. Those little shops are loved by the British people because they are conveniently located just around the corner. People can use them to buy their newspapers on Sunday morning and are often prepared to pay more to use those stores because they are convenient.

I know that the Minister likes small stores, because she referred to them in her speech on 14 October. I agreed with her and thought that her comments were eminently sensible. She said:

> "They provide help to those who are unable always to go shopping on weekdays and Saturdays. They are small corner shops. We all acknowledge that they provide an important service, especially for the elderly and those less able to get to the larger stores during the week."—[*Official Report*, 14 October 1991; Vol. 196, c. 129.]

We all agree that small stores are important, but they can remain viable only if they can carry out their trading on Sundays. One must recognise that Sunday business can account for about 25 per cent. of the turnover of those small shops. If one adds late-night opening, it can account for about 40 per cent. of total trade. The decision by Tesco and other groups campaigning to break the law to get their own way—which they have largely done as a result of the Government's co-operation and collaboration—has made a serious dent in the turnover and profit of the stores that are already struggling.

Mrs. Rumbold: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman acknowledges that the small corner shops which have been trading on Sundays—in many cases, outside the Shops Act 1950—provide a useful service to some people in our communities. However, I want to ask the hon. Gentleman a question. He has asserted that the Government have been unable to find a solution and has alluded to one anomaly, but will he state categorically what legislation the Opposition would introduce to resolve the difficulty?

Mr. Randall: I shall certainly answer the question, because we have a policy to which I alluded as a result of an interruption made by the Government Whip.

One of the reasons for the Government's failure has been the fact that they did not bring together all the groups involved. Until things collapsed, I had planned to hold a conference in either the last week in January or the first week in February because, as a result of discussions with the Shopping Hours Reform Council, SOS, the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, the Keep Sunday Special campaign, the consumers and other groups, I am confident——

Mrs. Rumbold *rose*——

Mr. Randall: I shall finish the point and then I shall give way. From the discussions that I have had with those groups and from some statements that I have received—I do not want to go into detail because they were confidential—I am confident that a solution could have been found which would have formed a reasoned consensus for those groups, for the interests that they represent and for the House. The Government have blown it. They should have held a joint conference. There is no question but that it would have involved tough chairmanship and I am convinced that the Minister—whom I should have expected to chair the conference—would have had to hit a few heads together. However, the parties involved were prepared to have their heads hit together to arrive at a solution.

As the basis of its policy, the Labour party has advocated such a conference. When we form the Government—whether it is in April or May, we do not yet know—we shall hold the conference to reach the consensus, the potential for which already exists. However, the Government unfortunately failed to bring the people together. The Minister held a number of meetings and I know what went on, but the opportunity was lost.

Mrs. Rumbold: I am interested to learn that the hon. Gentleman believes that a conference will be the panacea to all the ills connected with Sunday trading. Would that it were so. The absolute naivety of his suggestion knocks me out. Whatever people say to him in confidence and whatever they may say in twos or threes, if he had been here when the issue was raised on the Floor of the House only a week or so ago he would have realised—indeed he was here so he should have realised this instantly—that the leaders of the groups might come to an——

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): He was at the Dispatch Box.

Mrs. Rumbold: Indeed he was. The hon. Member should have observed, at that debate, the variety of views held by hon. Members. The leaders of the groups that he mentions might well come to some sort of compromise—I might have achieved that—but I would not be able to command a majority of Members, who have other ideas. How would the hon. Gentleman solve that?

Mr. Randall: I am confident from the discussions that I have had that we could have found the basis for an agreement. In the Minister's position, I would have hit heads together, stated what I believed would be ultimately acceptable to the House of Commons, and had the courage to put the case to the House. Instead of doing that, the Minister kicked the ball into the long grass. She has been pressurised by the big companies that contribute to the Conservative party and been forced to deliver what they want.

That is why we are in this trouble, and why the Government have been grossly irresponsible. The Minister should have started with an agreement on terms and conditions relating to employment protection and dealt with the other aspects afterwards. That would have got her 80 per cent. of the way to her goal; but, as a Minister on the right of the Conservative party under political pressures, she could not do it. The next Labour Government will do it; we will have the guts to come to the House with a solution that we think will be in the interests of the consumers, those who want to retain the special nature of Sunday, those who work in the industry and all the other interested groups.

This Minister will go down in history as the Minister who killed off small shops in Britain. The trend already has been remarkable: we used to have 140,000 village shops in the 1960s. Only 39,000 remain. People representing those shops tell me that the latest move by Tesco and the others that are breaking the law could sound the death knell for some of the vulnerable stores.

The Opposition feel strongly about this. We are told that the people of Britain want to shop on Sundays. Well, let us put the case to the House and vote on it. The opinion polls do not reflect the true opinions of the British public. They do not want their small stores destroyed and put out of business. They have a great deal of love and affection for the small stores, and the Minister will go down in history as the woman who wrecked them.

As a result of the opening on 8 December, small shops' trade for the day in the south midlands fell by 15 per cent. In Bristol, a group of shops affected by trading on 8 December saw their incomes drop from about £4,000 to less than £3,000, a drop of about 25 per cent. That is serious. It means that those shops are no longer viable and we condemn the Government's inaction on the reform of the Shops Act 1950.

6.59 am

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): The hon. Member for Ogmore (Mr. Powell) made a good point at the beginning of the debate when he said that there have been considerable difficulties in redesigning the Shops Act 1950 to meet the requirements of the 1990s.

Like the hon. Gentleman, I well recall the Second Reading debate of the Shops Bill 1986 which followed upon the discussions and deliberations of the Auld committee which, since as long ago as 1985, had been engaged in a series of debates about Sunday trading. After considerable deliberations, a great deal of attention, many discussions with the various parties concerned—no doubt the kind of conference which the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall) so naively believes will produce a solution—the committee came forward with the only viable solution, total deregulation of Sunday trading. As a result, the Government introduced the 1986 Bill.

As hon. Members may or may not recall, Conservative Members had a free vote, a conscience vote, because the Bill was regarded as being of sufficient importance to require people to make up their own minds. On that occasion, the Government's proposals were not accepted by the House. I freely admit that, following that, the Government have been unwilling to introduce other proposals because they feel that they would have to be enforceable, workable and acceptable to a majority of hon. Members.

It is a wonderful notion that we could have a conference of the main spokesmen for the different organisations——

Mr. Randall: They have agreed to that.

Mrs. Rumbold: Of course they have. Of course they will come together and discuss the matter. Of course it is believed that some will give way to others. I have had

discussions with those people, collectively and individually, but even were the leaders prepared to make some concessions, the strongly held views of people at both ends of the spectrum are such that it would be exceedingly difficult to introduce a proposal to the House which hon. Members would accept could form the basis for coherent, workable and enforceable legislation.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: What is the evidence for that?

Mrs. Rumbold: I have been sufficiently foolhardy to raise the issue from time to time with small groups of individuals who put their point of view to me when it is easy to be civilised and who propose arrangements whereby Sunday trading could be limited to certain times, to shops of a particular size, to the selling of particular goods or to certain types of shop. If groups of, say, 50 to 100 people were to be asked how many of them would like to see some deregulation on Sunday, only about half would put up their hands; the other half would want to keep Sunday special. That is what would happen if the matter were put to the House, but the Opposition seem to think that the matter could be resolved overnight.

As I explained in my statement on 27 November, I have undertaken intensive discussions with a wide range of major and conflicting interest groups on possible ways of reforming the Sunday trading laws for England and Wales, and they will continue next year. I am willing to talk to anyone who comes to me with a proposed solution that they believe the House would accept—including the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West and other Labour Members. However, it is unclear to me at this time what recommendations one could put in the form of legislation to be put before the House that would command the majority needed to make sensible legislation, to allow the country to move forward in the 1990s.

Neither the Government nor Parliament can decide with confidence on the options for reform until questions about the compatibility of the Sunday trading provisions of the Shops Act 1950 with article 30 of the treaty of Rome, which deals with free trade, are answered. I remind Labour Members that that article, which was signed in 1972, was referred by another place to the European Court of Justice, and that question of compatibility must be resolved.

Many of the proposed options, particularly those advanced by the Keep Sunday Special campaign, would continue to restrict Sunday trading by a class or list of goods. Whether or not agreement could be reached, it would not be sensible to settle policy on the merits of any proposals until their compatibility with Community law could be determined. There is nothing new in that concept.

This week, Labour Members announced that they are total Europeans, believe 100 per cent. in Europe, and that theirs is the party of Europe. I am therefore surprised to hear the hon. Member for Ogmore express concern at our reluctance to reach a decision until the European Court of Justice makes its pronouncement. I thought that the hon. Member for Ogmore and other Labour Members would be anxious to await that judgment.

When we joined the European Community some 20 years ago, Parliament decided that our own courts should refer questions of international compatibility in law to the European Court. I made it clear on 27 November that we intend to bring forward proposals for Sunday trading once the legal position is clear.

Mr. Randall: The right hon. Lady is skating on thin ice.

Mrs. Rumbold: Not at all. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely wrong about that. I am convinced that if the hon. Gentleman were ever in a position of responsibility in the House—the likelihood of which is becoming increasingly remote—he would also find himself advised that it would be foolish to put before the House proposals which in a few weeks or months might fall outside the law.

I point out to the hon. Member for Ogmore that the Sunday trading laws could be suspended only by primary legislation. It would be neither right in principle nor practicable to introduce such a Bill. An order made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department under section 43(1) of the Shops Act 1950 would only lift the requirement for shops to close ordinarily by 8 pm on Sundays. It would not affect the suspension of the Sunday trading provisions of the 1950 Act.

I was asked why we cannot suspend the law, and I have explained why that would not be possible. I have also been asked whether it would be possible to make partial exemption orders under section 48(1) of the Shops Act. That, too, would not meet the purpose: such orders require protracted and elaborate consultation on the part of local authorities with local traders. Except in emergencies, the orders allow only for the sale of additional grocery provisions such as bread, flour, fish and confectionery until 10 pm on Sundays.

The hon. Member for Ogmore said that the opinion polls demonstrated that only a limited number of people would be interested in total deregulation. Other polls have been published in the newspapers, however, and the issue has gained a good deal of attention over the past few weeks. I have experienced some of it personally. People from the newspapers foolishly park outside my home on Sundays, I suspect to see either whether I go shopping or whether I go to church. As they are parked outside in their cars, I do neither: I find it quite irritating to have my Sundays plotted. I dig the garden, or wrap my Christmas presents. That seems to me a better way of spending Sundays—among my family. Opinion polls always give different answers depending on the questions that have been asked, and I suggest that the hon. Gentleman should not place too much emphasis on the outcome.

The hon. Gentleman referred to another issue in which I take a good deal of interest—women and work. I am very concerned about women, their rights and how they are looked after and protected at work. I am keen for them to have a greater opportunity to develop both their working and their family lives. I place equal emphasis on both aspects. The majority of women—and, indeed, the majority of men—are feeling that they must start protecting family life.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that women might feel that they were under considerable pressure to work on Sundays. I understand his point, but many women have written to me asking us specifically not to prevent them from working on Sundays. Many said that they welcomed the opportunity to work, and were not able to do so during the week because there was no one look after their children. They therefore chose to look after their children

[Mrs. Rumbold]

during the week, and to allow their husbands to do so while they went to work on Sundays. That is a matter of choice, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not wish to deny people the opportunity of employment.

One of the common threads that have emerged from my dicussions has been the necessity, when considering how the law might be reformed, of tackling the question of protecting employees from being obliged by their employers to work on Sundays, against their wishes, or incurring any penalty for not doing so. It is a matter of great concern that employees should receive proper rewards for working on Sundays. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall) assumes that I have been sitting drinking cups of coffee and not talking to people about the issues. That is foolish of him, because we have discovered that there is agreement more or less across the spectrum.

The Government generally take the view that matters of pay and hours are better left to negotiation between employers and employees, or by their representatives, and that they should certainly not be dealt with in legislation or in codes of practice provided for in statute. Employees aggrieved by the actions of their employers may seek redress through the courts or at an industrial tribunal.

The Government recognise the importance of personal conscience in this context and included a measure of protection for existing shop workers against being made to work on Sundays in the Shops Bill which was debated by the House in 1986. I assure hon. Members that we readily acknowledge the strength of feeling about that aspect of Sunday trading and will take it fully into account when we draw up proposals for the reform of the law. I shall be more than happy to comply with that undertaking.

The Member for Ogmore also asked me to consider the question of enforcement. As he and the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West know, my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General, in his personal capacity as Law Officer of the Crown and not as a Minister, came to the House to inform it how he intended to proceed. He made clear on 27 November what he felt was the best action for him to take in his capacity as a Law Officer. I deprecate the rather ungracious and ill-considered words of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West in referring to my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General. That was unnecessary and completely wrong. The Attorney-General has made clear to the House the position under the law and it is important that the House should recognise that.

The hon. Member for Ogmore also raised the question of the Robert George case. Contrary to press reports, Sunday working was not the central issue in that case. The crux of the matter was the overall length and organisation of working hours during a peak session and their impact on the employee and his particular family circumstances. The industrial tribunal that heard that case accepted that it was undesirable for employees to be prevented from taking time off with their families, although there were other issues involved. In that case, Sunday was the only day on which such time off with the family was possible. That would not necessarily apply to all cases.

The hon. Gentleman must remember that many people are willing to work overtime, including Sundays, at peak periods. The hon. Gentleman will recognise that many people work on Sundays to deliver our emergency services. Many do that by choice. The men and women in the national health service go into our hospitals and work exceedingly hard, not necessarily by choice, but because it is part of the work that they undertake to do. The same is true of the police and the law enforcement officers generally, and of many people who man the emergency services, such as the fire service.

Mr. Powell: I was not referring to a press report of the Robert George case. I listened to Robert George at a conference at which he gave chapter and verse of the detail of his case. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall) was present at the conference when Robert George was on the platform. I was referring not to press reports, but to my conversation with the gentleman concerned. His statement to the conference and to me personally was that it was a Sunday issue. The fact was that he did not want to work on Sunday. He had worked for the same firm for 16 years without working on a Sunday because of his objection to working on a Sunday and his wish to stay at home and then to go to church.

Mrs. Rumbold: As I said, the industrial tribunal accepted that employees should be able to take time off with their families. He wanted to take Sunday off and spend it with his family. However, the principle of Sunday trading was not at the heart of the judgment.

I am sure that this will not be the last occasion on which we shall debate this issue. There are many difficulties involved, not least with regard to the application of the law, given that we must wait for the judgment of the European Court of Justice. No doubt we will hear the views of the hon. Member for Ogmore once that judgment is made. I understand that he is likely to bring forward proposals in a ten-minute Bill in the not-too-distant future and I will listen to that debate with great interest. I am here to listen to all my colleagues and to all hon. Members and anyone else who wishes to make representations to me. I am interested in possible solutions. If the solutions of the hon. Member for Ogmore command great support, we will consider them with great interest.

I am convinced that it would be foolish for the Government to formulate policy until we are clear, from the European Court, what that policy should avoid so as not to become entangled in the law. I can assure the hon. Member for Ogmore that once the legislative procedure is clarified, the Government will be more than anxious to end the anomalies and the present situation in which people are unclear and therefore feel free to take the law into their own hands. We are not anxious to see the situation evolve. We want to take control of the situation, but it is no use hon. Members like the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West telling me that we should have a conference and then table a Bill and that would be the end of the matter. Were it that easy, we would have done that three or four years ago. It is not that easy. People must understand that the issue is difficult and needs a great deal of give and take. They must also understand that the issue is very important for the people of this country.

At the end of the day, I hope that there will be a general recognition that Sunday is different and that we all, from time to time, need a breathing space during the working week. The legislation that we intend to introduce will have

to have the support of the House and the different interests will have to be brought together before such legislation can be introduced.

Iraq

7.22 am

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): I am extremely grateful to have the opportunity to raise this issue and I am glad that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs is present, because I know that he will listen with his usual thoughtfulness, great knowledge and understanding of the problems that I will enunciate. I am glad that he is to reply, because I am confident about his knowledge of this large subject.

Although this place has heard tales of much horror and beastliness over the many generations that hon. Members have spoken about the plight of victims throughout the history of this place, I suggest that the plight of the people whose human rights we will discuss this morning transcends almost every other horror that we have heard here.

Genocide is a very heavy word. It is a word which is mostly only used when we discuss Hitler's treatment of the Jews or when we consider Cambodia. Some appalling things have happened to those poor people, but the plight of the Shias in the south of Iraq matches, and possibly even surpasses, the horrors that those poor people suffered. It is difficult to think of that. I visited Auschwitz last year. It is impossible to get it out of one's mind once one has been there. Indeed, having been brought up after the war and having heard of the plight of those poor people, one has never forgotten it in any case.

Of course, that left me with a large question—how could people ignore what happened to the Jews? How could people turn a blind eye or a deaf ear to the horrors that they suffered? Having seen the Shias in the refugee camps in south Iran and in south-east Iraq, I can understand at last how it is possible to ignore such appalling things. The reason is that when the reality is so truly appalling, it transcends everyone's imagination. One cannot absorb it and one just turns off.

Perhaps the way not to turn off is to think of individuals. Mr. Al Sultan is a primary school teacher of about 45, a civilian, not a man who joined the army—he is an educated man, a graduate. He taught in a primary school near Basra. Mr. Al Sultan is now a shrivelled, blackened person. His poor hands are black claws with burns from napalm bombing. He has no eyelids. He cannot sleep. His eyelids have been burnt off. He puts a scarf around his head to try to sleep. He has 90 per cent. burns all over his poor body. He is damaged beyond repair. He will never be able to write because he will not be able to use his hands. His pain is unending.

Perhaps the worst victim—if there can be a worst victim—is little Amar, the youngest and worst napalm victim to have survived. He is a boy of 10. Amar cannot sleep, either, but he cannot sleep because he cannot forget. His whole family, save a sister, were destroyed in March. His sister is still living, because she is in a hospital next door. The doctors fear that if they tell him that she is alive and she dies, the psychological trauma will be so enormous that he will give up completely.

Little Amar does not have a face any more. His face looks like a Halloween mask—fixed and rigid; a shiny mask all over his face. His neck cannot move; it is fused rigid. If he takes his clothes off, which he does not do very easily because it hurts so much, one sees open wounds

[Miss Emma Nicholson]

from the top of his chest down to his toes. Amar cannot smile, he cannot cry, he cannot laugh—he cannot do anything because he has no muscles in his face, no nerves, no nothing. He has no ability to move anything at all. I am raising money for him at the moment. Kind surgeons have offered to operate on him, if only we can get him over here. But nothing will ever make up for Amar for the total loss of mother, father, entire family, house and everything.

One could say that Amar and Mr. Al Sultan are lucky. Despite their pain and suffering, they have got out—they have got away. They have been taken across the border—illegally. They have been smuggled out—out of Basra, out of their village, into the safe haven of Iran. Let us think for a moment about some of those who have been left behind.

There is an underground prison outside Basra. There, 700 men are said to have been imprisoned underground, without daylight, for 11 years. It is said that the stench is so appalling that no one can go near them now. They have long hair and long nails and, not unnaturally, a white pallor, and very little to eat. God knows how they are still alive.

Another one who got out is a doctor who translated for me. He went back into Iraq, in the marshes, at great personal danger to himself and translated for me when we met some Shias. He is a well-educated and articulate man. It is appalling to hear a doctor describe, with the detailed anatomical knowledge that only a doctor can have, exactly what happened to his poor body when he was tortured ceaselessly, unendingly, with just short gaps to let him regain consciousness, for weeks on end. That went on intermittently, sometimes for weeks at a time, for nine years. That poor man also finds it difficult to sleep.

Our short time for debate this morning should be given to those victims. A woman in a refugee camp outside the city of Ahwaz in the south of Iran said, "Take my voice to the world. Let the world hear my voice." That is what I want to do this morning. Those people have no voice themselves. That is the point about victims throughout the world—someone has to speak for them. But it is difficult to get there and to find people being tortured; it is such a horrible activity that it is done in secret. It is difficult to find people who have been tortured—so many of them are still in prison or have died.

The fate of those who are still living and of the hostages who are now being held by the regime in Iraq is not being decided by a beneficent Government. We have our wrangles in this place, but essentially we have a beneficent democracy. Most of us believe that we are here to do the greatest good for the greatest number of people. That is what drives us on. We differ on detail and sometimes on deep philosophical attitudes and questions, but none the less, our differences pale into nothing if we compare our beneficent democracy—which we have inherited, not created ourselves—with the wicked rule in Iraq and some other countries.

The fate of those people is being decided far away from where they are. It is being decided in Washington—perhaps by people in the Pentagon; perhaps by George Bush. If only we could persuade George Bush to look back at Iraq to see what has been left behind. Their fate is being decided in the United Nations, by the committees which endlessly discuss and debate and churn out pieces of paper that nobody seems to read. Even the United Nations Security Council, which has given thought and time to the plight of those troubled people, the Kurds, does not appear to have given any thought or time to the plight of the people in the south of Iraq, the Shia.

Their fate is being decided in the Hague, where a great man, a former Foreign Minister of the Netherlands Government, Mr. Van der Stoel, published his interim report as special rapporteur on Iraq and human rights on 17 November. His final report comes out in February.

Their fate is being decided in Geneva where, to my great sadness, Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan resigned last week from his post as special United Nations high commissioner for refugees in Iraq because he had spent the previous 10 days in Baghdad, trying to persuade Saddam Hussein to ease the plight of his people.

Their fate is also being decided here in London, where our Foreign and Commonwealth Office and our Minister for Overseas Development, with whom I have had many talks on this large subject are doing all that they can to help.

I pay a special tribute to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development. During the summer and early autumn she helped me with Government aid and guided me in the direction of private aid. She helped me with advice, support and encouragement to bring humanitarian aid to the Shias who have escaped and are in the camps in south Iran. That has been monumental help, but it has not been just practical help.

With about £0·5 million that I have collected, a large sum of it from the Minister and other sums from other places, I went and bought, and watched the purchase, delivery, consumption and use of the simple bare necessities of people in the camps. Those necessities are sacks of flour and sacks of rice, although I am glad to say that the Iranian Government are now providing flour for every refugee within their borders, and certainly for the Shias. That is no mean undertaking, because Iran has 3·5 million refugees within its borders, the largest number of any member nation of the United Nations. The Red Crescent has the most work to do of any member of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The aid, including children's shoes and cooking oil—the simple, basic things—has been of large benefit to many thousands of refugees in Iran. Their plight is indeed a miserable one, but, as they say, they do not want charity. They want to be back at home. They want to be in a free and democratic Iraq where they can vote for their leaders and have a democratically accountable Parliament.

I say a warm thanks on behalf of those refugees to the Minister for Overseas Development, whose help has been inestimable, whose competence is great and known to us all and whose officials work with such commitment, concern and effectiveness—I can vouch for that. I know that my right hon. Friend will continue to do everything that she can, and that is a great deal.

When one is in the refugee camps, Mr. Speaker, people crowd around. You and I have been to many refugee camps in many parts of the world. I am aware that you know some of the most difficult parts of the world, such as Pakistan, where you have seen things of great importance and many suffering people. You might have seen refugees out of Afghanistan there. It is impossible to compare one person's suffering with that of another. Why should one

victim be any more important or any more identified here than another victim? Surely, human suffering is all of a piece.

I suggest that there is something particularly inhuman and unbearable about the deliberate wiping out of a section of the population. I always thought that apartheid was one of the worst possible sins because it identifies someone and goes for them on the basis of the colour of their skin. The extermination being carried out in Iraq is of that order and type. If one is a Shia, one will be killed.

It is not an easy death. The kind of deaths that Saddam Hussein and his people pursue include a method of execution which involves simply lining people up in rows and running tanks over them. It includes pushing people out of helicopters in full flight. It includes killing babies in front of mothers. I have seen the evidence. It includes horrific torture of defenceless human bodies. You can see the arms, the legs, the faces, the bodies. You can see the marks and the twisted limbs bent beyond repair for ever. You hear what the people tell you.

Of course, when we left Kuwait, we knew that we had done a good job of work. We had brought Kuwait back to have its own rulers. We believed it to be right and proper to honour the sovereign borders of Iraq, and we withdrew. Perhaps we did not foresee—although perhaps people in the Foreign Office did—that Saddam Hussein would turn against his own people and that the brave Kurds and Shias would rise up against him, but would fail.

Since then, we have witnessed the genocidal attack on the people in the north and south who opposed him. Those people are on our side. They want democracy and freedom of speech. Not only is there no freedom of speech in Iraq, there is no freedom of listening. If one is caught with a radio, it is assumed that one has been listening to the BBC World Service and one is killed, as an old lady of 85 was the other day, when I was there.

The position is even worse if one is caught even on suspicion of not wanting to hurt other people. One can be hounded to death for that. Such a story was told by a man in a refugee camp near the border who has just got out. His brother was a general in Hussein's army until last month. He could take no more of the killing and somehow he must have indicated that, by some sign or language or something he said or did not say. Or perhaps it was simply that he did not rush fast enough to kill people. Saddam ordered his brother officers to get petrol, to pour it down the man's throat and to puncture a hole in his stomach and set light to him. His brother watched him burn. He did not tell anyone that he was his brother. He decided to come out and tell the tale.

Then there is the women who watched her husband being executed. She was one of 700 women who were lined up to watch their husbands being run over by tanks. The stories are endless and the appalling fact is that they are true. It is not easy to get there, to speak to people and to gain their confidence so that they will talk.

I respect and admire the part that the Iranian Government and people have played in keeping their borders open and in offering hospitality to their many hundreds of thousands of unwanted guests. I have a large respect for the Iranians, who have been my hosts on visits, and I hope that they will be my hosts on future visits. We seem content to let Iran get on with it. Is that because it is far away or that they had a triumphant war? Is it because we feel that those people, after all, are not us and do not pass the language, cricket or some other test? Does our insularity make us say that we are part of Europe, but we go no further than that? Are we a people of such narrow imagination that we discard our past and understanding of those places?

Shall we respond to the people in the camps and marshes who say, "We trust the British. They have had several hundred years of knowledge of us and we know that they will not let us down. Thank God for the British"? I do not think we have that short a memory. But if we let those people suffer, we shall be as ashamed of ourselves as many people must have felt about deliberately not listening to the plight of the Jews in Europe in the second world war.

If we ignore those people, let us do so in the knowledge of the suffering on which we are deliberately turning our backs. I know that we in the United Kingdom do not take that point of view. We have a Foreign Office which is full of knowledge and understanding, as is our chargé-d'affaires in Tehran. As I said, our Minister dealing with aid matters extends herself beyond the capacity of everything that could be asked of her, as does my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary who is to reply to the debate.

Can we not somehow bring alive again the other major players in this most devilish of games, the sacrifice of human rights in Iraq? Can we not get them to do something and not respond and succumb to the continuing blandishments of Saddam Hussein?

7.45 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): Clearly there are other hon. Members who wish to get in, but I am afraid that the debate started later than was anticipated.

Saddam Hussein's blatant disregard of internationally accepted norms of behaviour is certainly beyond dispute. The human rights record of the Iraqi Government is appalling and has been graphically added to in the catalogue of further horrors that have been perpetrated, as described by my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson).

The abuses inflicted by the Iraqi dictatorship include also the use of chemical weapons against its own unarmed people in 1988, appalling atrocities committed during the occupation of Kuwait, the mistreatment of western hostages and prisoners and, most recently, as alluded to by my hon. Friend, the brutal suppression of uprisings and the denial of human rights and torture of the civilian population in Iraq. All this has been well documented and in the spine-chilling descriptions that my hon. Friend has produced in these early hours we have further information to alarm and depress us.

In addition to all these specific cruelties, the Iraqi regime continues to show complete disregard of the welfare of its own citizens. I will touch in rather more general terms than did my hon. Friend on the situation in Iraq in that regard.

The United Nations and the other international agencies have done what they can to protect the Iraqi people from the worst of these excesses and to provide basic shelter, food and medicine. We and our coalition partners have also made a considerable contribution. Thanks to the initiative of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, safe havens were established in northern Iraq and an enormous international relief effort was mounted

[Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd]

to sustain the civil population there. The coalition deterrent force which we maintain in southern Turkey continues to provide valuable reassurance to all Iraqis and to deter further repression by the regime. Iraq must now take advantage of the mechanism provided by the United Naitons to sell oil to finance humanitarian supplies. The Iraqi authorities now have in their own hands the opportunity to alleviate the suffering of their own people.

Perhaps it would be helpful to the House if I gave a brief description of the situation in the north and in the south of the country. If the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Mrs. Clwyd) wishes to intervene I will accept an intervention from her. I am sorry that I could not enable her to speak.

We are concerned, of course, by reports of a blockade by the Iraqi authorities on the Kurdish north and by limited clashes in the area. We have made our concerns known to the Iraqis on many occasions and as recently as 9 December. The Iraqi authorities and the Kurds now seem to have agreed a series of measures which will allow the situation in the north to return to normal. We expect those measures to be implemented.

The United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights has reported that the winterisation programme in the north is now complete. We are also informed that he can cope with the recently reported increase in the number of displaces Kurds. We remain in close touch with him and have confirmed our willingness to provide further help if needed.

We have made it clear many times to the Iraqi authorities that we expect them to co-operate with the United Nations and the international relief agencies. We have also warned that further oppression and violations of Security Council resolution 688 will have serious consequences.

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): The Minister claims that there is an agreement between the Kurds and the Iraqi authorities. As the hon. Gentleman knows, I was in the area a short time ago, and my understanding of events is entirely different. There is an economic blockade; negotiations have taken place to try to lift it, but the blockade continues. There are people on hunger strike, as the hon. Gentleman knows, in Sulaymaniyah. They are protesting against the economic blockade, which is causing fuel and food shortages. The administrators of major cities are no longer being paid by the Iraqi authorities.

The Minister said that the winterisation programme is complete. I understand that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees issued a press release three weeks ago that stated that tents were a rare sight in northern Iraq and the winterisation programme had gone on apace. The commissioner has revised that statement and now claims that up to 400,000 refugees will need additional cover and that the winterisation programme will be extended. He agrees with many observers that the plight of the Kurds, as the winter approaches, is extreme. The means are not available at present to provide protection against a severe winter, food shortages and medical supply shortages. I ask the Minister to reconsider these matters.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for what she has said. The winterisation programme is a moving target to some extent. We have been given the assurances that I reported to the House. The existing programme will meet the needs of about half a million people during the winter months. It will lead to the repairing and upgrading of hospitals and will provide shelter and water supplies. Thousands of kerosene stoves, blankets and tents are being distributed. The hon. Lady will know that the United Kingdom's contribution to the international relief effort since April amounts to about £44 million.

Perhaps it will be of help to the House if I commented on the situation in the south. I shall then have to move on fairly rapidly to conclude my remarks.

The United Nations has a humanitarian centre at Basra. It has been pressing the Iraqis to permit the establishment of a further humanitarian centre at Nasariya, which is close to the marshes. The Iraqis have refused so far. We strongly support an expansion of the United Nations presence in the south. We have raised our concern about the south directly with the Iraqis, with the United Nations and with Mr. Van der Stoel, to whom my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West referred, who is the United Nations rapporteur on human rights in Iraq. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office has met representatives of the Shia community to hear from them about the situation at first hand.

Since September, we have given £1 million to UNICEF for medicines, water and sanitation in the south, £78,000 to the Save the Children Fund for water and sanitation in the south, and almost £700,000 to organisations that are working to help refugees from southern Iraq and south-west Iran.

I made some brief comments about the winterisation programme. I shall not proceed further in that direction.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): The Minister says that violations of resolution 688 will have serious consequences. That statement has been made repeatedly from the Government Dispatch Box over the past six months. Will the Minister tell us what the serious consequences will be?

The Minister talked about the Iraqi Government resisting the arrangements to which he referred in the south. Is it not true that under resolution 688 the Iraqi Government are required to comply with United Nations requirements on aid and humanitarian assistance. Why do we not enforce that resolution?

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that I shall not spell out or make policies at the Dispatch Box in the early hours of the morning on precisely what measures may be being considered and might be implemented. He has heard the position and I cannot add to it.

There is a great deal of concern in the country—I receive a lot of correspondence—about the effect of the sanctions regime on the civilian population. Our quarrel is with the regime, not with the long-suffering Iraqi people, but it must be recognised that Saddam Hussein's misguided policies have brought Iraq to its present position. He continues to inflict suffering on his people by his stubborn refusal to implement Security Council resolutions in full. We want all the Iraqi people to be able to receive food, medicine and humanitarian supplies, which is why we have contributed more than £44 million to the international relief effort since April this year.

A mechanism exists to enable Iraq to import all the humanitarian supplies that it needs. It was set out in Security Council resolutions 706 and 712, which allow Iraq to export $1·6 billion worth—although the total is subject to review—of oil over six months, to finance the purchase of essential humanitarian supplies. Those resolutions are mandatory. We expect Iraq to co-operate in implementing them.

Iraq is now discussing the arrangements with the United Nations, but the Iraqi regime's failure to implement the scheme promptly is preventing the Iraqi people from receiving humanitarian assistance. There can be no doubt that Saddam Hussein bears full responsibility for that—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) keeps interrupting from a sedentary position. If he will forgive me, I shall make my own speech in my own way.

In spite of all the efforts of the international community, many Iraqis are still living in desperate fear of the regime. The achievement of Prince Sadruddin, the UN Secretary General's executive delegate, in securing an extension of the agreement covering UN operations in Iraq, including the UN guards, will have given some reassurance to the civilian population, but continued international pressure is necessary to prevent further excesses occurring and to ensure that all the people of Iraq can live without fear of intimidation, repression or attack. We shall maintain sanctions until Iraq has implemented UN Security Council resolutions in full. Only when the Iraqi people have the freedom to choose their leadership openly and democratically will they be able to enjoy the human rights to which they are justly entitled.

7.58 am

Mrs. Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): That is a most unsatisfactory reply to a serious and deteriorating problem in Iraq. I congratulate the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) on her moving speech. She has taken a particular interest in the plight of the Shias, and I have taken a particular interest in the plight of the Kurds and in human rights in Iraq over a very long time.

I am deeply worried about the bad situation. Western television crews are now going to Iraq. They will again see Kurds dying on the mountainsides this winter, the Shias continuing to die in the marshes of southern Iraq, and people continuing to be rounded up by Saddam Hussein in Baghdad and elsewhere in Iraq. People were tortured in Iraq prisons for many years before the Government recognised the violation of human rights that was going on in Iraq, about which some of us have been concerned for many years.

Miss Emma Nicholson: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Clwyd: No, I am not giving way.

The Government must deal with the plight of the Iraqis. They have promised so much to the Kurds. The safe haven was looked on as something which would continue to ensure that the Kurds would be safe. They have been let down, and feel that they have been let down. An old Kurdish man who had fled for the third time told me just the other week, "John Major promised us a hammer—where is the hammer?" That is what people are asking over and over again.

People are on hunger strike in Sulaymaniyah: one person has died and others undoubtedly will die soon. They are trying to draw the attention of the world, the allies, the Prime Minister of this country and the President of the United States to the promises that they and others made. All the United Nations resolutions are in place; they are supposed to protect——

It being Eight o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

ENVIRONMENT

Ordered,

That Mr. Barry Field be added to the Environment Committee.—*[Mr. Don Dixon, on behalf of the Committee of Selection].*

EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND ARTS

Ordered,

That Mrs. Sylvia Heal be discharged from the Education, Science and Arts Committee and Mildred Gordon and Mr. Edward O'Hara be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Don Dixon, on behalf of the Committee of Selection].*

PC Tony Salt

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sackville.]*

8 am

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): The matter that I wish to raise has been described by the chairman of the Bar Council, Tony Scrivener QC, as a landmark case and it will be of particular interest to members of the royal commission who are considering under what circumstances confession evidence should be admitted.

The case demonstrates that, despite the safeguards provided by the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, West Midlands police officers are still able to persuade people to confess to crimes that they did not commit and even to tape-record those false confessions. It demonstrates that all the bland assurances—we may hear more of them later—that everything has been fine since PACE are nonsense.

The case also shows that, even when West Midlands police officers have been caught fabricating confessions and attempting to pervert the course of justice, they can rely on their superiors, up to the chief constable himself, to make sure that the truth is covered up. They can rely on the Crown prosecution service to connive in the disappearance of inconvenient evidence. They can rely on the silence of the police authority to whom the chief constable is supposed to account. Finally, they can rely on the Home Office to block any inquiries from inquisitive Members of Parliament.

They can rely, too, on the silence of the local media. It is a feature of almost all the great scandals in the west midlands that new information rarely, if ever, emerges as a result of the efforts of the Birmingham-based media. In this case, once again the truth has emerged only due to the diligence of local solicitors and the Granada television programme, "World in Action." Once again, the local media come limping along behind and, once again, they can be relied upon to drop the subject within a few days as soon as the outsiders have departed.

We shall be told in a moment to relax, as the matter is being examined by the West Yorkshire police. Why should we have the slightest confidence in the ability of the West Yorkshire police to get at the truth? They have just completed, at enormous cost to the taxpayer, a lengthy inquiry into the activities of the West Midlands serious crime squad. I have read their report. In many respects it is a thorough document and makes sensible recommendations, but it has one central flaw. Nowhere can the West Yorkshire officers bring themselves to state what everyone knows to be the truth: that West Midlands detectives have, over a long period, been fabricating confessions. Instead, the report talks coyly about entries in pocket books that are "less than satisfactory" and
"working practices that give cause for concern".
There have been the usual handful of retirements on grounds of ill health, but most of the officers involved are now back on duty. No one, as far as I am aware, has been properly held to account for anything and I will be amazed if anyone ever is. In the circumstances, I hope that the Minister will forgive me if I do not take too seriously any claim that the West Yorkshire police can be relied upon to get to the truth.

I shall now set out the facts surrounding the death of PC Tony Salt. On the evening of Saturday 16 April 1989, PC Salt and his colleague PC Mark Berry were assigned to keep watch on an illegal night club in the Small Heath district of Birmingham. They were to keep watch from a private flat in Whitehall road. They were in plain clothes and their job was to remain in hiding, logging people and cars as they arrived at the club.

Unfortunately, however, by 9 pm Messrs Salt and Berry had abandoned their observation post and commenced a drinking spree at a local pub, the Grapes in Green lane. At 11 pm, somewhat the worse for wear, they returned to duty, but at about 1 am they returned to the pub for a bout of after-hours drinking. PC Berry later admitted that by the time they left the pub for the second time they had each consumed seven or eight pints of beer, one short and half a can of super-strength lager. Witnesses say that they had difficulty in standing and one gives an account of a fierce argument between them when Berry suggested that they return to their post and Salt wanted to remain for another drink. Apparently, someone had to come between them to prevent a fight.

They left the pub again at about 2 am and Berry returned to the observation post. Salt, however, wandered down the alleyway that they were supposed to be observing, in the direction of the illegal party. About 20 minutes later, Berry saw Salt collapse at the mouth of the alley. He was dead on arrival at hospital.

The next day, Assistant Chief Constable Tom Meffen, held a press conference at which he gave a version of PC Salt's death which was loyally reported by the local media for many months. I am acquainted with Mr. Meffen, as he was the officer who in September 1986 was summoned to the Home Office—dragged by the scruff of the neck, as he put it—to interview me about my claim that the people convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings were innocent. In this case, as in that of the pub bombings, Mr. Meffen has a few questions to answer.

At the press conference, Mr. Meffen asserted that PC Salt had broken cover to check a suspect car and was set upon by a person or persons with martial arts skills, dragged into the alley and beaten to death. That was nonsense. In fact, there never was a suspect car and Salt never broke cover—he was on his way back from trying to get into the party. I understand that the West Midlands police now say that Mr. Meffen has no clear idea of where he got the information but that he thinks it was from a private conversation with PC Berry. That is odd, because, although Mr. Berry has given many different accounts of what happened that night, none corresponds with Mr. Meffen's.

Four statements given by PC Berry have so far been disclosed, the last apparently obtained after he had been interviewed under hypnosis. In addition, there is at least one other known interview, the notes of which have not been disclosed; nor has the record of the interview under hypnosis which was videoed and which would be of great interest as the statement based on that interview is still some distance from the whole truth.

According to a statement by a colleague who was called to the scene, PC Berry at first said that he thought that PC Salt had had a fit. He made no mention of an attack. In his first formal statement, Berry said that he saw a West Indian leave the alleyway three or four minutes before Salt staggered out. There was no one else in sight and he went to Salt's aid immediately.

Mr. Berry's statement says that Salt was followed out of the alley by a West Indian who

"appeared to be involved in PC Salt's collapse"
and stole from his body. Berry maintains in this version that he went immediately to Salt's aid.

Mr. Berry's third statement—it is not every day that there are four statements from the same police officer, all differing so substantially—contains two West Indians, one with dreadlocks, who appeared to push Salt from the alleyway. This time Berry says that he was too scared to get involved straight away.

By the fourth and final statement, Mr. Berry claims for the first time to have seen Salt stumbling into the alley in the direction of the illegal nightclub two or three minutes before stumbling out again and collapsing. He now remembers a detailed description of the West Indian said to have robbed Mr. Salt. It therefore became urgent—especially in the light of Mr. Meffen's statement—to find someone to take responsibility for Mr. Salt's death. In due course, three West Indians were arrested and what happened to them will be of interest to anyone who believes that tape or video recording is the answer to the problem of statements in police custody.

The three were at first told that they were being asked to assist with inquiries by identifying from photographs people who had attended the party. That was false. It is clear from questions put earlier to PC Berry that they were already suspects. The arrested men were Peter Gibbs, Mark Samuels and Tony Francis. None fitted the description given by PC Berry in his second statement of an assailant with dreadlocks. Indeed, no more was ever heard about the man with dreadlocks.

Gibbs was taken to Queen's road police station where several of the Birmingham Six were persuaded to sign confessions that later proved false. No custody record exists of Gibbs' visit. There he was interviewed by DC 9669 Gerald Harris and DC 7782 Gerald Doyle. This is Gibbs' version of what happened:

"They were saying you can either do it peacefully or we can do it rough. I've been beaten up before in police stations and its not very nice. I wasn't prepared to go through all that again."

Eventually, he agreed to admit to stealing PC Salt's wallet and a martial arts weapon called a cubiton that Salt was thought to be carrying.

Mr. Gibbs then describes how, once he had agreed to admit the thefts, he was carefully rehearsed in what he was to say once the recorder was switched on:

"They started going over the story with me, over and over again, so I could get it correct, so that it could fit in with everything else. They planned everything out before I went into the interview room."

He was then taken to Belgrave road where his statement was taped. The custody record commences only with his arrival at Belgrave road.

Mark Samuels and Tony Francis were taken to Sparkhill police station. Again, there is no custody record of the dress rehearsal. Samuels was interviewed by DS 7263 Alan Shakespeare and DS 7253 Richard Davies. This is Mr. Samuels' account of the interview:

"I was there in Sparkhill for nine and half hours, with nothing on half the time and they try telling me 'you're going to get done for murder if you don't own up to this theft'. I just took the easy way out."

Samuels was then taken to Belgrave road where the custody record commences, and in due course he confessed on tape to stealing PC Salt's wallet and cubiton.

Tony Francis was the doorman at the party which Salt and Berry were supposed to be observing. He was also taken to Sparkhill police station and questioned for most of the day, although there is no record of his presence there. He was interviewed by DS 2487 Richard Leary and DC 2344 Michael Howkins, both members of the now disbanded serious crimes squad. He describes what happened:

"I was intimidated, slapped around. Threats were made against my family."

Mr. Francis says that he agreed to make a statement because he was told that, if he did not, drugs would be found in his house which would have led to a gaol sentence for his girlfriend and the loss of his children. On tape he agreed that Tony Salt had tried to gain entrance to the party and that he had prevented him. All three were then charged with murder. Gibbs and Samuels, who had only been persuaded to confess to stealing, say that the police officers laughed as they revealed that they were being charged with murder and not theft.

Meanwhile, there was another witness to be squared. Seventeen-year-old Simone Armstrong had originally told police that Samuels and Gibbs had left the party well before PC Salt's death. She was persuaded to make a second statement saying that she had seen Francis hit Salt and had also seen Gibbs and Samuels rob him. She describes how this was achieved:

"There were more than five men and one woman in the room with me. They were all shouting and I was crying. They were saying, 'You did see it' and putting things into my head . . . I just couldn't take no more so I said to them, 'Just write down what you want to write down, okay?'"

The officer to whom Simone Armstrong's second statement was dictated was DS Michael Swinnerton. Students of the West Midlands serious crimes squad will recall that he was also the officer who achieved the remarkable feat of noting down, by torchlight, a lengthy confession from Hassan Khan in a police car travelling at high speed. His evidence was disbelieved by the Court of Appeal and Mr. Khan's conviction was quashed.

No sooner had the men been charged than things began to go wrong. A taxi driver was found who said that he had taken Gibbs and Samuels from the party some time before PC Salt died. Two pathologists said that, even if Francis had hit Salt at the entrance to the party, the blow could not have killed him. Nor did they believe that his injury—a blow to the neck which ruptured a blood vessel and caused a brain haemorrhage—had been inflicted at the entrance to the party, since he could not have staggered 120 ft back to the street. The pathologists believed that the most likely explanation for his death was that, in his drunken state, Mr. Salt had fallen and hit his head on the bucket of a JCB digger parked nearby. Most damaging of all, PC Salt's widow made a statement saying that she had found the missing cubiton—the one the two defendants had confessed for stealing—on the floor of the family car. That was very embarrassing. The defendants had also confessed to stealing £30 from PC Salt's wallet, but in her statement Mrs. Salt says that her husband had only £5 on him that evening.

The fate of Mrs. Salt's statement is of particular interest. It was not among the documents later disclosed to the defence by the Crown prosecution service. Its absence was noticed only because there were gaps in the numbered pages of the evidence that was disclosed.

There is a long history of inconvenient evidence being suppressed by the police and by the Crown. This is a classic case. I have written to the Attorney-General asking for an

[Mr. Chris Mullin]

explanation. I understand that the official responsible for the case at the west midlands office of the CPS was a Mr. R. J. Millard.

Despite the evident collapse of the case, it took a year for the charges to be dropped. Many prominent people played a part in covering up the truth. The coroner closed the inquest without hearing the full evidence.

Remarkably, PC Berry was allowed to retire on health grounds, his pension intact. There have been a lot of retirements on health grounds in the West Midlands police lately. I assume that the decision not to press any criminal or disciplinary charges against Mr. Berry was taken at a high level.

A memorial service was held in September 1989, six months after PC Salt's death. By that time many people in high places knew or had a good idea of the truth, but no one let on. The chief constable, Mr. Geoffrey Dear, attended the memorial service and spoke warmly of the deceased.

This case is yet another scandal for which Mr. Dear, as the then chief constable, must take ultimate responsibility. Incredible though it may seem, he has since been promoted to Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary and is now responsible for enforcing standards throughout the region.

So far as I am aware—perhaps the Minister will tell us otherwise—none of the police officers responsible for extracting the fraudulent confessions or losing Mrs. Salt's statement has suffered the merest inconvenience. Most of the officers involved continue to maintain the rule of law in the west midlands in the manner to which we have become accustomed.

The Home Office, too, I am afraid to say, has behaved true to form. I asked the Minister last month whether he would call for a report on the case from the chief constable of the west midlands. He answered no. I cannot say that I am surprised. We had a similar experience with the Birmingham pub bombing case some years ago.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Ms. Short) wrote to the new chief constable, Mr. Hadfield, and received a reply confirming that an inquiry was under way, prompted, presumably, by the television programme rather than a burning desire to get at the truth. He also said that Mr. Berry had been diagnosed as suffering from high anxiety—I bet he was—and had been allowed to retire.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) wrote to the chairman of the West Midlands policy authority and received an identical reply, about a page long in both cases. It would appear that the chairman of the police authority allows the chief constable to draft his letters for him. So much for accountability. One of the most remarkable features in the long series of scandals that have engulfed what is surely the most corrupt police force in the country has been the lack of any initiative from the police authority.

Finally, the Police Federation has added PC Salt to its roll of honour of officers killed on active duty. He remains there to this day.

As I say, this is only the latest in a long series of scandals. It demonstrates that no lessons have been learnt from what has gone before. How can we hope to restore public confidence in our police and judicial system if those responsible for maintaining its integrity appear not to care?

8.18 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): As usual, I have listened to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) with interest. The hon. Gentleman courteously informed me yesterday that he wished to take most of the time in this debate to set out his characteristically full case on the sad death of PC Salt and the related circumstances and aftermath. As he and the House will know, it would be wrong for me to comment on those matters in any detail. However, I shall say something briefly on the more general points that he raises about the inquiries taking place.

The hon. Gentleman opened his speech with a swingeing and quite unjustified criticism of the bona fides of several police forces, the Crown prosecution service and the Home Office. I will not repeat here the numerous explanations that have been given to the House emphasising the thoroughness and independence of the investigation that has just been completed into the activities of the West Midlands serious crime squad, because, clearly, the hon. Gentleman is not prepared to acknowledge its truth.

I cannot comment on the behaviour of members of the former West Midlands serious crime squad while all those cases—I emphasise the word "all"—are under consideration by the Director of Public Prosecutions. Even so, I place on record that care has been exercised at all stages to ensure that nothing that might have gone amiss would be covered up or glossed over.

The chief constable of the West Midlands force promptly transferred a large number of his officers to non-operational duties, despite his awareness that that would cause many of them great distress and hardship. At the same time, he called in a distinguished officer from another force to lead a thorough investigation and arranged for that investigation to be supervised by the Police Complaints Authority.

That having been done, all the reports have now been passed for a second stage of independent assessment to the Crown prosecution service, whose business it is to bring any criminal charges that may be in the public interest and for which there is evidence. There is absolutely no cover-up here.

Mr. Mullin: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Lloyd: No.

The hon. Gentleman used most of his speech to recount a number of alleged instances of unacceptably low standards of police behaviour. The hon. Gentleman indicated that PC Salt was drunk at the time that he died, and said that various other police officers made false statements or harassed, or worse, Messrs. Samuels, Francis and Gibbs, and other witnesses. Such behaviour, if true, must be dealt with appropriately—but, again, that is not something on which the hon. Gentleman can expect me to comment.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department is the final appellate authority for the police disciplinary process. If any of the officers were to be disciplined, in time it might fall to my right hon. Friend to

decide any appeal that they might make about any finding of guilt that might be made. My right hon. Friend could not properly do so were he to form an opinion before seeing the case papers, and therefore we exercise some care to avoid involvement in such matters at any earlier date. It would be improper for us to do so.

The chief constable is the disciplinary authority for his force. I can confirm that the chief constable of the West Midlands force wrote to the Director of Public Prosecutions on Tuesday 5 November—the day after the "World in Action" programme to which the hon. Gentleman referred—asking that the assistant chief constable of West Yorkshire, Mr. Donald Shaw, be asked to re-examine the issues raised and to report further on any matters not specifically or precisely covered in his earlier report. I understand that the Director of Public Prosecutions agreed, and that Mr. Shaw is currently undertaking the re-examination.

I need hardly say that police officers are not above the law, and if any are detected of any criminal offence the Director of Public Prosecutions has no hesitation in bringing charges.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Sunderland, South on securing this debate and on packing so much into it. I am sure that his remarks will be carefully read by those whom he wants to read them.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-three minutes past Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 13 December 1991

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PETITION

Gipsy Site (Bristol, North-West)

9.34 am

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): I am delighted to have the opportunity to present a petition from nearly 1,200 residents of Little Stoke and Stoke Gifford in my constituency and from Stoke Lodge and Patchway in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Mr. Cope), who is in his place for the presentation of the petition.

The petition relates to a proposal by Avon county council to place a permanent site for gipsies and other travellers at Clay lane, which is in the Bristol, North-West constituency, but is bounded by the constituency of Northavon. In the opinion of petitioners it would be a wholly inappropriate, unnecessary and damaging site. Among the claims in the petition are that no such site should be placed adjacent to residential or industrial premises, that it

"should be a minimum distance of 2 kilometres away from houses",

that the running costs should be borne by the users, and

"That! Provision be made for compensation to those residents whose property is devalued . . . by the imposition of such a site. That! Due consideration should be given to the views of the Electorate, in the same manner as consideration is given to the demands of travellers."

The petition concludes with the prayer that the petitioners will look to the House for relief.

To lie upon the Table.

Socialism

9.36 am

Mr. David Evans (Welwyn, Hatfield): I beg to move,

That this House notes the success of Government policies over the past 12 months; congratulates the Government for protecting the interests of this country abroad, reducing inflation and interest rates, strengthening the public services of the country, ultimately making them more responsive to the people who pay for them, having the foresight to initiate reforms which will improve the National Health Service and the education system and for improving social security payments; contrasts all of these Conservative achievements with the abject failure of the Labour Party, despite years in Opposition, to respond with any practical or credible alternative policies; further contends that this is not surprising given that socialism, whether it is espoused by extremist politicians or served up by advertising executives, is a hangover of history; believes that the electorate will reject the Labour Party at the next election because it will not swallow its charade of moderation and that, despite its failure to come clean about its true convictions, it is still abundantly clear that Labour clings to an outdated ideology that stifles individual initiative, blights economic growth and fails adequately to deliver even the most basic of public services; and therefore concludes that a party which is without direction itself has no place leading the country.

If Keir Hardie had not invented the Labour party, Jeremy Beadle would certainly have done so. Opposition Members surely represent the greatest practical joke ever played on the British people. It might even be funny, if the consequences for the country had not been so dire.

The role of conservativism since the 19th century has been to save Britain from the onslaught of socialism—an ideology which is fundamentally at odds with the free market and individual liberty.

The Tories have waged war in a battle of ideas. The mould-breaking policies that they enacted in the 1980s have resulted in the leader of the Labour party rewriting his party's history just to keep up with our agenda—a wonderful Tory achievement. He has had to eat his words. In 1983, he said that Labour "wanted out" of Europe, while pledging his undying allegiance to a non-nuclear defence policy. Funny how times change, is it not?

People change, especially when No. 10 is beckoning. At first glance it might appear that the red flag no longer flies over Walworth road. Do not be misled; that building in south London still represents the last refuge of bolshevism. That is where English Heritage should have spent its money, to ensure that that museum is still there so that my children and my children's children can see where the death of socialism and communism took place. It is a mausoleum to ideas which have long since lost their relevance in contemporary society. The purpose of this debate is to show that all the old socialist dogma can still be squeezed out of Labour's shiny new policy document.

In contrast, after 12 months in office, the Prime Minister has shown that the Conservative party retains its intellectual vigour and political drive. We can look forward to the 1990s, while Labour can look forward to another decade in opposition.

This has been a demanding year for our Prime Minister. While he was running the country, Labour has wilted in opposition. For every new policy initiative that he has launched it has served up only tired alternatives. For every percentage point that we knocked off interest rates, it has only jeered and asked for yet another cut and to hell with the consequences. For every patient we have treated on the NHS—we are treating 30,000 more patients a week than in

[Mr. David Evans]

1979—it has tried only to frighten the old, the sick and the less well-off. Good news for Britain is bad news for the Labour party.

It was once said that a state without the means of some change is a state without the means of conservation. That is the spirit in which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister continues to govern: sensible reforms, targeted on specific problems. The socialist prescription for change would destroy the fabric of our society, as it did in the late 1970s. Do we remember the then Labour Prime Minister saying, "Crisis? What crisis?" Who can forget the pictures on our television screens of the rats running round the rubbish in Leicester square, of the dead lying unburied in our cemeteries or of cancer patients being refused treatment and hospital supplies being refused entry because the National Union of Public Employees and the Confederation of Health Service Employees said so? Who will forget the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) on his way to Heathrow being told, "Come back; the IMF has refused to lend us any more money"? Who will forget the embarrassment of having our name dragged through the gutters of Europe? Who will remember going on holiday and being ashamed to be British? My children do not believe that people could take only £50 on holiday because that lot had made such a mess of the economy.

The electorate put their trust in a Government to provide them with security. That can take different forms: a guarantee that citizens' interests will be protected abroad and that people will be able to prosper in an economic climate in which their quality of life improves; a society where individuals will have an opportunity to prosper and fulfil their potential; and a community where people will be cared for when they fall ill or face hard times. But, most important, the people must trust their leader, as this nation trusts our leader the Prime Minister.

Those are the parameters within which Government should operate. The Government have excelled in those key areas in the past year—not the past 12 years, but the past year since my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister took over the country.

Trust is crucial, but it is rather like a new 5p coin—it can easily be lost, as the Labour party discovered in the past three elections. It failed in all the areas that I have listed, especially running the economy and governing our affairs abroad. Labour fundamentally lost the confidence of the British people and it continues to lose it. I shall try to explain why.

The United Kingdom sits at the hub of three great international organisations—the United Nations, NATO and the European Community. In the past 12 months, the Government have played a constructive role in each organisation. As a permanent member of the Security Council, the United Kingdom was quick to condemn Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. More important, Britain committed substantial forces to the Gulf to uphold United Nations resolution 678. On taking office, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister immediately had to take up the reins of a vast military operation. We may remember that, during the conflict, the Labour party refused to go into the Lobby to support our troops serving in the Gulf; it abdicated that responsibility.

After the conflict was successfully concluded, the Prime Minister ensured that safe havens were set up to protect the fleeing Kurds from Saddam. Britain insisted that United Nations officials should attend to the basic needs of refugees and the Royal Marines ensured the security of those refugees camps.

The United Kingdom was instrumental in pushing for the adoption of Security Council resolution 687, which set up a special commission charged with overseeing the destruction of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction—a commitment which has been backed by substantial logistical support from Britain.

The Government have steered NATO on a course of realignment, as it copes with the changing security environment. It is no coincidence that the United Kingdom, led by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, has been invited to lead the new rapid reaction force—a token of trust from our partners.

The Prime Minister has successfully negotiated a treaty that marks a watershed in the history of the European Community—a deal which is in the interests of Britain, not the unelected Eurocrats in Brussels. Thanks to the Prime Minister's negotiating skills, Britain is able to choose whether or when to join a single currency. In addition, Britain has ensured that any future defence arrangements are compatible with NATO, while the social chapter, which would have placed unacceptable burdens on British industry, has been dropped. Britain's idea to strengthen the European Parliament's financial control over the Commission has been adopted.

The Prime Minister has ensured that issues such as immigration are dealt with on a national level, not in Brussels. We all know that 7 million Russians have applied for visas to the west. Britain has a proud tradition of allowing asylum seekers who have been persecuted in their own countries to find refuge here. We shall not support the 75 per cent. of asylum seekers who already live in this country. We must not become the dumping ground for the world's refugees. The Labour party would let them in just like that. It had an amnesty in the mid-1970s and I am sure that, given a chance, it would have another.

In contrast with what the Prime Minister achieved in Maastricht, the only question of the Leader of the Opposition—if he had gone to Maastricht—would have been, "Where do I sign?" Foresight and statesmanship are in short supply on the Labour Benches. Labour's leader is arrested when he goes abroad, although I believe that the corporal who arrested him was promoted afterwards.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Has my hon. Friend noticed that Labour Back Benchers are in short supply? Does he draw any significance from the fact that not a single Labour Back Bencher is present, which no doubt arises from Labour's embarrassment about a debate on socialism?

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) said that not a single Labour Back Bencher is present. I admit to being married, but I am here and I am a Back Bencher, unlike the Parliamentary Private Secretaries.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): The hon. Gentleman has put the record straight.

Mr. Arnold: I concede that one of the few hundred Labour Members is here.

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend made a good point. Labour Members are embarrassed, but they might be even more embarrassed in the next half hour.

Successful diplomacy requires the respect of other nations. That is why the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary triumphed last week. Everybody knows that Major and Hurd are in a class above Kinnock and Kaufman.

Events in eastern Europe have been confusing and worrying, but they are nothing compared with the incomprehension that surrounds Labour's defence policy. For example, since 1988 Labour has churned out more than 20 documents on any subject that one cares to name except defence. It is therefore hardly surprising to find that its defence spokesman does not have a seat in the shadow Cabinet. One must ask what price freedom? It was Richard Crossman who said that the Labour party had adopted "their faith in pacifism but it does not face up to the consequences."

That was reflected in the Labour party's unwavering support for Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the loonies who camped at Greenham common. That stance has been shown to be, at best, irrelevant and, at worst, irresponsible.

I am still waiting to hear some Opposition Member admit that they were wrong to call for one-sided disarmament at the height of the cold war when Brezhnev was packing his empire with SS20s. If the Government had caved in then, as the socialists wanted, a wall would still divide Europe. The Labour party has been proved wrong again, but it still holds to its peacenik principles. A Labour Government would cut our armed forces by 27 per cent. and the Trident programme would be put in doubt—all that at a time when the Soviet Union is fragmenting and the situation calls for caution rather than gung-ho pacifism.

Four republics in the Soviet Union, now called the Soviet commonwealth, have a larger nuclear capability than the United Kingdom. However, the Labour party wants to cut our armed forces by 27 per cent. and put in doubt our nuclear deterrent. That is what the Labour party stands for.

The Leader of the Opposition has said that he would keep nuclear weapons as long as other countries still had theirs. However, he has never refuted the anti-nuclear core of the 1989 policy review document, "Meet the Challenge: Make the Change". That document committed the Labour party to negotiating away our entire nuclear deterrent in return for just a fraction of the Soviet nuclear arsenal.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): Does my hon. Friend recall that the Leader of the Opposition has already said that he could envisage no circumstances in which he would authorise the firing of a nuclear weapon? Does my hon. Friend agree that, in that case, the right hon. Gentleman has already given away our nuclear deterrent without doing anything else?

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend makes that point as only he can. I have no more to say, except that he is absolutely right. We know that the Labour party has given that deterrent away in its heart, its mind and through its mouth.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (Wanstead and Woodford): Is my hon. Friend aware whether the Leader of the Opposition has torn up his CND membership card?

Mr. Evans: I shall answer that question in a moment.

Mr. McKelvey I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that, at Question Time, the Prime Minister also refused to give any response to the question whether he would ever press the nuclear button.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman may say that, but, if he knew the Prime Minister as well as we do, he would know that, if it came to it, my right hon. Friend would press it.

Did the Leader of the Opposition give up his CND membership because he thought that there might be a Labour Government and that, as a result of his tax proposals, he would be unable to afford it? Or, although the right hon. Gentleman is still, at heart, a follower of CND, did the PR boys say, "We don't think that that would be a good thing to belong to"?

The Labour party has officially changed its mind no fewer than six times about whether Britain should be in or out of the Community. Day to day the Front-Bench spokesmen change the policy unilaterally, at will. I cannot believe that the Opposition have the cheek to lecture the Conservative party on this matter.

Let me put Labour's so-called credentials in perspective. If the socialists had won the 1983 election they would have pulled us out of the EC, because, as the Labour leader said:

"We want out of the Common Market."

One cannot make it clearer than that.

Every member of today's shadow Cabinet who was a Member of Parliament in 1972 voted against Britain's entry into the Community. In the light of that, can Opposition Members explain something about their leader, who fell over on Brighton beach the minute after he was elected and who has been falling over ever since? Did he bang his head that day? He must have done, or how could he possibly say:

"I have never seen hostility towards the European Community in the Labour party"?

That is an absolute joke. It is ironic that the Labour party now purports to be the EC's biggest fan. It has almost taken on the status of a groupie. However, all the positive things that have come out of Europe are anathema to socialist ideas. The single market, the dynamo of the Community, promotes competition, choice and opportunity—hardly the watchwords of socialism. It is not surprising that the Labour party voted against the Single European Act in 1986.

If the Labour party negotiated in Europe on behalf of this country it would be a disaster for the British taxpayer. It believes that the divergence between the economies of the member states is too great and its answer to that is the tired old socialist remedy—spend more money. It would increase dramatically the regional and structural funds. It would pour money into Greece, Spain, Portugal and Italy, but at whose expense? At the expense of Grantham, Sunderland, Peterborough and Inverness.

As Britain is one of only three net contributors to the Community budget, it is clear that the Labour party's policy would hit British taxpayers where it hurts—in their pockets. In short, the Labour party, in common with Jacques Delors, sees the Community as the secret agent of socialism. That is not an end in itself, but a method of imposing on the British people the policies that they have rejected in three successive domestic elections.

The social charter on which the Opposition are so keen would undermine the reforms that we have introduced in

[Mr. Evans]

the past decade. Everyone remembers that in 1979 the number of days lost through strikes was 29 million; in 1990 we lost 2 million days. The social charter would be a step backwards for the country and a step forward for the Trades Union Congress. The charter would also result in the imposition of a minimum wage policy. It is a socialist racket which would cost up to 2 million jobs, cause higher inflation and reduce growth. It would be a continental disaster for the people of this country.

The British people know that our Prime Minister protected our sovereignty in the negotiations at Maastricht. The British people have not forgotten that loved ones were lost in two world wars in the name of freedom. They will not forget that the Labour and Liberal Democratic parties were prepared to sign that freedom away. By standing up for this country, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has saved the lion from the talons of the German eagle.

Our people do not want a single foreign policy, a single defence policy, a social charter or a single currency. The Prime Minister knew that, but the Leader of the Opposition did not.

Since the Prime Minister took office inflation has fallen from 9·3 to 3·7 per cent., which is well below the European average. The Government promised lower inflation and they delivered it, something which the Labour party can only dream about. When it was in power inflation averaged 15 per cent. and it reached a third-world level of 27 per cent. at one point. Interest rates have also fallen from 14 per cent. in December 1990 to 10·5 per cent. today. That is good news for the house owner and the business community, but bad news for Labour.

The record levels of inward investment to Britain are testimony to the underlying strength of our economy. That has been reinforced by record export levels in the third quarter of this year. It is not surprising that we receive more inward investment than any other EC country. Even Jacques Delors admitted the day before yesterday that the United Kingdom has become a paradise for inward investment. That will increase when the Government fulfil their pledge to reduce the standard rate of income tax to 20 per cent.—a goal which was unthinkable when Labour was in power. Who will ever forget the top tax rate of 98 per cent? Who will ever forget the entrepreneurs, doctors, surgeons and scientists who were all leaving because they could not afford to live here? Surely the Labour party has learnt something, but I wonder.

Labour claims to be economically responsible, but one swallow does not a summer make. Just because we no longer hear the Leader of the Opposition say, "We cannot remove the evils of capitalism without taking its source of power-ownership" does not mean that the old prejudices have disappeared. One just has to look at bit harder.

Take Labour's plans for a national economic assessment, a so-called partnership between the unions, employers and the Government. That will not mean beer and sandwiches at No. 10. The new model Labour party prefers west end restaurants and gatherings at five-star hotels at £500 a time. Labour Members can afford that now, after 12 years of Conservative Government. They could not do so before. But they still want to experiment with the foolish ideas that failed so comprehensively in the 1970s. Just because one starts calling union leaders socialist partners does not mean that those union leaders will suddenly start acting economically and responsibly. The TUC will look after its own and to hell with the rest.

Let us recall that 165 Labour Members are sponsored by unions and that all but one member of the shadow Cabinet are unionised. The people know who Labour's paymasters are—the unions. Labour promises a system of financial regulation and credit management. It would impose restraints on bank lending. Labour cannot wait to get its hands on the leaders of the economy.

The Labour party has collected sociologists and textbook entrepreneurs who apply the economics of the common room to matters best dealt with by industry and commerce alone. The labour trade and industry Front-Bench team wants to run industry, but not one of those people has ever run anything—except perhaps a commune. *[Laughter.]* That is a fair comment. I shall tell hon. Members what members of that team did before they entered Parliament. Labour's team consists of two university lecturers, one trade union official, a charity worker, a television producer, a social worker and a psychiatrist.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Labour needs a psychiatrist.

Mr. Evans: Labour needs a psychiatrist! *[Laughter.]* One has to laugh—even Labour Members are laughing.

Labour's strategy for industry is to revive the interventionist policies which failed in the 1970s. Labour still believes that Whitehall can run the economy. Labour proposes new rules on takeovers, with a statutory obligation on companies to declare research and development and training expenditure. Labour proposes a national investment bank—can one imagine that? Labour also proposes a national minimum wage, particular training levels for companies, renationalisation of British Telecom and regional development agencies—all that to rebuild the dead hand of socialism.

It is ironic that Labour, the party that would have rolled over naked, legs in the air, playing dead for the EC, is at odds with the Commission's industrial policy and strategy. The Commission has emphasised in its Green Paper that the role of government is to produce the conditions for low or zero inflation, to remove regulation and controls, to reduce taxes, to promote competition and to remove state aid to industry. Labour fails on all counts.

Is it that Labour wants in because it thinks that it can get out of its responsibility for governing the country? Is that why Labour is so keen for Britain to join the systems of the European Community? I think so. In 1979 under Labour, every week the nationalised industries were losing £50 million of taxpayers' money—not Government money. In 1979, it took British Steel 13·2 man hours to produce one tonne of liquid steel; it now takes only 4·8 man hours to do so. It is not surprising that in 1979 that company lost £1·7 billion of taxpayers' money. In that single example, we can all see what happens when one brings competitiveness into an industry.

The socialist policies which I outlined will have a long-term detrimental effect on the economy's competitiveness. Labour's taxation plans, however, will have an immediate effect. The Leader of the Opposition has declared, "We will not increase taxes for the huge majority of the British public. No person earning less than £20,000 a year will be worse off." The problem for Labour is simple: under the Conservative Government, many

professionals, especially those in the public sector, have enjoyed substantial pay increases. Therefore, firemen, nurses, teachers and policemen will be penalised under Labour. Recently, the hon. Member for Derby, South (Mrs Beckett) had to admit that between 10 and 15 per cent. of teachers would pay more tax under Labour's proposals. It is as simple as that.

Putting Labour in charge of the economy would be like entrusting one's life savings and pension funds to one of the Leader of the Opposition's best friends—someone who, had Labour been in power, would have been guiding the Government on economic matters and looking after taxpayer's money, not to mention pensioners' savings and pension funds.

Only yesterday I was told that one particular gentlemen had supplied the Leader of the Opposition with a red Jaguar. I do not know whether the money for that came out of our pension funds or out of taxpayers' money. If the red Jaguar is still being driven by the Leader of the Opposition, he should perhaps return it so that the receiver can sell it and pay the money back into the pension funds. I was also told yesterday that that gentleman supplied the Leader of the Opposition with an aeroplane at the last election. I wonder whether the money for that came out of pension funds—we shall have to wait and see.

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): Would the hon. Gentleman like to tell us the name of this mysterious person who gave him these totally incorrect items of information?

Mr. Evans: No. If the information is not true, no doubt the Leader of the Opposition will say so.

Over the lifetime of the next Parliament, the Conservative Government could have at their disposal £16·5 billion from privatisation proceeds, on top of the £21·9 billion which we had already collected in 1987—resources which a Labour Government would not have available to them and resources which could not be used for health care, education, social services and other public services. If Labour ever returned to power, that would surely give a boost to the shares in the channel tunnel, because the brain drain of the past would seem like a tea party compared with the number of people getting out of this country.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has shown with his anti-inflation strategy, he is not afraid to tackle the big problems head on. The citizens charter is another example—a catalyst for a wholesale shake-up of public services. Buses, trains and councils are constantly at the top of the list of the public's dislikes as expressed in opinion polls; privatisation, the extension of competition, contracting-out, compulsory competitive tendering and the establishment of the Audit Commission have all played an important role in improving our public services. The citizens charter, conceived, initiated and endorsed by the Prime Minister, is another important step forward. The charter embodies all that is good about conservatism. It is not a grandiose pie-in-the-sky idea, but a practical programme for action.

Mr. Arbuthnot: My hon. Friend spoke about compulsory contracting out. I understand that he has experience of that because the cleaning and dustbin collection in Southend, before my hon. Friend became involved, was under Labour control and dustbins were collected for 20,000 houses that did not exist. Compulsory tendering introduced by Southend council put a stop to that sort of shenanigan.

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend is right. However, the 20,000 houses were not in Southend but in Lambeth, which was under Red Ted Knight. Before we privatised the service in Southend it was run by the TGWU and there were said to be 237 employees in the refuse department. When I arrived the most that I could find was 190. I will say no more.

It is long overdue for those in the public service to see people as consumers rather than as a nuisance. Bureaucratic inertia and inefficiency must be wiped away. The Prime Minister's initiative will ensure that people have proper redress for grievances and guaranteed standards of service. That will apply to tenants, parents, passengers or customers of the newly privatised utilities. Only a Conservative Government could conceive and execute the citizens charter.

As we all know, Labour is in hock to the unions, which is why it has consistently opposed measures such as compulsory competitive tendering which improve services and the pay of people working for those private companies. If tendering were abolished in the health service it would cost £120 million a year. Without it, 15 new hospitals would not be built. Since we came to power more than 500 building schemes in the health service, each costing over £1 million, have been completed.

Labour has always opposed those measures. Competitive tendering has improved services. I have given the example of the health service and my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) gave the example of refuse collection and other local authority services. In that area alone, local authorities have made huge savings of about £250 million. We know that the savings in the health service would enable us to carry out many more hip operations and heart transplants.

We can gauge Labour's consumer credentials by examining its performance in local government. It is a record of absolute shame. The 12 education authorities with the worst GCSE results in English and maths are all Labour controlled. The 20 local authorities with the worst rent arrears are all Labour controlled. We need only look across the river to see how badly a Labour council runs its services, not for the benefit of the consumer but for the gratification of the unions and the perverse priorities of militant revolutionaries masquerading as councillors.

The situation is no better up north. Liverpool, a city bankrupted by Labour, has 5,733 empty council houses, almost 2,000 of which have been empty for more than a year. More than a quarter of the rest, £16 million, remains uncollected. Labour claims to be the party of the working class.

Mr. Gerald Bowden (Dulwich): My hon. Friend speaks about rent arrears of £16 million. Is he aware that the borough of Southwark, which has been Labour controlled for all of living memory, has uncollected rent of £35·8 million? Does he agree that that is disgraceful?

Mr. Evans: My hon. Friend makes his own point. I was not aware of that, but it comes as no surprise.

Labour claims to be the party of the working class, but in Liverpool it cannot manage to put roofs over people's heads. That is the sort of financial mismanagement that results in capping. In April, 57 NHS trusts were

[Mr. Evans]

established. That is a watershed in the development of the national health service. Although they have been operating for only nine months, patient services have already improved and waiting lists have been cut through greater efficiency and increased use of surgery. In the past six months the number of patients waiting for more that a year fell by 16 per cent. In addition, the patients charter will continue to put pressure on patient waiting times.

For the first time in the history of the NHS maximum waiting times will be set for people receiving in-patient or day care treatment. If the hospital cannot provide the treatment within the specified time it will be offered elsewhere. For all patients there will be specific, timed appointments. Also from April, 3·6 million people are registered with GPs who have become fund-holders. Practices are given an annual budget and for the first time doctors can back their decisions about which hospitals can provide the right care for their patients and can provide the money for the treatment. The system devolves power to those who have face-to-face contact with the patient.

Far from privatising the health service, the Conservative party is revitalising an institution which has been in existence for more than 40 years. NHS trusts and GP fund-holders are in the vanguard of a package of reforms that will improve the quality of health care, which remains free of charge at the point of delivery. Plainly, it would be silly to continue to pour huge sums into a service that has become a bureaucratic nightmare, a quagmire. Hospitals and doctors have opted out of the clutches of NUPE and COHSE. That is essential if we are to meet the rising demand for care which confronts the health service.

Under Labour, medical judgments and clinical priorities had to be made against a backdrop of industrial unrest. Doctors, nurses and managers were not running hospitals; they were being run by COHSE and NUPE and they would still be running it under a socialist Government. A brother from COHSE is a member of Labour's review group dealing with health policy and a comrade from NUPE chairs the committee that oversees it. That is why Labour continues to get its sums wrong. It promised to spend more than the Government, but it does not say where the money will come from.

In the days when Labour committed itself, it got it wrong. At the last election it said that it would spend 3 per cent. in real terms on the NHS. That is not good enough. We are already spending 3·5 per cent. While Labour huff and puff in opposition, the Government have increased spending by 50 per cent in real terms. That has given the country 69,000 extra nurses and 16,000 extra dentists and doctors who enjoy wage increases rather than the wage cuts that were experienced in the 1970s. While the Government battle with the reality of running the largest employer in western Europe, Labour sits back and hurls abuse. No Labour spokesman has yet shown how the Labour party would ration health care, how it would fix priorities or how it would stop unions and professional lobbyists defending their restrictive practices. Like true socialists, they pledge huge sums of taxpayers' money without saying where the money is to come from and how it is to be spent in the best interests of patients. The £35,000 million that the Opposition have promised to spend can come only from increased taxation or borrowing. I believe that it will come from high taxation. The new wave of reforms is despised by Labour. That is because the new wave of reforms encourages autonomy and initiative.

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I ask who are the people in the civil servants' Box? Is it necessary for the Minister to have three civil servants here to advise him?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Who is in the officials Box has nothing to do with the Chair.

Mr. Dixon: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This matter was raised when the present Home Secretary replied to the debate on a private Members' day. We found out then that the people in the Box were from Tory central office. Could I ask you again who the people are in the civil servants' Box behind Mr. Speaker's Chair?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As I have already said, that has nothing to do with the Chair, but perhaps I can add that if they are to occupy that position they must, of course, be civil servants.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Does that intervention suggest that the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), will be so devoid of facts and challenging arguments that the Minister will not need support in terms of information and the like?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I think that we had better get on with the debate.

Mr. Evans: Education will, rightly, be one of the key issues at the forthcoming general election. The Prime Minister has unequivocally stated his objective—to make our schools and colleges more responsive to parents and pupils. Under his leadership, the programme to establish grant-maintained schools has gathered momentum. By freeing schools from local authority control, the Government are succeeding in increasing parental choice, making schools more responsive to local needs and enabling resources to be used effectively for the benefit of pupils. That will result in higher educational standards. A total of £2 billion a year is being spent on further education and sixth form colleges in England and Wales. From April next year they will also be able to function in a new independent environment, where funds come direct from Government. They will be rewarded for each new student who is recruited, which is an incentive for expansion. Sixth form colleges will also be able to admit part-time and adult students and to charge fees or accept training credits for them.

The message from No. 10 Downing street is clear: education is not just for children. Under new legislation, parents will also receive written reports on the progress of their children. Performance tables will provide information on all schools. Mums and dads will soon be able to make informed choices about their children's education. If a school has a bad record of truancy, they will have the right to know.

As in other policy areas, Labour's attitude to education is coloured by a pathological desire to wreck any constructive initiatives put forward by the Government. A socialist Administration would sling grant-maintained status straight out of the window. Schools would be returned to local education authority control, which

would be refined to meet the challenge of the 21st century. Yet these are the same institutions that consumed funds at the expense of local children. Once again, Labour has responded with a promise to return to the status quo—a return to the good old days when their friends in the town halls dictated policy over the heads of parents and governors. That is a system of which the new commonwealth in Russia would be proud.

Last month the Chancellor announced that spending on social security would rise to £70,000 million next year, an increase of over 50 per cent. in real terms since the Labour party was last in government. It is thanks to the growth in the economy that the Government are able to bring substantial help to those in need. Pensions and child benefit will be uprated in line with inflation. We all know that prosperity for our nation brings benefits to those who are less well off than ourselves. Half the social security budget is devoted to a full range of benefits available to pensioners. The Government have successfully targeted benefit on those most in need. Labour advocates an indiscriminate, scattergun approach which would spread benefits thinly across the board. In other words, Labour would end up doing least for those most in need.

Will any of us ever forget the three Christmases in the five years before the previous Labour Government lost office, when they were so mean that they could not pay the Christmas bonus? They took the Christmas pudding out of the mouths of pensioners three times. *[Interruption.]* I know that they could not pay it because the International Monetary Fund was running our affairs at the time. On the last occasion the receiver had arrived in this country. This House was no longer running the country; it was the receiver, in the guise of the IMF, who was doing that. What did the IMF do? It said to the Government, "You can't even give your pensioners their Christmas bonus." That is what it came down to and the whole world knew it. No wonder the Labour Government got kicked out later that year.

Apart from pensions and child benefit, Labour can only promise help to people—this is a joke—when resources allow. I have just explained what happened in 1979. There will be no resources. Essentially, the Labour party is engaged in a massive confidence trick. Labour cannot run a successful economy to foot the bill for our social services. It could not even support Arsenal, never mind increase pensions. I am sick and tired of the bleeding heart tendency on the Opposition Benches. They berate our achievements in social security when they can offer only a record of failure and neglect, of pensions ravaged by underfunding and inflation at 27 per cent. Under this Government, pensions have grown five times faster than they did when Labour was in power. Socialists promise the earth, but they only succeed in cheating the needy, the old and the sick.

Mr. Chris Smith: Can the hon. Gentleman tell us of how much pensioners have been deprived during the past 12 years because of the break in the link between pensions and earnings? This Government changed that to a link between pensions and the retail prices index almost as soon as they came into office.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman has completely missed the point. It is no good giving pensioners £5, £10, £15, £20 or £50 a week if inflation is running at 27 per cent.

The Conservative agenda for the 1990s is exciting. War has been declared on those who obstruct choice or provide shoddy services to the public. Under this Prime Minister, our schools and hospitals will prosper. Britain's interests abroad will be protected and our economy will thrive. What runs through Labour's policy documents is an unstinting attachment to socialism. The Labour party is ashamed to admit to the electorate that it is still red to the core. Its ideology is cloaked in the language of moderation —deceit of the most cynical kind. My purpose in introducing the debate was to highlight the Labour party's continuing commitment to the old dogma—ideas which failed when it was last in government, ideas which will consign it to the dustbin of history at the next election.

10.30 am

Mr. Steve Norris (Epping Forest): I extend my warm congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) on his excellent introduction to the debate, and especially on the moderate and reasoned tone with which he introduced it. The House owes him a debt for his intellectual and rational exposition of the fundamental case against socialism, spiced, as ever, with his good humour and unique style. It was a great pleasure to listen to him. He has enlivened my day in a way that I had not anticipated when I entered the Chamber.

This is a serious debate. I want to commence by talking about my history. One thing that has impressed me most over the past eight years since I entered this House is that most hon. Members, of whatever party, believe in creating the greatest good for the greatest number. There is no credibility in the idea that the Opposition are simply devoted to the destruction of British society, as we know it, as an object in itself. They believe profoundly in the philosophy that they espouse. Why, then, has someone who was born in Liverpool just as the war ended, who went to a state school and then to a university funded by the state come to be so profoundly disillusioned with the policies of socialism?

I believe that that has happened because, in examining what socialism actually means, it became clear that the key thread was a most unattractive trait—the trait of arrogance. If I had to pick one word that, for me, summarised what socialism meant, it would be "arrogance". It is the most extraordinary arrogance to believe in the concept of high taxation. I do not have the slightest doubt about that. Taking my belief that many Labour Members are dedicated to the proposition that they are improving society, they nevertheless have the extraordinary notion that somehow society is better off if they say to the ordinary working man, "Give us your money; we will spend it all on you"—or, with one or two distinguished Labour supporters, perhaps not all—"and you will be better off." The House should note that they do not say, "You spend your money in the way that you think will make you better off"; instead they say, "Let me spend it for you."

That is the most extraordinary arrogance. It is incredibly patronising to working people to imagine that someone has a God-given right to determine for them the sort of lives that they would prefer to run for themselves. I reject the notion that I have any right to determine the lives of ordinary working people. I simply have a responsibility to debate and ultimately to discharge, on their behalf, the responsibilities that no individual can take

[Mr. Steve Norris]

unto himself. However, wherever there is the opportunity to take responsibility, it should be for the citizen to discharge the responnibility of running his own life.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland) *rose*——

Mr. Norris: I am delighted that there is such interest in my remarks.

Mr. Maclennan: Will the hon. Gentleman answer two questions? As his Government have increased the burden of taxation since 1979, how does he square that with his arguments? Secondly, as he has not advocated abolishing taxation, is not the argument simply about its level? Surely he is prepared to acknowledge that it is not an issue of principle.

Mr. Norris: I shall deal with both those points later in my speech. I hope that the hon. Gentleman, the ex-leader of the Social Democrat party——

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): The ex-leader of an ex-party.

Mr. Norris: Indeed. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will wait for that part of my speech.

As a number of my hon. Friends wish to speak, I shall not dwell on the point about high taxation. Suffice it to say that I believe that the fundamental misconception that is allied to the underlying arrogance of the socialist approach to taxation is the idea that a person is not likely to be prepared to work sufficiently hard to raise capital and build a business. My hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield and I know that that is not so. I raised capital by going to the bank and asking for a loan on the strength of the value of my house. I put everything that I had earned until then at risk by investing in a business. I worked seven days a week. If anyone switched off the lights at the end of the day, it was me. If the burglar alarm went off at 3 am, I was the one the police telephoned. All that people do, only to be told by a grateful Government that if they have failed nobody will give a damn, and that if they succeeded the Government will take 98 per cent. of the proceeds.

What is so desperate about that is that it completely misses the point that if there is to be a successful economy that actually creates wealth, we must give entrepreneurs the ability to create that wealth. We have to create the conditions in which they are prepared to take risks, to invest and to be entrepreneurs. The fundamental mistake of socialism is that, from on high, it extinguishes every vestige of entrepreneurship, of initiative, and of the personal dedication to success that actually makes any economy—not just the British economy—great.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South) *rose*——

Mr. Norris: I give way to the hon. Gentleman. What a pleasure it is to see him here this morning.

Mr. Bermingham: The hon. Gentleman is so sweet in his compliments; it is a pity that his sanity does not follow his logic. Can he explain how there can be an entrepreneurial economy when the banks crucify almost every small trader?

Mr. Norris: There is not one Conservative Member who is in the slightest doubt that over the past couple of years business has had a desperately difficult time. However, I want to give a message to every small and every large business man: however bruised they may have been by the recession of the late 1980s, just remember what the Labour party stands for. It is intellectually opposed to entrepreneurship, success and reward. A business man who votes Labour at the next election is a turkey voting for an early Christmas. There is not the slightest doubt about that in my mind; it has ever been thus.

Mr. Chris Smith Which party has been in power while presiding over the two worst recessions that this country has experienced since the 1930s?

Mr. Norris: From time to time I meet, as no doubt the hon. Gentleman meets, people from abroad, whether from other legislatures or just friends. If they have not visited this country during the past 10 years, they always comment on the huge improvement in the fabric of London and of our other great cities. Despite the fact that business has had a tough time during the past couple of years—as I and other hon. Members who have been in business know—there is now an infinitely more vigorous business society and business economy than ever before. It is poised to take advantage of the marvellously low rates of inflation—lower even than those in Germany—that my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Chancellor, together with their teams of Ministers, have delivered.

For all the posturing, and for all the clever debating of points that Labour Members may care to adduce, I do not believe that there is one business man who, when it comes to the crunch, will be the slightest bit confused. Despite the vagaries of individual performance, and despite the day-on-day vicissitudes of the market, there is an underlying philosophical difference. There is much in socialism that is about the politics of envy. Socialists believe, "If you've got, I should have it." They believe that one makes the poor richer by making the rich poorer—one of the most fundamental misconceptions that it is possible to have. As my hon. Friend and Member for Welwyn Hatfield said, despite all the fine words, we know that that misconception is still held by Labour Members.

The arrogance of socialism is not simply present in taxation. It exists in its approach to nationalisation. Since the war, we have seen various bouts of nationalisation under Labour Governments. Thank goodness, the great achievement of the Conservative Government over the past decade has been to return those great industries to the private sector where, without exception, they have performed brilliantly in comparison with the appalling losses that were accruing in the Labour years. As my hon. Friend rightly pointed out, these industries are now admired everywhere—for example, British Telecom is gaining contracts throughout the world—and are models of expertise and good management. They are a stark and frightening contrast with the days of the 1960s and 1970s, when they were in public ownership.

The irony of all this is that the Labour party has come to take the view that the arguments of Conservative Members are right, and claims that it never believed in privatisation in the first place. The House may recall the Leader of the Opposition saying in the *Director* magazine on 1 September 1991:

> "The vast majority of the Labour party never believed in wholesale nationalisation."

Labour Members may not have believed in it, but they made a pretty fair pass at bringing it about.

The Government have freed the British consumer from the shackles of living under nationalised industries, where that great feature of any socialist economy is present, another great halter round the neck of the Labour party—the belief that the producer of a service is more important than the consumer of it. It is an extraordinary proposition that one should pay more attention to the workers in the service who produce the goods—no matter what they produce or how acceptable it is to those who have to buy it, whether at home or abroad—and concentrate solely on the rights of the producer.

The arrogance of socialism is seen not simply in taxation or in nationalisation but in the fundamental denial of choice and opportunity that is implicit in the concept, "Nanny knows best". For example, in housing, only as a result of the Government's pressure do we now have, agreed across the board, the right to buy. This is the old story—we need not dwell on it this morning—of how a Conservative Government pressed the concept of the right to buy in the teeth of opposition from the Labour party. Having seen the massive success that this policy has been, not simply by giving people the opportunity to accumulate capital but in terms of management of local estates and the interest that tenants, now owners, have shown in their estates, the Labour party now claims that it was its idea in the first place. It reminds me of those Russian history books that claim that the Russians invented television, penicillin and many other modern developments. They are slightly less in evidence than they were, but are still a rare curio if one can acquire a copy.

The right to buy is a stepping stone on the road to prosperity for many working-class people who otherwise would never be able to own their own homes. That right was opposed by socialism but introduced and given to the people by the Conservative Government.

Mr. Gerald Bowden: Can my hon. Friend help me by analysing the way in which the socialist parties in local government have, with one voice, said that they applaud the idea of people buying their own homes, while obstructing such sales by every procedural and technical device?

Mr. Norris: My hon. Friend has raised a tremendously important point—the fundamentally schizophrenic nature of the Labour party. There is a split between those on the Front Bench, who are desperate to appeal to ordinary working people and to pretend that much of its history and ideology do not exist, and those inconvenient souls who litter the Back Benches and who so often remind those on the Front Bench that there is good, old-fashioned recidivist socialism, and that they have not, for one minute, accepted the concepts about which we have been talking. On the contrary, they are back to the old arrogance of socialism. For example, they believe in the paternalist philosophy and look to the day when we decided that we would not have the state as landlord for one third of tenants as being a dreadful day, when some great social damage was inflicted. In all seriousness they advocate the idea that every sale of a council property should automatically initiate the building of a replacement of that property. That extraordinary proposition is based on the belief that the state should be landlord to one third of the people. We oppose that proposition.

Another great initiative from the Government is the housing action trust, which is designed not to make profit for local authorities, the Government or anyone, but simply to give proper responsibility for their own lives to the tenants of dwellings. I am glad that it is being accepted nationally not only by Conservative Members but even by Labour Members. Tenants recognise that it is the key to the more efficient management of their dwellings.

Socialism is arrogant not only in housing but in education. Were Labour to come to power, its belief that nanny knows best would lead to the destruction of grant-maintained schools and the city technology colleges. I wonder how far a Labour Government would go in reversing the local management of schools, one of the most rewarding concepts to be introduced in education since the war. It was entirely the product of the reforms introduced by my right hon. Friend the present Home Secretary in the Education Reform Act 1988, which he so brilliantly piloted through Parliament and which has been such a marvellous success. The Labour party's opposition to the private sector in education and choice is so well known that it hardly bears repetition.

The one great saving grace for the Labour party has been the existence of that well-known columnist of a number of Maxwell newspapers, Peter Mandelson, and the air brush. He is there, scouring every Labour party document and, wherever he sees the word "socialist" or "socialism", the air brush comes out and the word disappears. We are seeing the sanitising of Labour's policies because the party feels that it must not frighten the horses. It must not use words such as "socialist" which are discredited throughout the world in the wake of events in central and eastern Europe in the past couple of years and by the experience of the last Labour Government.

We see the reality every day in the House. Often, when I am speaking outside the House, I tell audiences that Conservative Members have a unique opportunity. Every day, we see how unreconstructed the Labour party is. As its Front-Bench Treasury team desperately tries to persuade us of its fiscal rectitude and says that spending commitments will be fulfilled only "as resources allow"—one of the most extraordinarily mealy-mouthed phrases in contemporary political science—other shadow spokesmen go around making spending commitments every day. At the moment, they are worth in excess of £30,000 million a year, and that is for starters.

The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) asked which Government had had the higher overall level of taxation. I will tell him something that he should know. What the Conservative party has done, and what my right hon. Friend the Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) was so right to do during her 10-year tenure of office, was to ensure that what the nation required to be spent was what the Government would have the guts to raise in taxes. Therefore, during her period of office we were, uniquely, in a position to make massive repayments of our international debt. We entered the recession with the best balance sheet of any of the economies of western Europe and will therefore have the strength to emerge from it.

I could give people lower taxation tomorrow, but it would be at the expense of borrowing and printing money. My example for that is the Labour Government. Those weasel words that imply that the only important factor is the actual level of taxation are the great lie that Opposition Members, and the party of which the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland was once a member, consistently sell. The burden on a taxpayer is not simply what he

[Mr. Norris]

pays now in tax but the consequential burdens of printing money that devalues the currency and borrowing money that will impose a future debt on him, on his children and on his children's children.

The dichotomy in the Labour party remains. On the one hand, there is a manic enthusiasm for spending commitments, and on the other there is the Front-Bench Treasury team desperately trying to persuade us that nothing has changed.

Mr. Bermingham: Will the hon. Gentleman explain why national insurance contributions were 6 per cent. in 1979 but are now 9 per cent., and why capital gains tax was 30 per cent. then and is now 40 per cent? Why is VAT, which was then 8 per cent., now 17·5 per cent? Why has the average tax burden on the average citizen of this country risen from 32 to 34 per cent. over the past 12 years if the Conservative party is a party of low taxation? But, of course, that question is too inconvenient for the hon. Gentleman to answer.

Mr. Norris: It might be too much to expect—indeed, it might be slightly arrogant on my part to imagine—that the hon. Gentleman was listening to what I said. As I have been decrying the quality of arrogance, it would come ill from me not to recognise the potential for arrogance of every politician. What the hon. Gentleman has said was precisely the point that I was making. We can compare rates of tax. With notice, no doubt we could compare our lists. I could give him a long list of individual taxes that have been abolished by the Government or are now lower —what about income tax, for example? In all the hon. Gentleman's scouring around to find taxes which are now higher than they were under Labour, he has forgotten the one tax that affects 22 million people—income tax. Were he to put income tax into his equation he might give us a more realistic scenario.

Mr. Chris Smith *rose*——

Mr. Norris: Will the hon. Gentleman allow me to finish my speech, as I am about to do? I am explaining to the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) that the burden of taxation is not contained simply in one tax—nor, ironically, is it contained in the totality of direct and indirect taxes imposed upon a citizen on any one day. Realistically, we must take account of the future burden being imposed on any generation of taxpayers.

Any Government can give people a free ride in terms of taxation for a year or two—even, in view of the Labour Government's record, for six years—but eventually that free ride comes crashing against the buffers and somebody has to pick up the pieces. To everyone who may at some time in the future read the record of our deliberations, I say, "If you credit Labour taxation policy, you will see the train upon which they will embark crashing into the buffers, and only a Conservative Government will have the guts to restore the nation's health."

I conclude by quoting from a journalist whom I do not see as a particular friend of the Conservative party. Robert Harris said the other day in *The Sunday Times:*

"The truth is that Labour—in terms of intellectual activity, as measured by numbers of publications—is perilously close to brain dead in this country."

I am someone whose family voted Labour for many years, and I myself voted Labour in 1964. But, sadly, I have seen the fallacy of socialism for myself; I have seen it in the community of Liverpool in which I was brought up, and I have had to live through trying to build a business. I see all around me in my constituency and elsewhere the benefits that a Conservative Government have brought in terms of individual freedom and prosperity.

Robert Harris was right. Socialism is intellectually dead —brain dead—in Britain. That is the lesson, and I sincerely hope that at the next general election the people will be prepared to remember it.

10.56 am

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): I see from the Order Paper that this debate was supposed to call attention to the failures of socialism. Despite all his attempts the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans), who moved the motion, missed one failure. Had he mentioned it, I would have agreed with him. There was one stark failure of the Labour Government——

Mr. Irvine Patnick (Sheffield, Hallam): Only one?

Mr. McKelvey: This is the one that I want to talk about. It is the failure to establish a Government in Scotland—a parliament for the Scottish people. I shall outline how such a Scottish assembly would ensure that the interests of the Scottish people are paramount.

When we have a Labour Government—which will happen as soon as the Prime Minister has the guts to call an election—one of the highest priorities on their agenda will be the establishment of a directly elected assembly for Scotland.

To discuss the matter we need to reflect on the current situation in Scotland—one in which we Scots have lived for too long. As hon. Members who take an interest in the subject will know, Scotland is a nation full of contradictions. It is the world's fifth largest producer of one of the most precious natural resources—oil. We are a world leader in offshore technology——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I realise that the hon. Gentleman tabled the second motion on the Order Paper, but he is now speaking to the first motion. I am sure that he can use his ingenuity to relate his remarks to that.

Mr. McKelvey: You may have misheard my opening remarks, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I said that an incoming Labour Government will redress the failure of the previous Labour Government—a failure of socialism which we admit. I shall go on to explain what redress there will be and how it will affect Scotland.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: While the hon. Gentleman is on the subject of socialism and a Scottish assembly, will he tell the House what the impact on the people of Scotland would be in terms of extra taxation? What extra rate of tax will the Scottish people have to pay for that luxury?

Mr. McKelvey: I know that the hon. Gentleman takes a keen interest in Scottish affairs and is anxious to hear what I have to say. I have spoken for only two minutes on how the Scottish people will feel on the subject. If the hon. Gentleman has the patience and I have the time, I shall try to explain to him what he wants to know.

As I said, Scotland is a nation full of contradictions. We are the world's fifth largest producer of oil—one of the most precious natural resources—and we are a world leader in offshore technology. Scotland has huge coal

reserves and a long history of engineering, which has now been adapted to the frontiers of high technology. It has a tradition of education and training with the potential to match the best in the world. We produce high-quality knitwear, textiles, lace, whisky and much else. In a world in which leisure time is growing, Scotland is one of Europe's leading attractions for tourism, recreation and cultural pursuits.

Hearing all that—it has to be acknowledged as fact—one would think that we were a most fortunate and well-endowed nation. But the majority of Scots have no share in all that wealth and potential wealth.

The hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield made no mention of the difficulties facing the Scottish people. He said that the Prime Minister had refused to sign the social charter because it would create more unemployment. That baffles me. I have some charts here which show average male earnings from 1980 to 1991. Taking the United Kingdom average as 100 per cent., in 1980 people in Scotland earned 99 per cent. of the average wage paid throughout the whole country. The Scots now earn 90 per cent. of the average United Kingdom wage, yet unemployment is higher in Scotland than it is south of the border. How is it that, although we work for under the rate paid elsewhere, our unemployment continues to rise and is higher than that in the rest of the country? On a parallel graph, if we reduced our wages further, it would mean still higher unemployment. Perhaps the Minister will explain to me why, although we work for lower wages, we have more unemployment. Our economy fails to provide employment for half a million people. So much for the Valhalla that the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield portrayed.

One million Scots are now on or below the poverty line and nearly another million are on the margins of poverty. Yet the Scottish people have the rights that the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield outlined. It seems that we have the right of equality only to be unequal.

For the past three decades, Scotland has persistently voted socialist, and there are now only nine Scottish Conservative Members. Not one of them is here today —nor is any Scottish Minister present, although one should perhaps have been here to answer the debate that might have followed this one had there been time. Of a total of 72 Scottish Members, only nine are Conservatives. No one could even begin to misunderstand, therefore, how Scotland feels. Conservative Members wax eloquent about responsibilities and say that they do not want to impose their wishes on others—which they say is what the socialist creed entails. The situation does not augur well for those hon. Members representing constituencies south of the border who marched through the Lobbies to impose that unwanted, obnoxious, unworkable tax—the poll tax—on the people of Scotland a year before it was introduced here. As a matter of fact, it could have been argued in the courts that that process was unconstitutional.

Mr. Norris: As we are talking about one national group imposing its will on another, does the hon. Gentleman agree that it was Scottish Labour voters who imposed the last Labour Government on the people of England and Wales—with disastrous consequences? The hon. Gentleman will confirm that; it is undoubtedly a fact.

Will he also tell the House how many Members he would propose to send to Westminster when his proposed new Scottish assembly is set up?

Mr. McKelvey: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that if the people of Scotland or their representatives could impose their will on the whole United Kingdom, the country would be in a much better state. There would be much less poverty, and wealth would be shared far more fairly. The wealthy have grown wealthy on the backs of the poor and the poor are a much bigger group than they were 13 years ago.

On the hon. Gentleman's second point, let us first set up our Scottish Parliament. The argument as to how many representatives we send to Westminster will then be a Westminster problem, not a West Lothian problem.

One in four of our young people leaves school at 16 with no qualifications and scant hope for the future, and hundreds of thousands are homeless. Conservative Members refer to the great repair job that has been done on our great cities and to the advancement and enhancement of London. One has only to walk along the road from here to Victoria station of an evening to see the results of 13 years of Conservatism. In shop doorways from here to Victoria there are cardboard boxes containing human beings. That is not the kind of enhancement of a city centre for which my people, my family or I would argue.

Millions of Scots find it rather difficult to grasp the fact that we inhabit one of the world's wealthiest countries yet we are some of the poorest people in the United Kingdom. It is only fair that we should redress the balance.

Many people in Scotland have come to realise that it is not enough just to change the Government. It would not be enough simply to vote in Labour, although it is a fact that, since 1959, the overwhelming majority of Scots have not voted Tory but have put their faith in and cast their vote for the Labour party. The continual overruling of Scottish laws and customs by the Tory Government at Westminster as if Scotland were some forgotten distant colony has led many people to realise that we must change the system.

I have been here throughout the 13 years of Tory Government and have consistently argued against the role played in Scottish matters by the Secretary of State for Scotland. He has withdrawn from local government its right to manage and withdrawn the funds to enable it to manage properly. He is still determined to stick to the dogma of the unwanted poll tax. He still argues that we should pursue those who were due to pay the 20 per cent., even if they cannot afford to pay it.

At present, I am pursuing two cases in my constituency. The first concerns an old lady in a nursing home, who is being pursued for the 20 per cent. that she should have paid last year. She has no funds at all. Even her pocket money is captured by the nursing home, which administers her personal needs.

The other case concerns a person who is in receipt of income support from the Department of Social Security, which has said that, because of the other deductions that it is making from the person's income, it simply cannot make further deductions to pay the 20 per cent. charge levied on the poorest of our people.

Why is it, now that we know that the poll tax has been a disaster—after all, it caused the demise of the previous Prime Minister—that we must pursue relentlessly a dogma that militates against the poorest of our people? Why could we not have scrapped the 20 per cent? Why not forget the dogma which says that everyone must pay and everyone must be made accountable, and give some relief

[Mr. McKelvey]

to the poorest people in our society? The truth is that, after 13 years of Conservatism, the poorest have become poorer and the rich have become better heeled.

Mr. Bermingham: Does my hon. Friend agree that a society that will send a 71-year-old to prison because she cannot pay the poll tax—in a Conservative borough, I hasten to add—and that will do the same to other elderly people who do not have the means to pay is a society that needs to be condemned, not praised?

Mr. McKelvey: I could not agree more. My hon. Friend adds emphasis to my point that dogma rules. Conservative Members say that they do not wish to pursue people or insist that their will should be enforced. It makes one wonder about that when one hears of someone of such frailty being pursued and put in prison for failing to pay a tax that everyone recognises was nonsensical from the moment that it was introduced.

Mr. Gerald Bowden: Does the hon. Gentleman condone the borough of Southwark, which has £35 million-worth of rent arrears, for its failure to collect? Does he feel that that is a proper approach of socialism to outstanding debt?

Mr. McKelvey: Many things can cause a failure to collect and one of them is the inability of the poor to pay. We must consider these matters and make——

Mr. Gerald Bowden: What about benefits?

Mr. McKelvey: If people are paid benefits, the benefit officers make the appropriate deductions, but that is not the answer in the case of people who are so poor that the benefit officers say that nothing more can be deducted. The only response is to clap them in irons, but that will not persuade anyone to listen to reason or to feel that he should be accountable. The truth is, as Conservative Members know, that the poll tax was unwanted. It was an abomination and the Government were advised by the counterparts of those who now sit in the officials' Box not to introduce it.

The hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield talked about how the Government were able to save money. He told us about the chaos that was caused by socialist policies and referred especially to public works departmens. He said that the number of those employed in such departments was cut drastically. It is interesting that there are three advisers in the Box to advise the Minister during a debate on a Back-Bench Member's motion.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): It is astonishing that the hon. Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden)—does the hon. Member represent Dulwich? I forget. I should know because I live in his constituency. I do not vote for him, of course. It is astonishing that he should have made a riposte about housing benefit being available to the poor for housing costs and to have given the impression that he was in favour of housing benefit. If the strictures of the Conservative party against the implications of socialism were implemented, there would be no housing benefit. Help from the state to assist the poor is a socialist idea yet it seems to be enthusiastically welcomed by some Conservative Members.

Mr. McKelvey: As always, my hon. Friend has given me great assistance. I agree, of course, with everything that he says.

I was saying that the Government treat Scotland as if it were a forgotten colony. That being so, the Scots must take responsibility for their own government. The Labour party is 100 per cent. committed to a Scottish parliament in Scotland that will take over the government of Scotland. The first-past-the-post system will not be used. It will be interesting to observe what takes place.

One of the responsibilities of a Scottish parliament will be health care. If we had a socialist Government and socialist health policies, it can be said with certainty that we would not have had the undemocratic farce that took place recently in south Ayrshire, where a brand-new hospital has recently been completed at a cost of £31 million. It is extremely well equipped. The management, through the health board, applied for opting-out status. The Secretary of State for Scotland said that there would be a consultative programme. When the right hon. Gentleman made that announcement I asked him and his junior Ministers if they would interpret the results of that process fairly and squarely. I wanted to know whether the application would be refused if the results showed that the overwhelming desire of the people in Ayrshire was that the hospital should remain as it was, under the auspices of the Ayrshire and Arran health board.

The Secretary of State would not give me a straightforward answer. One of his junior Ministers did, however. I was told that it would be an honest consultative process. He said that submissions would be examined but added that even if there were a massive majority vote against the application, that would not necessarily lead to the opting-out application being refused.

Under the consultative process, there were more than 700 submissions to the Ayrshire and Arran health board. About 500 were made by way of a written postcard. The Secretary of State decided that he should push those submissions aside. Whether that decision was democratic is a matter of judgment, but responsibility must rest with the Secretary of State. Under a socialist Administration, the consultative process would not have been handled in that way. It would not have allowed the matter to be handled undemocratically. There certainly was a failure to uphold democracy by a Conservative-controlled authority.

Of the 256 written applications, only nine were in favour of the application to opt out. All the others were against it. They came from churches, consultants, general practitioners and every political party with the exception of the Scottish National party.

The Secretary of State examined the submissions not on the basis of whether they were for or against, as a socialist Administration would have done, but in terms of "quality". He decided that the submissions made by Labour Members, Labour authorities, churches, consultants, general practitioners, nurses, other employees in the service and other individuals were of a lower quality than those from the 11 apparatchiks who had been placed to argue that opted-out status should be given to the hospital.

Opting-out has been pursued in Scotland, but in England there have been second thoughts about the process. With some democracy, Ministers have slowed the process and put a stop to such applications in the

meantime. Some of the hospitals that have opted out in the south have found themselves in extremely serious difficulties.

Had there been a socialist Administration dealing with social welfare, it is certain that pensioners would have been about £23 a week better off. That would have been the result of keeping them within the formula that was being used in 1979, when there was a socialist Administration.

Mr. Robert Hughes: It is argued by Conservative Members that socialism is undemocratic and that the Conservative approach is more democratic, but this is an undemocratic, centralising Government. They preside over the United Kingdom, and in Scotland the so-called local control of national health service trusts was removed. The trusts did not have the right to choose their putative chairmen. The chairmen were approached by the Scottish Office. There was no local democracy.

Mr. McKelvey: I am indebted to my hon. Friend. I know that he has a wealth of information to offer the House on these matters. I am sure that before I have completed my speech he will have helped me even more.

There is a catalogue of issues to be dealt with and I have not yet reached the real meat, which is how the Scottish people feel about the Government's policies and actions. I shall take my time and try to remain as calm as possible. If Conservative Members find it difficult to understand what I have to say and wish to put questions to me, I shall respond by trying to amplify my arguments. However, I do not want to take up too much time because I know that there are many hon. Members who wish to speak in this debate. I do not know, but we might get on to the next debate.

Mr. Soames: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that, in the event of a Scottish Office Minister arriving, he has another speech for the next debate?

Mr. McKelvey: I cannot confirm that. Without embarrassment, I would make the same speech again. There would be nothing wrong with making it again.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I trust that the hon. Member is responding to my appeal and is directing his remarks to the first motion.

Mr. McKelvey: I am, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but what I would be saying in speaking to the second motion would be not dissimilar to what I am saying now, because similar matters would be involved.

I could speak for at least half an hour on the deficiencies of the Government's social welfare policy. If we have reached a stage when people who are on benefit but who are subject to deductions are so poor that they cannot afford to pay the previous year's 20 per cent. poll tax, it is clear that there is real, harsh poverty. That has not been mentioned so far by Conservative Members.

In an intervention the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) alleged that local Labour parties had tried by all manner of means to stop people owning their own houses. There might have been a measure of truth in that in the early days, but that resistance has long gone.

Councils are concerned—as the Government should be—about the fact that the money that came into the coffers from the sale of council houses was moribund—trapped—and had not been used for the correct purpose, which was to build new houses for people who needed them. Homelessness in Scotland has risen and there are now many thousands of people on the waiting list who cannot be adequately housed, not to mention the hapless wretches whom we see on the streets of London. Many of them—26 per cent. at the last count—were Scots who had travelled south in search of the promised land about which we hear so much. However, they end up homeless, unwanted and uncared for. The Government are responsible for the state of those people.

Mr. Norris: Courtesy of the Labour Whip, we now know the truth about Labour's defence policy—the Leader of the Opposition merely allowed his CND card to lapse. Is not that what the hon. Gentleman is suggesting about Labour's opposition to the right to buy—Labour has merely allowed it to lapse? The hon. Gentleman said as much. The truth is that, despite the hon. Gentleman's posturing, Labour is trying to have it both ways—it knows the rightness of Tory politics, but cannot get away from its own rhetoric.

Mr. McKelvey: With regard to the right to buy, there has been an unprecedented number of recoveries. People cannot pay their mortgages and that is another problem not only in Scotland but in the south. I heard on the news only this morning that the Government, in their panic, are trying to push through a measure to protect those with mortgages because a record number of small business men are now unemployed as a result of the Government's policies. We would not be in that state if we had a socialist Government at Westminster and, of course, in Scotland.

How can the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield argue that there has been an improvement in the transport system? British Rail is in an absolute shambles because the Government have restricted and squeezed its funds. The rolling stock to the south is virtually falling off the bogeys. Socialist Administrations—unlike our Government—put money into transport infrastructure and have a much better system than ours. No one can claim that under its present strictures British Rail's management could run a proper integrated system. It is squeezed for cash. British Rail is instructed to make a profit on what should be a service to take people to and from work.

I deal now with agriculture in Scotland. If the MacSharry proposals were accepted, between a fifth and a quarter of Scottish farmers could go out of business. All hon. Members will agree that not only in Scotland but in England and Wales there has been a reduction in farmers' income totalling about 26 or 27 per cent. They cannot afford to continue in that way.

As a socialist, I want the land to be used properly for agriculture. I want the farmers to stay on the land because I am an environmentalist and I believe that if farmers are taken off the land—especially in Scotland—much of it would be laid to waste.

Mr. Robert Hughes: I should like to emphasise the plight of the farmers and the destitution facing the farming communities, especially in the north of Scotland where in the past 12 to 24 months there has been a rise in the number of suicides. The National Farmers Union for Scotland is very concerned that the farming community is returning to what it was between the wars when the only way that farmers could escape their debts and escape absolute penury for their families was to take their own

[Mr. Robert Hughes]

life. That is a serious matter which should be considered by those who believe that the free market is all that counts in life.

Mr. McKelvey: Such cases are especially sad. Another sad aspect is that farmers realise that their sons are not prepared to take on the onerous task of running farms, especially the hill farms in Scotland which require hard graft and apparently offer no possibility of making a profit for some years.

Let me state how a socialist Administration would deal with forestry. We would redress the imbalance that has been created by the selling of forestry land. We would reverse the process and return to the situation that existed in Scotland in 1979—80 per cent. of the land will be Forestry Commission land and 20 per cent. will be under scrutiny to ensure that it is properly managed.

Mr. Bermingham: Does my hon. Friend agree that growing fir trees is not necessarily the best way to afforestate land and that the sooner we return to a proper environmental approach to forestry—for example, the growing of oak, beech and ash—the better for the whole of our country?

Mr. McKelvey: I was just about to say that we must put an end to the massive tax dodge in which even television personalities have been indulging: planting firs in Scotland entitled them to a tax back-hander. That process will be abolished, if that has not already been done.

Mr. Patnick: Cannot the hon. Gentleman read his speech?

Mr. McKelvey: Yes, I can, but I am considering which matters I could perhaps best leave to other hon. Members who wish to participate and which matters I shall use in the next debate.

I have merely touched on the attitudes of the people of Scotland. Hon. Members wonder how I am able to argue so vociferously and with such sure footedness about what people in Scotland think about the Government and what they would like to see under a socialist Government.

On 30 November this year the *Glasgow Herald* carried out a series of polls in Scotland to discover what type of government or self-government the Scots wanted. More than three out of every four Scots questioned wanted some form of self-government. Support in Scotland for the current parliamentary system under Conservative control was less than 20 per cent. The Scottish National party and the Labour party both claim considerable comfort from the figures and graphs shown in the newspaper, but the figures in the System 3 poll put support for a devolved Scottish Parliament at 43 per cent.—that is for a Parliament in Scotland with maximalist powers. Support for complete independence was 35 per cent. and only 18 per cent. were in favour of no change to the present system. That means that 78 per cent. of the people of Scotland want a different kind of government. They do not want the Westminster parliamentary system and they certainly do not want that system run by Conservatives. The polls have remained fairly static in the past 10 years. The only alteration is an increase in the majority of the people seeking a change. Therefore, the wishes of the people of Scotland should not be treated lightly or disregarded by Conservative Members.

Some Conservative Members think that we are a bunch of whingers in Scotland and that we ought to shut up or put up. They are arguing that a referendum should be held and that the Scottish people should be given the stark option, "Either stay as you are or go fully independent." That is a dangerous road to travel. If that were the only option given to them today, the Scots would opt for independence. Those polls clearly show that they are prepared to stay as part of the union, but only as an equal partner, not as some far-flung, forgotten colony which is mentioned here once a month during Scottish Question Time, or when the Scottish Grand Committee meets in a Committee Room here. The Government are putting the brakes on those matters ever being discussed by a Scottish Grand Committee in Scotland.

The Government must begin to realise the difficulties which exist in Scotland—the problems that we are trying to tackle, which Scottish people feel strongly about. They have been voting consistently for socialist policies rather than for Conservative policies and they feel that their demise is due to the Conservative, non-socialist policies that are being applied.

I believe, as do all the men and women I talk to, that we should be working towards a Scottish Parliament. The lives of all Scots will be enriched if we take democratic responsibility for our government. I have watched with sadness the demise in the powers of local authorities. The Government have throttled them because they are holding the purse strings.

Under a socialist Government we shall achieve a directly elected assembly—or Parliament, as I prefer to call it—in Scotland, but that will be of no value if we leave Westminster the power to throttle it by holding back the necessary cash to run it. It would be a big mistake if Westminster thought that it could hold on to those powers.

The most useful explanation of the application of democracy for Scotland and for European structures that I have read recently was written by a man in Scotland for whom I have a high regard, the chairman of the executive of the Scottish Constitutional Convention, Canon Kenyon Wright. He said:

"There is a realisation that the Scottish issue and the current European issue are very close to one another. They are both about sovereignty. Both Scotland and the vision of a more integrated Europe, fundamentally question the strange view of sovereignty held in the English parliamentary tradition—namely that power is concentrated in one place and that any proposal to share that power with other levels is somehow a threat"—

to democracy—

"The opposition to real power for Scotland and the totally irrational fears of a European super state are based on the same fundamental misunderstanding of what sovereignty is all about."

To enlighten Conservative Members, the crux of the matter is that

"we live in a time when democracy itself, as well as the demands of the age in which we live, means that power must be shared at different levels for different purposes. So long as each level is fully democratic and therefore preserves the true sovereignty of the people"—

that is what is important—not the sovereignty of Parliament but the sovereignty of the people—

"this is the only way towards a just participatory and sustainable society."

I support those sentiments 100 per cent.

If I get the opportunity I shall return to expand those powerful concepts, but I do not want to take up time on that matter during this debate.

The assembly will take over key responsibilities for the government of Scotland. Much of the power over Scottish matters would be wrested from Westminister. That has to happen. It will be vital that local government powers and responsibilities are restored and extended to take the workload and to strengthen local democracy. We have to reverse at a stroke the present Government's 13 years of corrosive, dogmatic obsession with stripping the people of Scotland, England and Wales of their democratic rights, through the ballot box, to elect district and regional councils of their choice, without the threat of the withdrawal of cash by Westminister. With the Conservatives in power, consideration would never be given to electing a representative body by any other system than that of first past the post.

Parliament in Scotland will be elected by a form of proportional representation. The work of the Scottish Constitutional Convention, for about two years, especially in those areas which the executive members have been considering, has involved a great deal of work and heart searching. It is a credit to the Labour party that it has been able to sit down with other political parties and has been able to accept some form of proportional representation as a method for electing that Parliament.

The test of time will determine whether that socialist initiative will be acceptable, whether it will be a success or a failure. In the pursuit of some form of proportional representation it is interesting that women, who make up more than half of our community, will have fair and equal representation in a Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: The direct consequences of proportional representation will be fewer Members of Parliament from Scotland in this place and, proportionately, fewer Labour Members in any Scottish convention.

Mr. McKelvey: That is another matter. I am arguing about a democratic situation and I am not insisting that my party must have the majority of seats, irrespective of whether there is a democratic form of election. If the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) is saying that I should discard any form of democracy, because it will move against the party that I represent, let me tell him that I am a democrat. If that is a consequence of some form of proportional representation, I am prepared to bear it.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: I think that we are all democrats. The difficulty is, what is one's priority? Is it representative democracy, in which one Member of Parliament is solely responsible for his constituency—the smallest electoral area possible—or is it an alternative, arithmetic representation of political parties? One cannot have both. I know which I would go for—representing the people.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that we shall not lose sight of the motion before the House.

Mr. McKelvey: We are discussing socialist alternatives and Conservative dogma. We have not tried proportional representation. We are not slow to try experiments in Scotland. After all the Government stuck the poll tax in Scotland a year before it came here, despite the fact that we are supposed to be a union. I think that that was unconstitutional, but apparently the courts were not able to decide. In Scotland we were forced to accept a different taxation system from that in England and Wales and that should not have been allowed. Conservative Members representing English and Welsh seats showed no democracy when they marched through the Lobby triumphantly to impose a series of taxation measures in Scotland, measures which they know nothing of, and could not care less about. There was nothing democratic about that. If proportional representation results in fairer representation in any form of Parliament, it is a step forward for democracy, but time will tell.

Mr. Gerald Bowden: Did the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues from Scotland go into the Lobby for the Division on the abolition or retention of the Inner London education authority or the Greater London council?

Mr. McKelvey: I honestly do not recall. Hon. Members know our system in Parliament. Very often I do what the Whip tells me to do—[HON. MEMBERS: "Often?"]—I always do what the Whip tells me. We all know the position. It is one of the weaknesses of this place that one is not free to argue as an individual. I stood as a member of the Labour party. I am duty bound, therefore, broadly to follow its manifesto.

Mr. Bermingham: Does my hon. Friend agree that the hon. Members for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden) and for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) are shedding crocodile tears about electoral size? The Boundary Commission's redistribution in England in 1983 meant that seats in, for example, London ranged in size from 48,000 to 103,000. Are the 103,000 people less worthy than the 48,000? Both constituencies have only one Member. Surely the electoral system, as gerrymandered by the Boundary Commission, is a disgrace?

Mr. McKelvey: Of course it is. One of the difficulties with having more than one Member of Parliament for each constituency is the division of their tasks, but that could easily be overcome. I would rather have two Members of Parliament who applied themselves to a constituency than one Member of Parliament who had several outside jobs that prevented him from giving 100 per cent. attention and accountability to it. All hon. Members sometimes shed crocodile tears on that issue.

Four-year fixed terms for the Scottish assembly would free Scottish people from doubts about elections. Economic forecasts would not be a major factor in calling elections to the Scottish Parliament. An executive would be drawn from its elected Members.

Unlike Conservative ideas, the prominence of socialist membership——

Mr. Soames: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is quite plain that the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) is speaking to the second debate, calling

"attention to the future Government of Scotland; and to move, That this House acknowledges the sovereign rights of the Scottish people to determine the form of Government best suited to their needs."

His speech has nothing to do with the implications of socialism.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am not sure whether the hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) was in the Chamber when I made that point to the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey), who is linking

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

his remarks to a wide motion. I am sure that he will continue to do so and will not go into detail more appropriate to the second motion.

Mr. McKelvey: I do not wish to incur your wrath, Mr. Deputy Speaker; nor do I wish to impinge on my speech for the next debate, if I get the opportunity to make it. But these matters are dear to us in Scotland.

The hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) misses the point: the nation is divided, not only between rich and poor and north and south, but, in effect, a socialist Scotland and a Conservative England. Therefore, the frailties of socialism, if there are any, should have been highlighted by the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield. I am seeking to argue against the motion and to promote what is good in Scotland and what will be better under a Socialist Administration.

I am prepared to argue for proportional representation. It is not my fault that the Conservative party in Scotland refuses to participate in the constitutional convention. It is not my fault that the Secretary of State for Scotland denies the right of a Scottish convention to exist and refuses to discuss the matter with it. Only recently, the Secretary of State has done a U-turn and is now prepared to hold a debate in the House on the future government of Scotland. At least we shall then hear the Conservative view and Labour Members will be able to express their views on the frailties, or otherwise, of a socialist-led Scotland.

Nobody can deny that Scotland is socialist. Of the 72 Scottish seats 48 are Labour. The Scottish National party claims to be socialist. It has five Members, including one of ours who went over to it. In total, we carry the wishes of two thirds of the Scottish people. The socialist Administration in Scotland, particularly on the regional and district councils, are being prevented from carrying out socialist policies by Government dogma.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The word "Scotland" does not appear in the motion. The speech of the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) is highly irrelevant and has taken up nearly an hour of the House's time. Many hon. Members wish to speak about socialism.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman should leave this to the Chair.

Mr. McKelvey: The fact that the word "Scotland" does not appear in the motion condemns the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield, not me. If I had not had so many interruptions, I would have finished, because I wish to make only a couple of further points.

The polls show that Scotland does not accept the Conservative style of administration. It would be a sad day indeed, if, because of their dogmatic opposition to a socialist Administration, Conservative Members were prepared to leave us almost as a colony.

I have dealt with some of the difficulties that we have in socialist Scotland, which we shall try to overcome. I hope that the election is held as soon as possible so that the people of this country—particularly the poor, the down-trodden and the business men who have suffered from a record number of business failures—can decide whether they have had enough of this Government. The sooner the election is held, the sooner we shall be able to discuss the question of socialism.

Mr. Chris Smith: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have just received the inflation figures, which were published 20 minutes ago by the Central Statistical Office. They show that the headline rate of inflation has risen from 3·7 per cent. last month to 4·3 per cent. this month. Does not that give the lie to the motion, which refers to "reducing inflation"? It would appear that the Government are presiding over rising inflation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman can legitimately make that point, if he so wishes, when he catches my eye. I call Mr. Gerald Bowden.

Mr. Maclennan: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I must express my surprise that you have thought fit to call three Conservative Members and one Opposition Member in a debate that has lasted for two hours and twenty minutes when other hon. Members on the Opposition Benches have sought to catch your eye. If there is some reason for that, it would be extremely interesting to hear it as it is a departure from convention.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: This is a matter for the Chair, but I did note that the hon. Gentleman did not rise earlier in the debate.

Mr. Maclennan: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hesitate to contradict you flatly, but I regret that you did not see me rise earlier in the debate. I have been here seeking to catch your eye from the beginning of the debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that what I said was correct.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith)——

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Is this a point of order?

Mrs. Mahon: Yes. The Prime Minister promised the country that he had licked inflation. Has he contacted you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to make it known that he will come to the House to explain why, yet again, something he said has not proved to be true?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There has been no request for a statement of which I am aware.

11.50 am

Mr. Gerald Bowden (Dulwich): I am sure that it will be a disappointment to those on the thronged Opposition Benches that I intend to return to a discussion of the motion on the Order Paper. After the agreeable digression about the highlands and islands and the bogus points of order, I can understand why the Opposition do not want to discuss the issue of socialism.

I had great sympathy with what my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) said. He made no attribution of bad faith to the Opposition. I agree with my hon. Friend that we, from whatever party we are elected, come to the House by and large with the belief that we are

here to try to improve the lot of those whom we represent. I do not believe that the way in which we discuss issues in the House reveals any bad faith or deliberate corruptness.

At this moment we are witnessing the collapse of socialism throughout eastern Europe. That collapse is also manifest in this country. Those of us who have taken an interest in the way in which the flagship of socialism, the *Daily Mirror*, has represented its cause are concerned about the way in which voices are heard in the House.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I wonder whether you are all right. Do you need the protection of the House?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Mr. Bowden.

Mr. Bowden: The two current political theories on government suggest that it results either from a cock-up or a conspiracy. It is clear that socialism has collapsed because of both those factors.

Those of us who have lived under a socialist regime in local government recognise that, although the highest ideals may have prompted people to accept socialism as the modus operandi for the provision of local government services, it is subject to corruption and inefficiency. That means that the way in which those services are provided serves as a disadvantage rather than as a benefit to those who receive them.

At my advice surgery tonight, as on every other Friday night, there will be about 30 people who have come with a grievance or complaint. The vast majority of those complaints will be about Southwark's services, particularly relating to housing performance. The failure of that socialist-run local authority to provide services to meet the needs of the people is one demonstrable example of the failure of socialism at a practical level.

I recall the words in scripture which suggest that "By their lights you shall know them". One knows that the lights of socialism burn dimly in those authorities where socialism is put into practice. If one wants a practical judgment of socialism, one need only study the London boroughs, especially the London borough of Southwark which I know best, to see the failure of that theory when put into practice.

Reference has been made to the failure of some authorities to collect rents. It is scandalous that about £35 million of outstanding rent is due from Southwark tenants. Those arrears do not result simply because of a failure to pay or an inability to pay through poverty. Properly organised provisions exist to ensure that those who do not have the necessary financial resources to pay are supported. The failure to collect the rents and to guarantee good management within the housing department means that a heavier burden falls, unjustly, upon those who are called upon to make up the deficit. The failure to collect the £35 million means that a heavier burden falls on all the other right-thinking and responsible people of Southwark who have made their payments.

To allow such staggering rent arrears to accrue is one aspect of the overall failure of local authority housing provision. Another is the inability of local government to bring empty properties back into use swiftly. Practices within local authority direct labour departments—they may or may not be corrupt—have often led to an empty property, habitable or not, being boarded up immediately or being subjected to a maintenance provision. Many people on the housing waiting list would willingly take an undecorated property. They could work on that property and decorate it according to their style. Instead, those properties are unnecessarily refurbished by the local authority. Empty properties should be brought back into use immediately, but the restrictive practices that direct labour departments of local authorities enforce are equivalent to socialism in action. They limit the opportunities to reduce housing waiting lists.

Today, we have heard mention of the right to buy. That provision has given people the opportunity to obtain independence from a local authority landlord who puts many heavy restrictions upon them. One notices immediately the sense of independence that is apparent among those who have purchased their homes. They are no longer subject to those restrictions and can make the improvements that they want.

The right-to-buy policy has been grudgingly adopted by the Opposition because they know that it touches a nerve of popular appeal. However, although the Labour party has accepted it in theory, it has done all that it can in practice—certainly in Southwark—to inhibit those who wish to purchase. However, new provisions have been enacted to ensure that local authorities act promptly to deal with right-to-buy applications; they are penalised if they fail to do so. That has forced the Labour party to find other tactics to frustrate those who want to purchase.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will speak in the debate. He should be aware of the way in which local authorities project high maintenance charges with a view to frightening off those who might think of purchasing a property. We know that the work envisaged in the estimate of charges would never be done, but those astronomical figures frighten off potential purchasers.

Housing is just one aspect of the failure of socialism in local government. That failure is also apparent in the provision of social services. My borough of Southwark has a scandalous history of failure in the provision of such services. That has happened in many homes for the elderly. In one or two cases, a calculated and systematic regime of cruelty has been inflicted on those who have been incarcerated—I use that word advisedly—in such homes in the care of Southwark council. Those incidents have been subject of a ministerial inquiry at the homes involved have been closed.

Mr. Bermingham: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I thought that there was a convention that we do not attack people who cannot reply. The hon. Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden) has used the word "corrupt" several times with regard to Southwark council. He is now using the word "incarcerated". Of course, incarceration is the criminal offence of false imprisonment. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to attack people personally, let him have the courage to make his remarks publicly outside, were he can be sued.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is a matter for the hon. Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden). He did not say anything that was out of order.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. On the issue of corruption in local government, some of us are prepared to talk about corrupt Tory councils outside this place. As the hon. Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden) is talking about corrupt councils, I wish to refer to the corrupt Westminster

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

city council, which sold off three cemeteries for 5p a piece. Its successor, another Tory council, now has to buy them back for several millions of pounds. The result is that people in Westminster and taxpayers generally have to foot the bill for the corrupt activities of the Tory-controlled Westminster city council, and I shall say that outside this place.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. These are not points of order but matters for debate. If the hon. Member wishes to raise a point of order, I shall hear it.

Mrs. Gorman: Further to the earlier point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As a member of Westminster city council when that deal was done, I want the House to know that it was done for the perfectly legitimate reason of reducing the cost of running a very expensive loss-making operation for the council. There was no suggestion of corruption and there has been no question of prosecution. To say that there has been is an absolute and outright untruth.

Mr. Skinner: That is very revealing. The hon. Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) was involved as well—a Tory Member of Parliament.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We must not forget the hon. Member for Dulwich, who has the floor.

Mr. Bowden: I shall check the record, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I think that I did not personalise my remarks at all. In a debate such as this, with such an enticing motion on the Order Paper, I expected to see the Opposition Benches thronged with hon. Members wishing to defend the ideology that brought them here and justifying the basis on which they sought election, but those Benches are denuded.

Southwark is one of the most interesting councils in as much as the area includes three parliamentary constituencies—one held by a Conservative, one by a Liberal Democrat and one by a Labour Member. If Southwark's socialism needs defending, the hon. Member for Peckham (Ms. Harman)—who represents the socialist interest in the House—might attend to make that point.

Mrs. Mahon *rose*——

Mr. Bowden: The Opposition Benches may not be strong in numbers, but the sanctimonious tendency is here in strength.

Mrs. Mahon: The hon. Gentleman talked about ideology. I wonder whether he would like to comment on the ideologies that prevail in countries such as Brazil, where millions of street children are shot because the capitalists send out gangs to murder them because they make the place look untidy, or the Philippines, where in Manila alone there are 25,000 child prostitutes and millions of people live below the poverty line.

If we are having a discussion about ideology, perhaps the hon. Gentleman will give a more balanced view and point out that capitalism is failing millions of people, not least in this country. Yesterday, in my constituency, a 79-year-old lady collapsed and died as she queued for free food from the EC. Hundreds of people queued in the freezing cold. I raised that matter last night on the Adjournment. Does the hon. Gentleman believe that his party's ideology has been a success for people over the past 12 years?

Mr. Bowden: I understand why the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) wished to divert our attention to Scotland and why the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) wishes to divert it to Brazil. What one sees near home is far too embarrassing for them to debate.

During a quiet evening when I was in the Chamber, I found myself thumbing through the debates in the other place. I was particularly struck by a debate on 31 January 1991, when the deputy leader of the socialist Opposition raised the matter of corporate governments. I should like to direct the attention of the hon. Member for Halifax to that debate, which dealt with what the duties of non-executive directors of companies should be—*[Interruption.]*

Mrs. Gorman: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I know what the hon. Member is about to say. We would be well advised to take notice of what is happening in the Chamber.

Mr. Bowden: To return to the tranquillity of the debate in the other place on 31 January, Lord Williams of Elvel and Lord Donoughue referred to corporate governments and the duties of directors. It is interesting that they both represent the socialist interest in the other place and that both have been identified as directors of the flagships of socialism, the *Daily Mirror* and the Maxwell group of companies.

Yesterday evening, I had the opportunity to remind Lord Donoughue of his words. He said, "Most of the recent highly publicised corporate scandals"——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Is the hon. Member quoting the words of a member of another place? It is not in order to do so unless that member for is a Minister. I remind the hon. Member that it is not in order to criticise members of the other place other than by way of a motion.

Mr. Bowden: I am grateful for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was not quoting. I was paraphrasing, not criticising. Indeed, I was complimenting Lord Donoughue on his foresight at such an early stage in the year in drawing attention to an issue that bears heavily on socialism in action, the socialists who control companies and contribute to the socialist party in the House and in the country at large—"By their deeds ye shall know them."

If I may paraphrase, Lord Donoughue said, "Most of the recent highly publicised corporate scandals could have been avoided or exposed at an earlier stage by alert and truly independent directors." Both Lord Donoughue and his colleague, Lord Williams of Elvel, were directors of just that independence and quality. It is interesting that, with the collapse of those great empires of socialism in eastern Europe, we have also seen the collapse of the great commercial socialist empire of Maxwell. We do not take pride in a failure, because we see within it the essence for the failure which we are trying to identify in this debate.

Mr. Skinner: He was a crook.

Mr. Bowden: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman is referring from a sedentary position to me as a crook or to some other person, but I shall willingly give way so that he can clarify the matter.

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Gentleman obviously did not catch what I was saying. I was referring to the fact that Maxwell was a crook. I was one of those who from time to time highlighted that fact both in this place and outside it. It was no surprise to me when the house of cards came tumbling down.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: It was a surprise for that gullible gentleman, the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Skinner: I have nothing to say about the hon. Gentleman's comment.

The *Daily Mirror* supported the Labour leadership. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden) is aware that from time to time I was attacked in the *Daily Mirror* because I stood up and acted like a socialist.

Mr. Bowden: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his clarification. I would not say that Mr. Maxwell was a crook—merely that he was a socialist in the way he conducted his affairs. That seems to be evident from the debate.

We are discussing a rather wider issue than the simple matter of two ideologies. We are examining the way in which they provide for the needs of a country and the way in which, in delegated form, local government and local health and education authorities make provision for people's needs. It is demonstrable that when socialism is in charge of those matters the provision of the services is less efficient, less attractive and more expensive. That issue is fundamental whatever Labour's cosmetic changes and irrespective of the way in which it tries to disguise or put a fig leaf over its socialism. With the advent of an election, Labour cannot disguise the basic fact that, in practice, when socialism provides services it does it less efficiently and more expensively. Over the past 12 years we have demonstrated what conservatism in practice can do, and I know that the electors will make the right choice.

Several Hon Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before I call the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), may I say that I regret any misunderstanding that may have arisen between the hon. Gentleman and me and apologise to him. However, I remind the hon. Gentleman and the House that it is the sole prerogative of the Chair to decide which hon. Member to call.

12.11 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): Your remarks, Mr. Deputy Speaker, show your characteristic courtesy. I regret anything that I may have said which has given offence.

The debate has certainly not thrown a great deal of light on the nature of socialism. The hon. Member for Dulwich (Mr. Bowden) failed to discharge the burden of proof that the troubles faced by the country have anything to do with socialism. We have never really seen socialism in this country and some people may take comfort from that. Others, including, perhaps, the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), regret it. Socialism has not characterised the beSaviour of the Labour party in government although individual members of Labour Governments may have been inspired by socialist idealism.

The debate was initiated by the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) and he treated socialism and Labour as synonymous. No doubt that was intended to shower pejoratives on the concept. The House does not normally deal in abstract philosophical concepts but rather with the way in which the country is being governed and the impact of that on the country. It is remarkable that the three speeches from Conservative Members have wholly failed to acknowledge the plight to which their party has brought the country.

Mr. Bermingham: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that Conservative speeches have been cant and rubbish? There was not an intelligent remark in any of them.

Mr. Maclennan: I thought that they would have taken the opportunity to engage in serious discussion about political ideology, but, bearing in mind the Conservative Members who participated in the debate, perhaps that was too much to hope for.

The hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) said that his friends who come to this country from abroad would be struck by the enormous progress that has been made over the past 12 years. His experience is different from mine, because most of my friends from other countries are struck by the relative decline in our standards of public provision over the past 12 years. They are struck by the squalor of our cities compared with other western European cities and by the evident poverty of sections of our community who are forced to lie out in the streets in freezing weather. They are struck by all the signs of a country in which mammon reigns and where the divisions between rich and poor are increasing, to the discredit of the Government who have presided over it.

I do not know whether that is a denial of socialism. Socialism has little to say that is relevant to the world in which we live. It may have had at some time, but not now. I am more interested in what drives the current Labour party. I ask myself whether it is socialism and what is meant by socialism. I recall the reasons that drove me to leave the Labour party. I certainly did not feel that it was about to be taken over by some form of eastern European-style socialism. It was rather the disunity, the dogmatism and the unwise trade union domination which dogged the Labour party in government, in which I served, and in opposition when many of the policies pursued by the last Labour Government were rejected and reviled.

Mr. Skinner: When the hon. Gentleman came here he came as a Labour Member. Even if he did not profess to be a socialist at that time, the only way in which he could become a Labour Member was by taking socialist money. To win marginal seats, such as that of the hon. Gentleman in Scotland, socialists had to put their hands into their back pockets and provide money. That was how the hon. Gentleman became a Labour Member and served in a Labour Government. Then he joined the gang of four and another party. That borders on—I was about to say hypocrisy, but I do not think that I am allowed to say that.

Mr. Maclennan: The hon. Gentleman wants to fight battles of years which he and I fought 10 years ago. The

[Mr. Maclennan]

reality is that those who elected me have seen fit to re-elect me twice since that battle was fought. I can only assume that they did not think that my action was mistaken.

Mr. Soames: I know the hon. Gentleman extremely well. When he changed his party those who sent him to Parliament supported him in great numbers. On this occasion the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is wrong.

Mr. Maclennan: I have always rather admired the hon. Member for Bolsover. I know that he does not reciprocate and I do not expect him to. I admire him for his outspoken adherence to his beliefs. My beliefs have taken me down a different path, but I think that the hon. Gentleman knows that they are sincerely held. I shall leave it at that.

What is the democratic socialism that inspires the Labour party? Perhaps a clue was given about this time last year when the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) published his autobiography. It was something of a best seller just before Christmas last year and I was struck by its reference to the words of a Polish democratic socialist, Lesjek Klakowski, who has chosen to live in this country. He defined democratic socialism as

"a positive will to erode by inches the conditions which produce avoidable suffering."

That creed has sustained embattled dissenters in eastern Europe when the going was rough and perhaps it has also sustained people in the Labour party. However, for me, that approach is too gradualist, too determinist.

A positive will to erode by inches the conditions that produce avoidable suffering will not bring about the changes that are needed in this country, in the time scale that is necessary, if we are to avoid the fate of being a third-class economy and a third-class democracy.

As a description of the approach of the right hon. Member for Leeds, East, it is faultless. In a memorable passage in his book he also said:

"In a parliamentary democracy change can be achieved only through working inside a party. This means accepting its constraints and its disciplines. It means acquiescing in policies that you dislike until you can persuade your party to change them."

I do not know whether the hon. Member for Bolsover always acquiesces in policies that he dislikes, but I certainly recognise that the right hon. Member for Leeds, East did.

I do not believe that politics can be compared with the race between the tortoise and the hare. That description of political change and how it comes about in this country, is, in my view, unhistorical. When reform has come it has not come by tittuping little steps, taken and then held firm. It has come in great waves. It has come twice in this century —in the reforming Governments of Asquith and Lloyd George before the first world war and, for the second time, in the post-war Labour Government of 1945 to 1951, which introduced the national health service and an altogether more secure position for people living in poverty than had been their lot in the 1930s.

There are some who think that there has been a similar change in the 1980s under the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher)—the change in the balance of power between the trade unions and the state. I doubt whether it will be seen, in the eye of history, that any such historic change occurred. The right hon. Lady's achievements seem to me to be likely to be passing ones. They certainly do not appear to have prepared the country for the challenges that we face as a result of the growing union in western Europe.

Labour party strategists appear to me to be unnecessarily conservative. They seek to reassure the public that by change they mean little more than not doing the unpopular things that have been done by the present Government. For some people, I suppose that the mere relief that would flow from the end of this present Government might be regarded as enough to support the Labour party, but in its day-to-day handling of the political challenges that face it, too often the Labour party relies upon the negative. I do not think that it has put its alternatives clearly enough before the country.

When the country was faced by the last challenge of empire—Hong Kong—the Labour leadership was swift to condemn the Government's paltry and counterproductive proposals in refusing to allow Hong Kong citizens to come to this country, but they made no policy statements about what they would do in those circumstances. When the stock market collapsed on Black Monday, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson), sought to boost demand to forestall a possible recession. It transpired that he was wrong in his predictions of what was going to happen. Although the Labour party attacked him, it was in almost exactly the same position as he was when he took his decision. Opposition for opposition's sake is understandable, but it does not exactly inspire the nation and does not give the impression that the vision of spokesmen on economic matters in the Labour party is any greater than that of the right hon. Member for Blaby.

As Labour has wobbled a little ahead of the Conservatives in the opinion polls, we have heard from time to time a somewhat triumphalist note from the Labour party. We have heard voices that sound as though they believe that all will be right in this country if the ins are out and the outs are in and the quango chairmen are changed. I doubt whether that will win the Labour party the election. I also doubt whether, if it did win the election, a Labour Government would produce a striking improvement in the quality of government or in the economic success of this country.

The causes of freedom and democracy require a more radical change than is contemplated by the Labour party in opposition. If the Labour party in opposition is not prepared to be radical, how much less radical is it likely to be when in government, judging by the experience of previous Labour Governments? I remember, just anecdotally, all that was said by the Labour party in Opposition about how it would tackle the land question in the highlands and islands. The hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) will remember that, too. He will recall that nothing was done to tackle the land question by the Labour party. The position remains as it has always been: that the decisions of those who own large tracts of land are taken without let or hindrance, sometimes unwisely and not in the interests of those who live in the community. The Labour party has had plenty of opportunities in government to tackle that question, but it has not chosen to do so.

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Gentleman was a Minister.

Mr. Maclennan: Others were, too, and others had greater power to do something about it.

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Gentleman played a blinder, didn't he?

Mr. Maclennan: I published a Bill. The Highlands and Islands Development Board of the day, after four years of sitting on the proposals, adopted them and put them to the Labour Government in their last months when it was too late for legislation to be enacted. However, that is anecdotal and by the way.

If there is to be more effective government, delivering what the people of this country seek in the way of economic and social improvement, whichever Government are returned to office will have to tackle the unsuitedness of our constitutional arrangements to deal with the problems that we face. We need a modern constitution that defines the powers of government, gives individual citizens redress against the abuse of power and decentralises government to levels appropriate for taking decisions that affect people, both in the nations of Scotland and Wales and in the provinces of England—thus matching, perhaps, the experience of other countries much more successful than ours, such as the Federal Republic of Germany, which has decentralised provincial power and which is much more open than our Government are. With freedom of information legislation, the quality of debate is much more informed. Ministers can discuss with parliamentarians the realities, not the slogans that tend to characterise exchanges here between the two Front Benches.

The development of the Committee system in the past 10 years in this House has been a modest step in the right direction, but it has been hampered by the secretiveness of the Government. I read today that the Ministry of Defence has refused to reveal the details of any of the discussions that have taken place about the changing structure of our defence forces and has backed out of giving the sort of evidence on defence to the Select Committee on Defence which would enable it to take a serious view of what this country should do, in view of the markedly changed conditions in eastern Europe. There is also a markedly changed position in the middle east. However, we are still faced with the old confrontations. It is time for the power of the Government to be more defined and for the absolutism of this place to be curbed. It is not operating either efficiently or equitably, and nor does it protect citizens from abuses.

We must spread power throughout the country. We must rely, to a greater extent, on a definition of those powers and make them justiciable in our courts, as have other countries, so that we can defend the fundamental rights and freedoms of our people. This country is peculiar in not having an enforceable Bill of Rights to override the contraction or limitation of those rights by abuse. Until we have that, we shall continue to allow citizens' rights to be eroded.

I am not persuaded that the Labour party is ready to tackle those out-of-date parts of our parliamentary constitution. For that reason, I doubt whether it is yet fit for government. If it does show a willingness to embrace the necessary reform measures—not least those that will elect a more representative House of Commons—the public will view it with a different eye and it may, indeed, be a great radical party once again.

12.30 pm

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): I am sure that the House will forgive me if I do not take up the remarks of the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan), who is always worth listening to and who represents one of the most beautiful—indeed magnificent—constituencies in the country. It has a splendidly independent electorate, who will rightly continue to return him to the House with an increased majority. Although what he had to say was of great interest, I do not intend to follow him, because I want to deal with the question of socialism.

You and I, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will have many fond memories of the last debate on this subject on 15 December 1989, under a motion in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Hamilton). Unfortunately, now that my hon. Friend has taken vows of poverty, chastity and obediency, he is unable to contribute to our debates. On that day in 1989, our late and greatly lamented hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne, Mr. Gow, gave us a small tour—as he always did on Fridays—of the anniversary list in *The Times*. He drew some specious connection between that list and the House.

The House will wish to know that today is not only the anniversary of the birthday of the Aga Khan, but the anniversary of the death of Maimonides, an early socialist philosopher in Egypt in 1204. It was our great good fortune to be in this House when our late hon. Friend discovered in *The Times* that our right hon. Friend the Minister for Overseas Development—to whom he always referred as the deputy Foreign Secretary—shared her birthday with the Emperor of Japan. You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, called our late hon. Friend to order and said that he had to make some connection between that event and the subject for debate. Before you do that again today, I shall move on.

The socialist movement and ideal have collapsed and they are everywhere in terminal decline. The fact that there are only four Labour Members of Parliament present today to debate the demise of socialism shows what a parlous state the party is in. Of those four, only the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) actually means what he says.

During the debate in 1989, my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton buried socialism with a stake through its heart, and at the crossroads of world affairs. He said that everywhere in the world socialism was in retreat. In 1989, the eastern European countries were just beginning to see the light of common day—Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia and Poland.

The collapse of socialism in Europe has continued apace. The revolutions in eastern Europe in the autumn of 1989 have been followed by the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and the creation in the past few days of a new country, Ukraine, an independent state of the same size as France and a united Germany put together. It is an important power with vast resources and, unfortunately, a battery of nuclear weapons. This year, Sweden, which is often cited as a model of democratic socialism by the left in western Europe, has turned away from socialism after decades of rule by the left.

The Labour party in Britain has not been insulated from these developments and, in its policy reviews, has attempted to rid itself of some of the old socialist

[Mr. Nicholas Soames]

shibboleths. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton pointed out two years ago, the Labour party has spent the past 10 years in implacable opposition to all the changes, of whatever sort, that the Government have introduced and on the basis of which the extraordinary transformation of Britain has taken place. If matters had been left to it, we would be stuck in the world of the 1970s, of corporatism, failure and decline.

While no one would suggest that the Labour party in Britain shares the socialist policies pursued in eastern Europe or the Soviet Union, it is worth remembering the words that my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) used in that debate two years ago. He said:

"The common thread that binds all Socialists is their belief that the state and the Government have a crucial role in determining policies and economies in society. Like it or not, that is the pre-supposition of all Socialist programmes, whether they be communist or Fabian, British or Romanian."
—[*Official Report*, 15 December 1989; Vol. 163, c. 1335.]

Mr. Skinner: On the basis of changing minds, perhaps the hon. Gentleman should include the fact that a couple of years ago he went through the Lobby to vote for the dreaded poll tax—a degree of centralisation over local government the like of which we have never seen before. Two years later, having got rid of Mistress Finchley, the hon. Gentleman went through the Lobby to support getting rid of the poll tax. Nobody has changed his mind more than the Tory party over that.

Mr. Soames: I am not sure that that is quite the case, but the hon. Gentleman is correct to draw attention to the matter. As a distinguished ancestor of mine once said in the House, "I have regularly had to eat my words and have generally found them to be a wholesome diet."

Look at the Labour party today. Doubtful of its mission, for the very reason that the hon. Gentleman has pointed out, it has changed its mind on almost everything. It is no longer confident of its principles because, as far as I can see and everybody is able to tell, it has none that matter. It is drifing to and fro in the tides and currents of British political life. It is wrong on economics, on political conceptions and, thank God, in its estimation of public opinion.

Mr. Chris Smith: In the tests of public opinion that have taken place in the past two and a half years—in Mid-Staffordshire, the Vale of Glamorgan, Langbaurgh and Monmouth—the people of Britain have spoken clearly about which party they want to see in government.

Mr. Soames: That may be true, but the hon. Gentleman can only whistle in the wind about by-election results.

What of Labour policy? It seems to me to be a succession of formulae, designed to enable people who differ profoundly to persuade themselves that they are, in every respect and in each regard, in total agreement. Labour's policies are not only unsatisfactory but in a lamentable state of deficiency. The intellecutal left in Britain is completely clapped out and impoverished. As Robert Harris, who is no friend of the Tory party, pointed out in *The Sunday Times:*

"The truth is that Labour—in terms of intellecutal activity, as measured by numbers of publications—is perilously close to brain dead in this country."

Mr. Skinner: We have had that already.

Mr. Soames: It is worth repeating. That view echoes those of many socialists who have made similar statements in recent years. They show that the failure of socialism in many countries has left the democratic socialists in western Europe with few ideas and models for inspiration. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Patten), the chairman of the Conservative party, said at the party conference:

"Socialism, a clapped out relic of the industrial turmoil of the last century, hobbles on its Zimmer frame into the sunset. Unelectable if they embrace the principles of socialism, a cause despised abroad, they want to claim at home that it has nothing whatsoever to do with them."

Let us be plain about what remains at the heart of the new, glossy, red-rose modern Labour party. There remains at the core of it an extremely disagreeable and dangerous body of people who regard success prosperity and patriotism as major obstacles to their wicked and subversive objectives. They may cut off a few Militant twigs in Liverpool and Coventry, but the roots are strong, vigorous and virile, and they extend through every constituency in the land. Those people are a powerful and sinister influence in the Labour party.

What of the leader of the Labour party—the fount of socialist inspiration in this country? In an article the other day, George Wills wrote:

"Neil Kinnock started as George Lansbury, and is trying to become Harold Wilson—without the integrity of the one, or the intelligence of the other. Underneath the pulpit cant, he is a trifler and an opportunist. Rarely has mouth depended so little on brain. A Kinnock Government would be a lurch into frivolity—"

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I counsel caution. The hon. Gentleman cannot get away with putting words into the mouth of another which, if he used them himself, would be deemed to be unparliamentary.

Mr. Soames: I am not quite sure whether I understand that, Mr. Deputy Speaker,

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman cannot seek refuge in quoting words which, if he had used them himself, the Chair would have deemed them to be unparliamentary. He is dangerously near to doing that

Mr. Soames: Oh.

Mr. Skinner: You are just beginning to get through to the hon. Gentleman now, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Soames: Indeed. The article says:

"A Kinnock Government would be a lurch into frivolity, at a crucial moment for NATO and for Britain's economic prospects. We would quickly discover that we had never had a Prime Minister so . . . intellectually ill-equipped for the job."

Amusing and articulate the right hon. Gentleman can be, but he is scarred with more than a streak of left-wing envy——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has disregarded what I said. It should be clear to him and to the whole House that if any Member sought to impugn the integrity of another and make discourteous remarks about him, those remarks could easily be attributed to any man in the street. The hon. Member could then claim in his protection that he was merely quoting the views of others.

Mr. Soames: I am not attempting to impugn anyone's integrity, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was merely quoting a newspaper article about the Leader of the Opposition. Amusing and articulate as the right hon. Gentleman can be, he is scarred with more than a streak of left-wing envy and spite. We have only to see the Labour party in the House to realise how cosmetic are those much-vaunted reforms both as to policy and to structure.

Now we come to the issues. What about Labour industrial policy? There is a vital connection between confidence and industry's willingness to invest. In my constituency—an area which over the years has benefited enormously from the encouragement of the enterprise economy, although it is having a difficult time now in the recession—a number of big, important companies are delaying investment decisions out of pure fear of a possible Labour Administration. That is being repeated throughout the length and breadth of the land.

Industry has always accepted the Conservative Government's priorities because they have always been made plain. They are the encouragement of enterprise, the control of inflation, improvements in industrial competitiveness, and a radical increase in incentives. All that would be put at threat by a socialist Government. There would be burgeoning bureaucracy, inefficiency and political extremism—those are the hallmarks of Labour economic policy. What is good for Britain is bad for the Labour party, yet the language of socialist denunciation sounds daily more idiotic and out of place.

What of Labour's programme of public expenditure? Whichever way one adds it up, it amounts to a substantially more costly programme. To attempt to increase provision simply by increasing state spending, financed by higher taxation or borrowing, may be tempting in the short run, but would soon involve reversing the economic policies that have brought us the steady growth without which we would become less competitive, poorer individually and, in the long run, less able to pay for public services—quite apart from our lack of ability to compete in the rest of the world. To my mind, the electorate is unlikely to be seduced by promises of higher public expenditure and by a raft of promises that cannot possibly be delivered without substantially higher taxation.

What about law and order? Can we ever trust the Labour party with the solemn care of law and order? What of its record on law and order during the miners' strike?

Mr. Skinner: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Soames: No.

Mr. Skinner *rose*——

Mr. Boateng *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Mr. Soames.

Mr. Soames: The crucial question is this: how much does the Labour party care for the law and how much do Labour Members value order when it stands in the way of something that they themselves want? Inconvenient colleagues are betrayed and dropped out of the side door. Trivia, irrelevance and implausibility are the hallmarks of Labour policy on law and order.

On defence, Labour has not even a credible hint of a policy. The Leader of the Opposition has already said that he could countenance no circumstances in which he would use the nuclear deterrent. The whole point of the nuclear deterrent, which is that it must be credible as to its use, has been thrown out of the window at a stroke.

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Gentleman has the cheek to talk about law and order when his Government are refusing to prosecute B & Q and many other big traders who hand over money to the Tory party. In addition, when the Government were elected 12 years ago, there were three prisoners in every cell. Now we have had God knows how many Home Secretaries, there are three prisoners on every roof, and the IRA is running Brixton prison. The Government were supposedly elected to set the people free but the prisoners got out.

Mr. Soames: I knew that it would be a mistake to give way to the hon. Gentleman. The House will wish to know that today is also the anniversary of the birthday of Dr. Johnson, who once said that one should never make way for a fool. I regret having done so.

We avow ourselves against socialism. We are against its uniformity, its ugliness, its ordinariness, its complexities, its limitations, its rigidity, its institutionalism, its banality, its ready-made ideas, its hypocrisy, its routine, its severity, and its prejudice. Above all, we are against it because of its incompetence and inefficiency and because of the great harm that it has done over the years to the economic and industrial standing of our nation.

Socialism has been a melancholy story of indecision, miscalculation and ineptitude. From the Labour party we hear nothing much but a judicious blend of prejudice, ignorance and, from Manchester, Gorton, menace. Never before has the Labour party approached the electorate with such self-seeking, superficial and ignorant views and it will not win.

When Pope Innocent X saw the terms of the treaty of Westphalia, he called them

> "Null, void, invalid, iniquitous, unjust, damnable, reprobate, inane and empty of meaning for all time."

Such is socialism, and it is dead as a result.

12.48 pm

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): This morning, we have been entertained by three Conservative Members who, with cant, venom and spite, raised their voices against socialism without even knowing what it meant. Innuendoes and allegations have been made, often without any foundation or a single ounce of truth, as the hon. Member for Luton, North will certainly learn to his cost before the day is out.

Mr. David Evans: Who?

Hon. Members: Welwyn Hatfield.

Mr. Bermingham: That just goes to show: there are so many Conservative seats around London with empty voices speaking for them that it is easy to get mixed up.

The fourth Conservative Member to contribute to the debate was the hon. Member for Crawley (Mr.Soames). It is probable that he has not, since his prep school days or his first year at Eton, used so many big words in one speech. He had to read them, of course. He would not have been able to remember them. What did they all mean at the end of the day?

Mr. Boateng: Precious little.

Mr. Bermingham: That is right. I thank my hon. Friend.

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Member for Crawley is educated beyond his intelligence.

Mr. Bermingham: It is necessary to have some intelligence to get a first.

I shall not speak for long but, first, I shall refer to the motion. It would be a good idea if someone did that. It is in the name of the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans). The first part of it reads:

"To call attention to the failures of socialism".

We have not had a socialist Government for about 12 years, but what was happening in the economy at that time? I recall that the secondary banks went bust in 1974, but that was when a Conservative Government were in office. We must never forget that. I recall development companies going bust. That happened when a Conservative Government were in office. I remember security houses buying out companies and breaking them up.

Mr. Boateng: That happened under a Conservative Government.

Mr. Bermingham: Yes, another Conservative Government.

Mr. Boateng: Those are their successes!

Mr. Bermingham: Indeed.

As I have said, we have not had a Labour Government for 12 years. But what have we had during the past 12 years? I intervened in the speech of the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) and posed three questions. The hon. Gentleman told me that the Conservative party was the party of low taxation. Either every economic commentator has it wrong and the hon. Gentleman has it right, or he has it wrong and the economic commentators have it right. I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), who sits on the Opposition Front Bench, will confirm that overall average taxation has increased in the past 12 years.

Mr. Chris Smith *indicated assent.*

Mr. Bermingham: In 1979, the Conservative Government told us that they would never touch value added tax. It was 8 per cent. in those days. It is now 17·5 per cent. Unless I am unintelligent that means that VAT has increased.

I seem to recall that in 1979 capital gains tax was 30 per cent. It is now 40 per cent. I accept that certain death duties have been reduced, but property prices have risen to meet the lower levels of duty. I understand that national insurance has increased from 6 to 9 per cent. Those are all examples of taxes increasing. Over the same period the level of taxation overall has increased.

The unfairest increase in tax of them all is that of VAT. That is because it hits the ordinary person in the street. It is a tax on what people buy. Whether someone is a rich man or a poor man, he still has to buy food, clothes and furniture. He still has to put socks on his feet and to wear shoes. I suppose that the difference is that rich men buy more shoes than poor men. Rich men buy more clothes than poor men. In my constituency, there are people who cannot afford to buy clothes in the shops. They have to go to bring-and-buy sales or jumble sales. Those are the places where they get their clothes.

There were about 20,000 people working in the glass industry in my constituency 12 years ago. There are now only 8,000. The rate of unemployment in my constituency 12 years ago was 6 or 7 per cent. The most recent figure that I have seen—it is the product of all the adjusted, moveable and variable methods that the Government use nowadays to calculate unemployment—is 10·4 per cent.

All these events have taken place under a successful Conservative Government, so this Administration would have us believe. I dread to think what would happen to St. Helens under an unsuccessful Conservative Government. I know what would happen to it under a successful Labour Government. We would not have unemployment standing at 10·4 per cent. We would start building things again—houses, for example. It is a little, old-fashioned idea to build houses.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that under every socialist Government since 1929 unemployment has doubled, except for one socialist Government under which it increased by 50 per cent?

Mr. Bermingham: That may be historically correct, but the hon. Gentleman must, in turn, remember that just before the 1979 election about 1 million people were unemployed. I understand that now about 2·4 million are unemployed so unless my arithmetic is terribly wrong, the second figure is almost 250 per cent. of the former. Does the hon. Gentleman call that success? Those figures are the fiddled figures—according to the straight figures there is an underlying trend of another 2 million who do not have a job and who are no longer registered. Hon. Members may laugh, but I can take them round St. Helens and show them people who have been out of work for 10 years or more and who are no longer on the register because they have been "retired early". It is a bit sick to retire people early in their 40s and 50s—it is a sign not of success but of abject failure.

Before the hon. Gentleman intervened, I was saying that we shall begin to build houses again. Hundreds of thousands of homeless people are sleeping rough. I do not disagree with the right to buy and I can tell the Minister that Sheffield city council was building starter homes for sale in the 1970s. They were built with public funds on public land and were sold locally, so the Conservatives should not tell us that we do not know about the right to buy.

It would be nice if local authorities were allowed to use their money to build houses again, whether to sell or to rent or to help the housing associations. All those options are fine but when one starts to build houses one needs glass, piping and bricks—Ibstock Brick and Pilkington are in my constituency—and we need to get those industries going again. The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry——

Mr. Chris Smith: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I apologise for interrupting my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) in his important speech, but I have just received some important information which should be raised on a point of order.

In his introductory speech, the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) made an accusation against my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. He

said that he had been informed that Mr. Robert Maxwell had made available to my right hon. Friend a red Jaguar car and a plane during the election campaign of 1987. The hon. Gentleman will recall that I challenged him at the time about the veracity of his allegation. It appears that he was merely repeating an item which appeared in *The Sunday Telegraph* last Sunday. I understand that my right hon. Friend has taken up the matter through his solicitors, has pointed out to *The Sunday Telegraph* that there is no truth whatsoever in either of the allegations and that *The Sunday Telegraph* will be putting the matter right this Sunday.

In those circumstances, I hope and trust that the hon. Gentleman who made the allegations at the outset of the debate will now have the courtesy to withdraw them immediately.

Mr. David Evans: If the allegations are untrue, I withdraw them. There is no problem.

Mr. Smith: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member must accept the undeniable fact that the allegations that he and *The Sunday Telegraph* made are completely untrue. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not qualify his withdrawal but will withdraw the remarks.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is not for me to judge where the truth lies, but I think that if the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield, (Mr. Evans) were to make a less qualified withdrawal of his remarks, it might avoid the necessity of having to return to these matters again.

Mr. Evans: Unreservedly I withdraw the remarks.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Bermingham *rose*——

Mr. Don Dixon (Jarrow): Although the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) withdrew his slanderous remarks unreservedly, he has not had the courtesy to apologise to the House for telling what was obviously a blatant lie. I raised a point of order earlier, when you were not in the Chair, about the—[HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw."] He has already accepted that it was a lie and withdrawn it. I raised a point of order about the number of civil servants in the civil servants' Box for private Members motions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. On the second and lesser matter, we do not refer to people who are outside the Chamber—I am not aware of their existence. What is more important, I am not sure whether the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) was suggesting that the substance of the newspaper article amounted to a blatant lie, or whether he was saying that the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) uttered a blatant lie. If it was the latter, the hon. Member for Jarrow must withdraw.

Mr. Dixon: Could I put it this way, he repeated a lie which appeared in *The Sunday Telegraph*. When your predecessor was in the Chair I raised a point of order because during a debate on private Members' motions some time ago, the present Home Secretary had someone from Tory central office sitting in that Box and we had to get them shifted. That is the reason I raised the matter this morning.

On a further point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Immediately after that Member made his speech—[HON. MEMBERS: "Honourable Member"]—there is nothing honourable about him—he immediately went to see the civil servants from the Department of Trade and Industry. He happens to be a Parliamentary Private Secretary to a Minister at the DTI. I wondered whether the DTI were feeding Tory Back Benchers with this sort of——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Those are not matters for me. We really should move on.

Mr. Bermingham *rose*——

Mr. Boateng: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It pains one to have to mention this issue, but one is bound to say that if there were a case of a member of Conservative central office sitting in the civil servants' Box, feeding Tory Members with lies——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am not prepared either to contemplate or to rule upon any hypothetical matters.

Mr. Bermingham *rose*——

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): Further to the point of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon). Would it not be appropriate for the hon. Member involved to apologise to the House for the error of his ways because——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) made an unqualified withdrawal of the remark that he made. That should satisfy the House.

Mr. Bermingham: Would anyone else like a point of order before I continue?

We need houses, and building them would put people back to work, thus increasing the number of people with jobs, which would increase the general wealth of the country. That would mean more moneys would be available for taxation, even if it were to stay at the old 1979 rate. One of the interesting aspects of income tax is that the higher it goes, the less people pay. I am not in favour of high taxation, as my party knows only too well.

If there is greater wealth in the country greater tax revenue would be available and we would be able to do many of the things that we want done. We would be able to have schools with books in them, hospital beds and operations. It would not be a case of people waiting months for a hip operation, as happens in my constituency. How do you tell a 65-year-old woman that she cannot have a hip operation for 18 months because there is no bed available, and expect her to have quality of life? That is what happens. We all know from our postbags and surgeries that that is happening throughout the country. Waiting lists have got longer. I concede that efforts are being made to reduce them, but how is it being done? One can get the operation next week if one can pay for it.

An 85-year-old constituent informed me that she was told that if she paid £3,000 she could have a hip operation; if she did not, she would have to wait for a year. It is surprising what a letter from me to the area health authority did on her behalf—I do not claim any credit. Suddenly, the waiting time went down and she did not have to pay. That is the sort of land we live in.

One of my favourite gripes is banks. We are having to pay exorbitant rates of interest. The present base rate is 10·5 per cent. By the time that one pays the bank back it

[Mr. Bermingham]

is not 10·5 per cent. because some banks, for example Lloyds, run a "privileged" account with interest at 1·4 per cent. per month. Even on my arithmetic that is nearly 18 per cent.—on a base rate of 10 per cent. Other banks, such as Barclays, are running at 2, 3 or 4 per cent. over base, depending on their agreement with the customer. How can small seed-corn industries invest when the effective repayment rate is about 15 or 16 per cent? Such companies must pay those interest rates and then start to repay the capital. With such rates, companies cannot afford to invest, which explains the decline in investment.

I am glad that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is here, because my next point is a personal gripe. The Conservative party is the party of privatisation. "It will work better," it said. About 18 months ago, in an magnanimous gesture—an inspirational move, they thought—the Government sold four skill centres to a man, but not for money; they gave him £2·1 million. One of those skill centres is in St. Helens and it employs 28 people. Within 18 months, that man had gone bust. We shall probably never know where the £2·1 million went to. The skill centre that we needed in St. Helens has gone—and the money with it.

When the centre was privatised, civil servants were told, "Your pension and rights will not be touched." That has not been honoured. Magnanimously, although they have not gone far enough, the Government have said that if the workers receive no redundancy from the liquidation they will help a bit. That is not good enough. There is a moral duty on the Government. The local authority wanted to takeover the skill centre. Luckily, with the help of the St. Helens Trust and others, moves are being made to enable it to do so. I pay tribute to the local authority and the St. Helens Trust. That is the true cost of privatisation.

Local authorities bought land for the water companies when they were responsible for running those companies before 1974. The money that was realised when the water companies were floated did not go back to the people but went into sustained Government spending. The real profits will be made when the water companies start to sell that land for housing, tourism and development. The people will not see the benefit of that. Those who could afford to buy shares will see the benefit, but they are not the ordinary people who are finding it difficult to make ends meet and who stand in the dole queues in St. Helens and queue up at the jumble sales for clothes.

Twelve years has taught me one thing: 12 years ago, the rich had a lot, but 12 years later they have a hell of a lot more. Twelve years ago, the poor had something, but 12 years later they are very much poorer. The motion is not an attack on socialism. It does not even discuss socialism. It tries to justify 12 wasted years, and I say to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, "Your time is up mate. Put your card in and we will see how you do in the dole queue after the election, when your party has the courage to call it."

1.8 pm

Mr. Chris Smith (Islington, South and Finsbury): I should begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) on his success in drawing first place in the ballot. I cannot congratulate him on the risible content of the motion or on the intellectual vacuity of the speech that accompanied it. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman put the record straight on one extremely important matter that he mentioned in his speech.

Let us consider the motion piece by piece. It says:

"That this House notes the success of Government policies over the past 12 months".

I am immediately tempted to ask the obvious question, what on earth has happened in the past 12 years, according to the hon. Gentleman? We have had a Conservative Administration not just for the past 12 months, but for twelve and a half years.

They have been years of unparalleled failure in our economic and social life. Let us consider one or two of the basis facts of those years. Growth under the Conservative Government has been lower than it has been under any Government since the second world war. Between 1979 and 1991, the average annual growth rate was 1·75 per cent.—the lowest average figure achieved by any post-war Government. The growth rate has not only been lower than it has been under any previous Government in Britain, but lower than that of all of our European competitors. Between 1979 and 1991, Britain has become sixth from the bottom of the growth league of the 24 OECD countries.

The Conservatives have caused the two worst recessions since the 1930s. Manufacturing investment is now lower than it was when the Conservatives took office and is still falling. Britain has the worst manufacturing investment record in the European Community. The level of unemployment is now more than double what it was under the previous Labour Government. The interest rates achieved under the Conservatives have reached record levels. Under previous Governments in the post-war period interest rates were at 12 per cent. or above for 26 months only. Under this Government interest rates have been at 12 per cent. or more for 60 months. Therefore, we have had those high interest rates for twice as long as the rates reached by all the other post-war Governments.

Since 1979 the top 1 per cent. of taxpayers has received more than twice as much through income tax cuts as the bottom 50 per cent. That is the record of twelve and a half years of Conservative Government. Therefore, we will take no lectures from Conservatives about economic success or failure.

Let us consider the motion on its own terms. Let us lay aside some of the things that have occurred in the past 12 years. Let us consider what has happened in the past 12 months—the period of the John Major premiership. Unemployment has risen by 768,000 which means that 3,000 people have joined the dole queue every working day. Since November 1990, 45,000 businesses have failed, 200 per working day. In the past year, 85,000 homes have been repossessed, 300 per working day. The gross domestic product has fallen by 2·3 per cent. Manufacturing output has fallen by 5·3 per cent. and manufacturing investment is down by 12 per cent.

That is the record of the past 12 months. I am extremely surprised that the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield failed to mention any of those basic underlying indicators of failure and incompetence on the part of the Government when he introduced his motion.

Mr. Den Dover (Chorley): I appreciate that the past 12 to 18 months have been difficult for the economy and that unemployment has risen nationally. Is the hon. Gentleman aware, however, that in Chorley, in Lancashire, in the past

two months the level of unemployment has fallen—even when that level has been seasonally adjusted? Does not that show that the high interest rate policy has squeezed inflation out of the economy and has brought about the first signs of improvement in it?

Mr. Smith: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman decided to join our discussions. He ignores the fact that unemployment is still rising. The signs of recovery which he pretends to see are few and far between. No doubt—I raised this point earlier—he will be aware that the inflation figures, which show a rise in the headline rate from 3·7 to 4·3 per cent., reveal how tawdry is the Government's claim to have conquered inflation. It is clear that they have done no such thing. The underlying inflation rate is rising, not just the headline rate.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Will the hon. Gentleman please tell the House when, under the last Labour Government, inflation was brought down to that level?

Mr. Smith: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman wants to tell me what happened to inflation when the Conservatives took office in 1979. There was deliberate inflation, created by increases in gas and electricity prices and the imposition on the British people of a near doubling of VAT. I shall not take any lectures from the hon. Gentleman about inflation, given that the Government raised inflation, then savagely squeezed it out of the economy and then allowed it to rise again.

Mr. Arnold: I intervene again to ask the hon. Gentleman whether he will specifically answer my question: when, under the last Labour Government, did inflation fall to anything like the levels about which he is now complaining? Indeed, will he tell us the lowest levels that they ever reached?

Mr. Smith: As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, when Labour left office in 1979, inflation was at the European average. Under the Conservative Government, it has been consistently above the European average. Only in the past few months has it been brought down to approximately, in headline terms, the European average. It now appears to be rising again.

The Conservatives subjected this country to a recession at the start of the 1980s, followed by an unsustainable boom and then a recession at the end of that decade. The pattern is familiar—it is exactly the same pattern as the Maudling dash for growth, the Barber boom and the Lawson credit explosion. Each time the Conservatives have had the stewardship of our economy, they have gone from boom to bust. If they are permitted to have that stewardship again, that is precisely what will happen again.

The motion proclaims that the Government have reduced inflation, whereas it appears to be rising, and reduced interest rates, whereas interest rates have been consistently higher under this Government than any previous post-war Government. Instead of proclaiming those untruths, the Government should be turning their attention to the real needs of our economy—for a proper framework of macro-economic stability, coupled with the supply side measures on training, research and development, investment, infrastructure and regional policy which we have been advocating consistently.

After making a fool of itself on the economy, the motion

"congratulates the Government for protecting the interests of this country abroad".

Let us consider the outcome of the discussions at Maastricht and the deal that the Government have brought back. It is a bad deal for Britain. It has left this country isolated on the issue of economic and monetary union. This is the only EC country that has not yet decided whether economic and monetary union is desirable. The uncertainty that that will create in the coming years will be bad for our economy, for inward investment and for the forward-planning needs of business and industry. The Government have forgone any realistic chance of securing the location of the new central European bank in Britain.

Mr. Neil Hamilton (Tatton): Big deal.

Mr. Smith: It is a big deal. The location of that bank in Britain would have substantial advantages for our financial services industry, which is a vital sector of our national economy. Under the Conservative Government it is almost certain that that bank will not be located here and in the long term that will have adverse effects on our financial services industry. It is clear from their response that Conservative Members are not at all worried about that dire prospect.

At Maastricht the Government rejected the social charter. That means that they have deprived British workers of rights that will pertain to all workers in the rest of the Community. In the past couple of days the Prime Minister has talked much nonsense about the social charter being some sort of licence to strike, a return to what he claims would be the bad old industrial relations days. Of course it is nothing of the sort. The Prime Minister should have read the charter.

Mr. Jacques Arnold: Has the hon. Gentleman read the comments of his socialist colleague, Mr. Delors, who says that, as a result of Britain's rejection of the social charter, this country will be paradise for Japanese investment? Would he care to comment on the thousands of jobs that will result?

Mr. Smith: For once Mr. Delors is wrong. The hon. Gentleman should read the social charter and the annex 4 document which has been agreed by the remaining 11 members of the Community and which our Government rejected. That agreement specifically rules out areas of concern which the Prime Minister appears to be claiming are included in paragraph 6 of article 118 to the annex. It states:

"The provisions of this Article shall not apply to pay, the right of association, the right to strike or the right to impose lock-outs."

The Prime Minister is wrong in trying to claim that the social charter covers such items. It does not. They are specifically excluded. What is included in the social charter is a range of items that I should have thought any self-respecting Government would wish to endorse. It includes equality between men and women with regard to labour market opportunities and treatment at work. It says:

"The Commission shall have the task of promoting the consultation of management and labour at Community level and shall take any relevant measure to facilitate their dialogue by ensuring balanced support for the parties."

The social charter also includes items relating to the improvement of the working environment to protect workers' health and safety. Moreover, it includes the provision that

[Mr. Smith]

"each member state shall ensure that the principle of equal pay for male and female workers for equal work is applied." Those specific items are included in the social charter: consultation rights for employees, an equal balance between partners in industry, equal pay for equal work as between men and women and the right to equal treatment for women workers. Those are the provisions which the Prime Minister said were so outrageous that he had to object, throughout a 14-hour negotiating period, to ensure that Britain did not benefit from them.

I make it absolutely clear, for the benefit of the House, that a Labour Government will join the other 11 Community countries in signing the social charter. What this Government have been about is not protecting the interests of the British worker; they have been about selling the rights of British employees down the river.

The motion applauds the Government for initiating "reforms which will improve the National Health Service". Which reforms is the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield talking about? Is he talking about the one in five acute beds in national health service hospitals that have been closed since 1979? Is he talking about the fact that there are 300 fewer national health service hospitals now than there were in 1979? Or is he referring to the fact that hospital waiting lists have grown by 50 per cent., with a quarter of all patients waiting for treatment for over a year? Or he is, perhaps, referring to the opting out of hospitals which has been encouraged so assiduously by the Government—the opting out of hospitals which neither the patients nor the local communities affected want to happen? Or is the hon. Gentleman talking about the charge now levied for eye tests, which has caused the number of people having eye tests to drop by a full third, almost certainly meaning that 200,000 people have serious eye conditions which, as a result, have gone undetected? And for what purpose? The Government have saved £90 million as a result of that change, the equivalent of one and a half year's worth of private health insurance tax relief. What an appalling state of priorities for the Government to adopt.

It comes very ill from the mouth of the hon. Gentleman when he says that the Government's reforms will improve the national health service. The Government's reforms are damaging it. The evidence is there, in the daily experience of people throughout the country.

Mr. Dover: The hon. Gentleman has concentrated on the reforms during the past year or two. One of the most fantastic reforms, which occurred about eight years ago, was the reorganisation of the health service. Lancashire area health authority was abandoned on that level, doing away with costs and bureaucracy. Chorley and South Ribble health authority then came into being. It comes under the regional health authority, but could opt out. That reform means that we now have local control; we are not the poor relation under the old Preston health authority or the Lancashire area health authority. Our spend has gone up from £5 million to £53 million over those eight years of local coverage and that is what the people want. The reform giving power to local people in response to local wishes has been a super deal for the Chorley area.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman referred to local control and response to local wishes. I would take it a great deal more easily from him if there were a Government in office—which there is not—who considered local wishes in relation to the opting out of hospitals. I know of no case, when local people have been consulted through a ballot, referendum or opinion test, where they have supported the opting out of hospitals in their areas.

The motion congratulates the Government on "improving social security payments". I invite the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield to tell that to my constituents who are living on income support. They come to my surgery week in and week out saying that they find it impossible to live on the benefits that have been so meagrely made available by the Government. I invite him to tell that to the pensioners who, because the link between pensions and earnings was broken by the Government in 1979, have seen the value of their pensions drop by £14·55p for a single person and £23 for a couple. I invite him to tell that to those applicants who have to go to the social fund to apply, like Dickensian supplicants, for cash-limited funds so that they can afford the basic necessities of life. I invite him to tell his story to the homeless people who are camped out on the streets of our capital city in the middle of winter, many of them consigned there because of the Government's restrictions on benefit payments.

Let us consider what has happened to the poor in this country during the past 12 years. In 1987—the last date for which figures appear to be available—2,890,000 people, 5 per cent. of the population, were living below the supplementary benefit level. We must remember that that is the basic minimum that even this Government accept that people need to have for the bare minimum of a decent existence. Five per cent. of the people of this country were living below that basic minimum threshold and that included 490,000 children—4 per cent. of all children.

In addition, 10,200,000 people—19 per cent. of the population—were on or below the supplementary benefit level. They were either at or below the basic minimum. Twenty-one per cent. of all children were also at or below that level. Those are the actual figures that the hon. Gentleman should take into account. For his motion to refer to improving social security payments is an insult to the millions of people for whom social security payments manifestly have not been improved under this Government.

The text of the motion, like the speeches from Conservative Members, is imbued with a fundamental misunderstanding and misrepresentation of what democratic socialism is all about. It is about three important fundamental principles: first, a recognition that the market system is fallible and needs to be tempered by regulation and enabled by Government assistance; secondly, an understanding of the place of the individual in society and of the fact that the dignity of the individual and the welfare of the community as a whole are totally interdependent and each must enhance the other; and, thirdly, a realisation that opportunity must be available to all, not just to the few.

Let me dwell for a moment on these three important principles, starting with the market system. Conservative Members have spoken about what has happened in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. They appear to be labouring under the benighted notion that what persisted in those countries was some form of socialism. It was not. It was state centralism in the same way as much despotism round the world has been. The 1980s have seen the end of two competing ideologies. The ideology that the state can and should run everything has been shown comprehensively

and rightly to bring neither prosperity nor happiness to the people on whom it was imposed. The competing ideology —that the free market can achieve everything and all that one needs to do is to lift off the constraints of the state and everything will be well—has also been demonstrated, where it has been tried, including here and the United States, to have deep fundamental flaws.

The successful economies of the world in the past 10 years have been those which have found the right mix between private enterprise on the one hand and state assistance and regulation on the other.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Peter Lilley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: Ah, the great free enterpriser of the Cabinet wishes to intervene.

Mr. Lilley: Out of courtesy, will the hon. Gentleman repeat his repudiation of socialism for the benefit of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)?

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has been consistent in his opposition, over decades, to what purported to be socialism in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, but which has been no such thing.

The second and fundamental belief to which I referred was the importance of the idea of community. The former Prime Minister was fond of saying that there is no such thing as society.

Mr. Skinner: I did not catch what was said earlier, but as my name has been mentioned I should put it on the record that I have always taken the view, contrary to the opinions of some Tories, that what took place in eastern Europe was not socialism. People who have been here have probably heard me say that before. There is no problem on that score.

I shall take the opportunity to raise another important point about what is happening under the authority of the Government. I have just been in the Tea Room and a young worker there has had £29 deducted from her pay by the authorities of the House, supposedly for not clocking in and out properly. Yet that person had been working an extra hour in the morning—coming in at 8 o'clock although she was not due to start until 9 o'clock. People who do not clock in at all——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must realise that that does not arise out of the motion.

Mr. Skinner: The authorities of the House have deducted £29 from that woman's wages. That is an important matter and it is time that that money was repaid. It is a scandal to treat a low-paid worker in that way.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend has done the House two services. First, he has confirmed exactly what I said about his views and mine—and those of our hon. Friends—on what purported to be socialism in eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Secondly, he has drawn our attention to one specific consequence of the Government's economic policy over the past 12 years: some people are being badly treated by their employers and frequently receive wages that are far too low.

I was talking about the second fundamental principle —the importance of the community. The former Prime Minister was fond of saying that there was no such thing as society and the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) came close to saying much the same earlier in the debate. There is such a thing as society. It is extremely important that the Government realise that and take into account the needs of the community as a whole as well as those of individuals.

William Godwin's treatise, "Enquiry Concerning Political Justice"—I realise that political justice is a foreign concept to Conservative Members—was written in 1793. It contains these words, which are still relevant today:

"Democracy restores to man a consciousness of his value, teaches him, by the removal of authority and oppression, to listen only to the suggestions of reason"—

would that that were true of Conservative Members. Godwin said that democracy

"gives him confidence to treat all other men with frankness and simplicity, and induces him to regard them no longer as enemies against whom to be upon his guard, but as brethren whom it becomes him to assist".

That text could stand as a fundamental tenet of the democratic socialism which my party espouses and which will guide a Labour Government.

Mr. Soames *rose*——

Mr. Smith: I shall not give way now, because time is marching on and I know that the Secretary of State wishes to speak.

The third fundamental principle was the need for opportunity for all. The Government are fond of the idea that one need only look after the people at the top of the tree and somehow the condition of the people at the bottom will thereby be improved. That has not happened; it does not happen. The trickle-down theory, as it is called, is a fallacy. The deteriorating quality of our public services and deterioration in the standard of living of many people are a testimony to that.

I urge the Government to understand what R. H. Tawney, a great man, who formed much of the thinking of the Labour party in Britain, wrote in his book "Equality":

"A society is free in so far, and only in so far, as, within the limits set by nature, knowledge and resources, its institutions and policies are such as to enable all its members"—

note "all its members"—

"to grow to their full stature, to do their duty as they see it, and—since liberty should not be too austere—to have their fling when they feel like it. In so far as the opportunity to lead a life worthy of human beings is needlessly confined to a minority, not a few of the conditions applauded as freedom would be more properly denounced as privilege. Action which causes such opportunities to be more widely shared is, therefore, twice blessed. It not only subtracts from inequality, but adds to freedom."

That is the basic belief of democratic socialists. The widening of opportunity to everyone is what we in the Labour party are all about and what we in the Labour Government will be all about. Those are the fundamental beliefs of democratic socialism, which sees society as a whole as well as a disparate collection of proud individuals. It is a philosophy which understands how our economy can grow, how our public services can be improved and how those least able to fend for themselves can, for once, be recognised as the fully fledged citizens that they are. Government's purpose must be to support all the people, not just a few. That is the philosophy that the British people will support at the coming general election.

1.46 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Peter Lilley): I commend my hon. Friend for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) for securing the debate and I congratulate him and my other hon. Friends on their excellent contributions to it. My hon. Friend is well known for his kid-glove approach to debating, but his demolition of the Leader of the Opposition was made all the more effective by the delicacy and gentleness with which he approached it. He certainly made it absolutely clear that, if the Leader of the Opposition were ever Prime Minister, we would not have a credible nuclear deterrent in Britain. I can assure my hon. Friend of one thing, however: the Leader of the Opposition remains the credible ultimate deterrent to voting Labour, and we can continue to rely on that. —

A notable feature of the debate has been the conspicuous absence of my shadow, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). At his party conference this year, he concluded by urging the Labour party to be "confident most of all in our enduring socialist values". Today, we have had a debate on socialism and the hon. Gentleman is not confident enough to come and defend his enduring socialist values. I am sure that the whole House will miss the little ray of gloom that he habitually casts on our deliberations and will welcome the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith), who is brighter in every respect.

The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey) made a notable contribution to the debate. It is the first time that I have ever heard an hon. Member filibuster his own motion—in this case, due to come on later today. He refused, in his lengthy contribution, to answer two key questions put to him by my hon. Friends: first, how much would he and his Labour party reduce Scottish representation in the House as a result of their plans and are the Scottish people aware that they will be deprived of that representation, and, secondly, by how much would the burden of taxation on the Scottish people increase as a result of an extra body empowered to raise taxes upon them? I have a great affection for Scotland and, like many English hon. Members, I am proud to be able to claim my little portion of Scottish blood. I should certainly hate the Scots to have to face the proposals without the issues being first clarified.

My hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) made a fine and witty defence of freedom and enterprise as only he can. He drew on his immense experience in those areas.

The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) excited the debate—I think for the first time in recorded memory. That was when he, an ex-leader of an ex-party, exited with a flounce, only to flounce back a short while later. The hon. Gentleman advanced the memorable argument that anyone who did not propose the complete abolition of taxation could not say that the level of tax was a matter of important political principle. For the Government, it is a matter of great importance. That is why we have striven to cut tax rates and oppose the Labour party, which is determined to raise them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) made a memorable speech which I shall plagiarise frequently. I shall endeavour to give my hon. Friend credit for his many witticisms, which I shall reuse.

The hon. Member for St. Helens (Mr. Bermingham) made an important point when he made the surprising complaint that privatisation proceeds had all been used to sustain Government spending. That is a complaint to which we must plead guilty. We ask ourselves how Labour could sustain public expenditure, let alone increase it, if it is to forgo future proceeds from privatisation.

The hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury accused us of running a pre-election boom. This will be welcome news to many of my right hon. and hon. Friends. I shall let my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer know of the dangers of overheating in Islington, South and Finsbury.

Mr. Chris Smith: The Secretary of State knows that I accused the Government of no such thing. Instead, I accused them of starting the 1990s with a deep recession and with having an irresponsible boom based on credit expansion in the mid-1980s, which was inevitably followed by a further recession. That is the charge that I made. The right hon. Gentleman should address himself to that rather than conjure up a charge that I did not make.

Mr. Lilley: We can consult the official record. I think that we shall find that the hon. Gentleman said that we always have pre-election booms, and that that was the problem.

Socialism is in retreat throughout the world. Countries everywhere are turning to the policies that we pioneered in the 1980s—privatisation, free markets and lower taxes. They are doing it for the best of reasons. They have seen the market, and it works. I have seen that in every country that I have visited over the past 18 months. In Poland, I addressed the Polish Parliament on privatisation on the very day that the Polish Government were taking powers to privatise about 14,000 companies.

In the Guangdong province of China I could see the spectacular developments where free markets have been allowed. Already 2 million jobs have been created, largely by capital from Hong Kong.

Hong Kong provides the most dramatic proof of the success of capitalism and the failure of socialism. Since the Communist revolution, the population of Hong Kong has increased roughly tenfold. Incomes in Hong Kong are now many times higher than those on the mainland. The only difference between China and Hong Kong is that Hong Kong has no natural resources and a free market system.

In India, I was again invited to speak on our economic reforms. The Indians were increasingly conscious that the most damaging part of the British imperial legacy was the belief, which was at its apogee in the United Kingdom at the time that we gave India its independence, that the state could develop a modern industrial economy by intervention, protection and state ownership. India, too, is now abandoning that legacy of socialist imperialism; privatisation, liberalisation and lower taxation are the orders of the day.

In Latin America the pattern is the same. In September I visited Venezuela which is leading the way—it is privatising major industries, cutting taxes, reducing tariffs and moving back into the world economy. As a result, it is one of the fastest growing economies in Latin America.

Finally, last month I had the privilege of representing this country in St. Petersburg at the official celebrations of the demise of communism. It was a glorious day for the Russian people and, as Major Sobchak said in a moving speech in front of the Winter palace:

"After 74 years in the darkness Russia is re-emerging into the light of freedom."

We all welcome that change.

The most painful part of the economic legacy of socialism and of communist control is the fearful cost of transition back to a market economy and bold steps are needed to achieve it. Therefore, it was heartening to hear the mayor of Moscow promising to give flats to tenants absolutely free. Anyone who has seen the quality of Soviet flats would, I think, be bound to observe that the mayor of Moscow probably got the price about right. No doubt some of my hon. Friends think the same may be true of some properties in Labour-run authorities.

Mr. McKelvey: The Secretary of State has taken us through the highways and byways of the world, but he has not commented on housing conditions in Scotland. When there was a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs and when we visited Scotland, we discovered that about 300,000 houses were almost inhabitable because of dampness but the Government refused to give additional money to deal with that.

Mr. Lilley: In his earlier contribution, the hon. Gentleman acknowledged that the Labour party had been averse to home ownership, and in the words of one of my hon. Friends, had merely allowed its hostility to lapse, just as the Leader of the Opposition's membership card for CND lapsed. It is in Scotland that the hostility to private ownership by socialist local authorities has been most intense and until recently half the population in Scotland had the state as its landlord. Now the hon. Gentleman complains that the conditions under which they suffer are worse than those in other parts of the country where free enterprise was able to make a greater contribution. I am happy to say that in Scotland the desire for home ownership—long repressed by socialist councils—is now becoming manifest and sales of council houses have been increasing rapidly.

Western firms can play a part in restoring the Russian economy. I saw in St. Petersburg a splendid example being set by Littlewoods. It has linked up with a Russian clothing company, introduced British design, management and quality standards and opened a Littlewoods store. It is so popular that queues form well before it opens. People in the queue are given a ticket which is itself a valuable object. Demand is so great that each person is allowed to buy only two items and when the doors open, the store is emptied of goods within minutes. Turnover is rising as rapidly as output can be increased—would that more companies from this country followed Littlewoods' example and contributed to the restoration of the Soviet economy from the devastation wrought by socialism.

The list of countries in which socialism is now in retreat and in which free market policies are on the advance is immense. Countries that are privatising, cutting taxes, reducing state intervention and freeing markets include the whole of eastern Europe, all the republics of the former Soviet Union, all continental Latin America, all North America, most of sub-Saharan Africa, most of Asia and all Australasia.

Those that reject privatisation cling to nationalisation and want to extend state intervention are a more select band. In the entire world they comprise only Cuba, North Korea, Libya and the British Labour party.

Mr. McKelvey: Does the right hon. Gentleman not think that it is scandalous that the Cuban economy is being strangled by a country the size of the USA? Why does it not lift the blockade?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Member's sympathy for his socialist friends does him credit. However, I have made it clear that we shall not enforce, or allow the subsidiaries of American companies to enforce, the American blockade, since we retain our independence in that matter.

Mr. Soames: My right hon. Friend has done an enormous amount to promote the interests of British companies in the Soviet Union and elsewhere. Does he agree that the great difficulty in those countries, as they emerge from the socialist hold around their necks, and what matters most, is enabling them to manage businesses in a sensible manner, which is completely alien to anything that they have been taught? To assist eastern European countries, we need to supply more management training. What steps is my right hon. Friend taking to try to ensure that they receive such training?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend makes a valid and important point. We have established the know-how fund because we recognise that know-how, rather than straight cash, is the important contribution and ingredient that we can offer. Under the fund we have arranged a scheme—especially with St. Petersburg—for about 100 small business men to receive training from Manchester business school, which is very welcome over there.

There are probably other schemes which my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary—who is in overall charge of the know-how fund—would be able to expand upon.

The Labour party is one of that small band of people and institutions in the entire world which remain wedded to the extension of state control and state ownership. In its policy documents this year, the Labour party has reaffirmed its commitment to nationalisation, its rejection of privatisation, its plans to extend the powers of the state, to intervene in industry and to control more of the nation's income.

When I say that socialism is alive in the British Labour party, I should explain that I use the word "live" purely in its technical sense. As Robert Harris—a Labour sympathiser—who has already been quoted in this debate has said:

> "The truth is that Labour—in terms of intellectual activity . . . is perilously close to brain-dead in this country."

I should explain to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that that did not involve any snide reference to the intellectual vitality of the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Harris was talking about the demise of magazines. He went on to say—this should be added to the fund of quotations which have emerged during the debate:

> "It is very odd. Sometimes, in the right light, Labour looks more impressive than it has for a generation: disciplined, talented, responsible, well-presented. And then you stand still for a moment and listen and you can hear . . . nothing. It is eery. It is like walking down a street built on a film set: the technicians have put up wonderful frontages, but behind them —thin air."

We are here to debate this important subject and we see row upon row of thin air.

Mr. Harris was referring to the demise of a series of left-wing magazines, culminating in the closure of *Marxism Today*. I doubt if many of my hon. Friends read it or regret its passing. "Better dead than read" would be their verdict, I suspect.

[Mr. Lilley]

The magazine went out with a splendid drinks party recently. One cynical ex-Marxist suggested that the Communist party might end its search for a new name by calling itself the "Cocktail party." To mark its demise the magazine also produced a final issue which sent a crisp message to all socialists, "The End."

That lack of faith in "our enduring socialist values", as he called them at the party conference, did not stop the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East from writing a moving tribute for the final issue. He wrote:

"Marxism Today . . . never forgot the value of matching imagination and ideas with rigorous analysis, and that will be its lasting contribution."

That tells us a lot about the hon. Member's capacity for imagination and rigorous analysis. An especially penetrating example of it was an article contributed to *Marxism Today* by the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock). He wrote:

"The . . . market system never has and never will produce the plenty necessary to meet human need."

He has since jerked from that extreme position to another, as is his wont.

Labour's presentation has changed, but its policy proposals remain remarkably similar to those advocated in previous manifestos and implemented by previous Labour Governments. All Labour Governments have nationalised at least one industry. Labour is committed to nationalising the water industry and the national grid as priorities.

Mr. Chris Smith: Will the Secretary of State tell us what the Conservative Government of 1970 to 1974 did to Rolls-Royce?

Mr. Lilley: If the only problem with our record that the hon. Member can find occurred between 1970 and 1974, when I was not a candidate for the Conservative party, he is obviously endorsing our position.

Labour is committed to nationalising the water industry and national grid. Those pledges were spelt out this year in "Opportunity Britain", its manifesto document.

All Labour Governments have set up a Government body to intervene, invest in and takeover private companies: first, there was the industrial reconstruction corporation and then the national enterprise board. We know the history of the latter, and of the 102 companies that it took into partial public ownership, 35 were liquidated or failed, 38 were sold at a loss and only 29 returned the taxpayers' cash when they were disposed of.

Labour now promises a national investment bank—an NIB—presumably to take equity stakes, among other things, in private companies. That is nationalisation by the back door.

All previous Labour Governments have increased the proportion of the nation's income that is spent by the state. The commitments in Labour's recent documents have been objectively costed at £35 billion a year. That would take public spending back up to about half the national income. Like all their predecessors, a Labour Government would be committed and obliged to raise taxes.

That all appears in the small print of Labour's policy documents. Voting Labour would lead to the political equivalent of date rape. A Labour Government would do many things to British people to which they would strenuously object, but Labour would then say, "You were asking for this when you invited us back in." We must make people aware of the pledges in the small print of Labour's policy documents if we are to avoid that fate.

Labour assiduously pretends nowadays that it has abandoned socialism or that socialism is not what we always thought it was. It even claims sometimes to have embraced the market, although that did not come up today. If it has changed, we are entitled to ask what brought about that conversion. There are only two possible explanations: it has been convinced either by the success of our policies in transforming the economy since it was last in power or by the success of our policies in winning three successive elections.

There is no doubt that our policies have transformed the economy. In the 1960s and 1970s, Britain was bottom of the growth league in Europe. In the 1980s, we were top of that league and that was the first decade for more than a century when Britain grew faster than France and Germany. The transformation was greatest in areas where we had been weakest, such as industrial relations. In 1979, 29·6 million working days were lost as a result of the disputes and strikes that we inherited from Labour's industrial relations regime. In the past 12 months, fewer than 1 million days were lost through strikes and industrial disputes.

There is no doubt that the transformation is the result of the policies that we have pursued. The transformation of the economy is the result of privatisation, of reducing taxes and of reforming trades union law. Labour consistently denies the facts and the cause. Moreover, had it really been converted to free markets, its policy documents would surely contain some free-market policies.

The Labour party's counterparts in Australia and New Zealand have undergone that conversion. They have adopted free market policies and genuinely abandoned socialism. However, the British Labour party does not advocate privatisation, because it has voted against every privatisation that we have carried out. It does not advocate cutting a single tax rate; it has voted against every tax cut that we have made. The Labour party plan, quite openly, to raise taxes again. It has not supported a single trade union reform. Instead, it is committed to restoring many of the union privileges that we have removed. We may safely conclude that the Labour party's conversion is simply cynical opportunism.

Several hon. Members have reminded the House of the threat posed to pension funds by socialists. I do not want to go into that issue in detail, but they are right. The two previous Labour manifestos threatened to divert pension funds for purposes other than seeking to enhance pensions. The previous Labour Government took the Christmas bonus away from pensioners. All Labour Governments have robbed pensioners by resorting to inflation. Under the previous Labour Government, inflation plucked 27 per cent. from the value of people's savings in a single year. The value of pensioners' fixed incomes were cut by a half during the lifetime of the previous Labour Government. If the Labour party wants to see the unacceptable face of socialism, it should look into the mirror.

The collapse of the Soviet economy has finally discredited socialism. The collapse of the Soviet Union has

also surely discredited that other fashionable doctrine, federalism. It has shown that artificial federations inevitably collapse. Nations prefer to govern themselves, not to be governed by each other. How extraordinary that the British Labour party has still not managed to break free from socialism yet it has already half fallen for federalism.

The collapse of socialism has left an intellectual vacuum in the minds, or what passes for the minds, of our left-wing intelligentsia. The concept of federalism has rushed in to fill that void. The Labour party, unable to make the state supreme within the nation, wants to submerge the nation within a supreme super-state.

The excellent deal that my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor were able to negotiate at Maastricht would not have been available to a Labour Government. A Labour Government would have signalled their intention to sign any deal on paper. They would have signalled their intention to abandon any power to govern ourselves that might have been requested by our partners. They would have signalled their intention to extend the competence of majority voting into huge areas of our national life. They need not have gone to Maastricht, but could have signed the communiqué when it was telexed to them at the end of the negotiations.

The great paradox is that the Labour party has always been against Britain intervening in other countries' internal affairs, but now it has carried that to the ultimate extreme, because it is against us interfering even in our internal affairs. The issue of the social charter is not just about whether Labour's policies are better or worse than Conservative ones—the British electorate can decide that. The question is whether other countries of Europe should be able to overrule the decision that the British electorate and Parliament make on such matters.

We believe that the British people, through their representatives in this House, should be able to tailor policies on such crucial matters to fit our needs, experience and traditions. This issue is vital, since we cannot and will not go back on the reforms that we introduced to trade union law, and which have been profoundly successful in the past 12 years.

We could not return power to the trade union bosses and go back to the strikes, chaos and inefficiency that marked the Labour party's trade union laws. However, the Labour party want us to hand over responsibility so that we are governed by trade union laws—often foreign trade union laws at that.

Mr. Chris Smith: Would the right hon. Gentleman care to tell me what it is in the social charter agreement which was signed by the other 11 EC countries that in any way accords with what he just said about new powers for trade union leaders?

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Tristan Garel-Jones): It is article 118B.

Mr. Lilley: As my hon. Friend so succinctly puts it, it is article 118B. We believe that the House and the Government should have the right to select and to choose the laws that apply in the British economy. Over the past 12 years, we have amply demonstrated that the laws which we have chosen have done this country a power of good, and we should be reluctant to go back on that.

The agreement, which we have negotiated successfully and in accord with our partners, will achieve what Mr. Delors said that it would achieve—it will help to make this country a paradise for investment. I have ensured that that message will go out to all our commercial attachés throughout the world.

In recent years, we have been successful in making this country more attractive for investment—whether inward investment, domestic investment or investment from other European countries—than any other European country. We intend to retain and to reinforce that position. That is what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and his colleagues achieved at Maastricht.

The debate has been about socialism—its demise and its end as a credible intellectual force. My hon. Friends' contribution have demonstrated that fact, as have those of the Opposition. The Opposition's paucity—in terms of numbers and of the intellectual content of their speeches—has revealed that the Labour party has indeed, as their friend Robert Harris said, no further intellectual contribution to make to the political debate. The Labour party is certainly not ready to think, let alone to govern. Until the Labour party has re-established its ideas, principles and what it actually stands for, it should not pretend that it will be in a position to take charge of the fate of this nation.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield on his motion and on securing this valuable debate.

2.16 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Mr. Evans) on choosing for debate so timely a subject—the implications of socialism. We have come here not to mourn socialism but to bury it, because socialism has been a pernicious creed which has held much of Europe in its iron grip for 74 years. What has been the cost? It has been economic stagnation, massive pollution and millions of dead. With its stablemate, the national socialists of Germany, it laid waste to much of our continent during the middle of the century.

The peoples of Europe have risen up and we have seen the fall of hundreds of bronze Lenins around eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, but socialism has left in its wake economic devastation, hunger and famine, social disruption and suspicion of one's neighbours. Look at the position in the former East Germany and one finds a country in which the dreaded Stasi kept a file on almost every citizen. There is suspicion between neighbours and between brother and sister in that country. The peoples of Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia have fought for their freedom and are now fighting for the success of free enterprise. They have been joined by the peoples of the three Baltic republics who are at last free from that shameful deal between national socialists and communist socialists. The peoples of the Ukraine and Russia are following suit.

Is not it funny that, when the hon. Member for Islington, South and Finsbury (Mr. Smith) and many of his hon. Friends see the failure of socialism in eastern Europe, they suddenly say, "No, that is not socialism"? But that is not what they said when Labour leaders trooped to pay tribute in Moscow, time and again referring to their brothers and comrades.

Mr. Chris Smith: The hon. Gentleman is totally incorrect. The position is precisely what I have always said. The hon. Gentleman must not tar me with that brush.

Mr. Arnold: The hon. Gentleman has just said, "It was not me, sir." As in the case of its association with Robert Maxwell, when failure beckons, the new high-gloss Labour leadership cannot be seen for dust. But some are seen. John Austin-Walker, Labour's prospective parliamentary candidate for Woolwich and leader of the Labour-controlled Greenwich council, said that he thought that the overthrow of eastern European regimes was very sad.

The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) has gone even further, explaining that the campaign for socialism will have to be resumed inside the USSR and eastern Europe. Only last month, six Labour Members signed an early-day motion noting that the Bolshevik revolution of 74 years ago represented the aspirations of Russian workers and peasants. Did not that turn out wonderfully for those workers and peasants!

To this very day the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) defends Cuba and its Castro regime. After all, Fidel Castro is an unreformed socialist, the last dictator in Latin America. Like the Bourbons, he has learnt nothing. He blunders on, his people in poverty and want, with five-hour speeches which are another by-product of socialism. The hon. Member for Islington, North never learns either. In the House he glows with praise for socialist Nicaragua, but the people of Nicaragua gave their verdict on socialism and kicked out the Sandinistas. Not to be outdone, Mrs. Kinnock wrote to *The Independent* wishing the Sandinistas well just days before they were voted out of office.

Only a year ago Labour Members told us to look at Sweden as a marvellous example of socialism in action. We did look at it, but more important, so did the Swedish people and at their first opportunity they chucked the socialists out of office. Around the world socialism is in retreat and collapse, but here it is alive and only too keen to do the kicking—kicking the British people in the pocket and then in the teeth.

Until the general election socialism is being kept carefully under wraps. We know that the Opposition totally rely on opinion polls for policy direction. They know, as we do, that the British people are clearly anti-socialist. Therefore, Labour's publicity machine sees to it that its presentation is definitely anti-socialist. The question that we must ask is whether the Labour party itself is anti-socialist. Let us take a warning from that great sage the right hon. Member for Chesterfield, who said recently that Labour had changed its mind to win the next general election, but could also change it back again after the election. That is a clear warning to the British people.

With great fanfare, Labour kicked out the hon. Member for Liverpool, Broadgreen (Mr. Fields) to prove that the Labour party was safe in the hands of the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock). Now with even greater fanfare Labour has dispatched the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East (Mr. Nellist), who earned the accolade of Back Bencher of the year. He puts the case for socialism today, as the right hon. Member for Islwyn did yesterday, although he does so in a less long-winded way and with more evident intellectual integrity.

The socialists are still there in the Labour party. They are official Labour party prospective candidates and Members of the House. The hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) was and is a national by-word for town hall socialism with all that that has meant in reality and in the minds of the electorate. I presume that he is ready to overthrow the Labour leader with a palace putsch after the general election in the way that he did in the GLC. He should not worry, because the Leader of the Opposition will be overthrown after the next general election when he fails yet again to lead Labour to victory.

The hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant) also remains an official Labour party candidate. That hon. Gentleman gloried in the recent problems in Haringey and gloated that the police were given a good thrashing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Earlier today I had occasion to reproach hon. Members for what seems to me to be growing discourtesy in the House. The hon. Gentleman's remarks are coming dangerously near unparliamentary in respect of one of his colleagues.

Mr. Dixon: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If an hon. Gentleman wishes to refer to another hon. Member, is not it the convention of the House that that hon. Member should be informed before the debate? Has the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Arnold) spoken or written to the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Grant) and told him the he intended to make this scurrilous attack upon him today?

Mr. Arnold: No, I did not. I assumed that as the debate was about the implications of socialism, a matter very close to the heart of Opposition Members, the hon. Member for Tottenham would be here this morning.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should observe the long-standing courtesies of the House. The fact that he is getting dangerously near to making personal attacks on parliamentary colleagues is a symptom, I fear, of the growing discourtesy in the House.

Mr. Arnold: I shall press on, then, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and say——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I should like the hon. Gentleman to show some sign of contrition before he moves on. It is not unreasonable that the hon. Gentleman should withdraw his remarks or apologise for his discourtesy in not informing the hon. Member to whom he referred.

Mr. Arnold: In the circumstances, I certainly withdraw them, on the grounds that I explained just now and, if it is necessary, I apologise for not so informing the hon. Member concerned.

The British people should be aware that the key question at the next general election will be, "What would socialism cost you?" They will not get an answer to that question from the Labour party. It just keeps on spraying out the promises. The House should be grateful to our right hon. Friends at the Treasury who have costed these sprayed promises at a figure of £35 billion. What would that figure of £35 billion mean? It would mean an increase of 15p in the standard rate of income tax, from 25p in the pound to 40p in the pound. The Labour party has already declared that the top rate of income tax would rise from 40p to 50p in the pound, together with the removal of the upper limit on national insurance contributions. That would mean a marginal rate of 59 per cent.—up from the present 40 per cent.

In the small print of its programme the Labour party has announced eight extra taxes, but we have heard nothing about them today nor have we seen them in the glossy brochures that have been put about. Even so, those eight extra taxes still leave a massive shortfall that would require an extra 10p in the pound on the standard rate of income tax.

Opinion polls tell the Labour party, the Conservative party and our constituents that health and education are very close to the heart of the British people, but the difference between the socialist and the Conservative approach to these matters is that we are interested in service—as are the public—not in the structure or the institutions of the education service or the national health service. Our education reforms are clear. What should be taught to our children is contained in the national curriculum. How well our children are coping will be shown by assesement and testing. Reports to parents are being made clearly, not by means of the gobbledegook that educationists alone understand.

What, at the end of the day, can parents do about it? We have seen fit to increase the number of parent governors. We have given schools local financial management and, further, through grant-maintained schools control over the totality of education funds for children. What has been the Labour party's reaction? It dislikes assessment. Why? Because the National Union of Teachers has given it its instructions. It will not allow data to be provided which would enable the performance of members of the teachers' unions to be measured. Why has the Labour party done that? Because the NUT is one of the paymasters of the Labour party.

In particular, the Labour party opposes grant-maintained schools. In my constituency, the parents of children at St. George's school, Gravesend, voted by nine to one for grant-maintained status so that they could be in full control of the finances and running of that school. Other schools have gone ahead, by similar vast majorities, and have taken control over them. The Labour party dislikes the idea of parents calling the shots rather than the bureaucrats, particularly when the bureaucrats are members of affiliated unions. The House should note the Labour party's decision to destroy grammar schools, which have provided an excellent education for many children.

Across the House, we share the belief that the national health service should be open to all, regardless of income, and financed out of taxation. The question is how to deliver that. Socialists believe in bureaucracy and they created the largest employer in the world, the NHS—that is, the largest other than the red army and the Indian railways, neither which is an especially helpful comparison——

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

2.30 pm

Mr. Chris Smith: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. During his remarks, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry made a comment about the social charter which he may wish to reconsider. I challenged him on whether there was anything in the social charter that accorded with the points that he was making. His response was to cite article 118B. I now have the text of that article and it does not justify his remarks.

Mr. McKelvey: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Would it be in order for me to move my motion formally?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I regret that that is not possible.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 18th December, the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to the European Community: The European Council at Maastricht may, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 14 (Exempted business), be proceeded with, though opposed, until 2.00 a.m.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Mr. Frank Brand

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

2.31 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): On 30 November 1990, a constituent of mine, Mr. Frank Brand, was informed that, in accordance with a decision given the previous day at a summary hearing, he had been summarily dismissed from service as a steward on British Rail.

The charge was that

"on Thursday 1st November 1990 whilst working on duty circuit 092, 1703 Paddington to Cheltenham service you issued an ICOBS buffet receipt to 2 passengers in lieu of a travel ticket. This receipt was to the value of £5·00 which you failed to account for in your daily business."

He was told to return all company property—uniform, travel passes, keys and so on—but he was given the right of appeal. The passengers in question apparently boarded the train at Stonehouse, got off at Gloucester, reboarded after an interval at Gloucester and got off at Stonehouse.

Before coming to the detail of the hearing and the appeal, I make two general points. The first concerns the extreme improbability of the alleged action. Mr. Brand was a steward with a high reputation. According to his advocate at the appeal, he scrupulously handed back miniature drink bottles, as he did his revenue and copy receipts.

The catering manager at Paddington complimented Mr. Brand on his professionalism, having received on 14 November a letter of praise from a passenger. The manager wrote:

"I would like to thank you for your efforts and I am sure that your future announcements will continue to project the same professionalism and create additional sales on our buffet services."

It is hard to imagine that anyone in Mr. Brand's position, as a British rail employee knowing of the likelihood of inspectors going through the train—as they do frequently on InterCity services—and with ticket collectors at the barriers, would crudely write out a return fare from Stonehouse to Gloucester on a buffet slip. It is also strange that the allegation of malpractice against Mr. Brand came from a woman, without any address being given, who is the mother of one of the two passengers and that her evidence should have been uncorroborated.

My second general point is that we have no other account of this incident. Everything seems to revolve round a photocopy of the receipt. How were the two passengers on the train without tickets in the first place? Who were they? We have no names, addresses, ages or occupations. They are variously described as youths, lads, students and children.

At the appeal hearing, the chairman admitted that he had no idea of their ages. Did Mr. Brand lean over the counter of the buffet and say, "You look like two customers who might not have tickets. I have a good method of getting round this"? Or did they come to him and say, "We are travellers without tickets; can you help us"? The transcripts in the case are haphazard and confusing, but, as I understand the story, the passengers were apprehended on the return journey to Stonehouse and discovered with this bogus document. However, the allegation was made by the woman some five days later.

If we look at this case carefully, it seems more and more incredible. Would not an official of BR have issued two tickets, the normal practice, and have written "return" on both? In any case, the £5 that British Rail says that Mr. Brand received and appropriated for his own use bears no relation to the fare, which is 85p for a child single or £1·70 for an adult single. We are still not clear whether these were two children or two adults. All that we know that the mother of one of them reported the story five days after the events and, prima facie, I must say that it looks to me as though she may have fabricated this highly implausible story to exculpate the travellers from an attempt to travel without paying the fare.

Two points should be mentioned before I deal with the hearings themselves. At the summary hearing, there was a great deal of discussion about handwriting, although it was admitted that on a moving train and with different pens, letters and words could vary even when written by the same hand. At the summary hearing, the chairman, Mr. McIlroy, said—this is on page 3—that the colour of the original ink was black. During the adjournment, Mr. Brand's representative rang Gloucester station, where someone said that the original ink was blue.

One might have thought that, by this time, the sole piece of evidence should have been regarded as important, but apparently it has since been lost. It was also said that, from the receipt book, receipts Nos. 04 to 09 were missing. Were some of these stolen, perhaps by the two passengers in question? We do not know. At the appeal, we heard that only Nos. 04, 05 and 06 were missing. No. 8 was used by Mr. Brand and we have heard nothing again of No. 7. I do not say that this is vital evidence, but it was evidence that the matter was carelessly investigated, and no one seems to have been sure of the facts.

At all times, Mr. Brand has been desperately eager and willing for a full police investigation. He certainly was in the repeated interviews that he has had with me. The handwriting has been examined from a photocopy only, which could, after all, have been copied from a forgery, yet British Rail places great stress on the handwriting issue. Mr. Barry Woledge, personnel director of InterCity, British Railways Board wrote to me on 16 July 1991. He said:

"A forensic report has confirmed that the receipt was completed in Mr. Brand's own handwriting."

Let us see what the forensic report says. It is much more cautious. Mr. M. S. A. Handy, document examiner, has examined receipt No. 409604—the first time that we have been given the number. He says:

"There are many similarities between these writings and in my opinion BRAND completed the receipt. The evidence is such that I cannot exclude the possibility that another person was responsible, however, I consider it unlikely. It should be noted that examination of the questioned writing has been limited because it is photocopied."

Mr. Woledge continues to me:

"This clearly confirms the allegations from the two members of the travelling public".

The House will note how two lads, children or youths on the Stonehouse to Gloucester train without a ticket have now become

"members of the travelling public".

Mr. Woledge says that they

"were required to pay £3 for travel and for which they received a buffet receipt in lieu of a ticket".

Prima facie, a BR official seems to have been exerting some measure of compulsion here. Mr. Woledge continues:

"We believe that there is sufficient evidence from the buffet receipt and the unsolicited complaint that we received to confirm that an offence has been committed."

To call the complaint unsolicited is stretching language. The original letter was from the mother of one of the two members of the travelling public found in possession of a buffet ticket. Those two might well have alighted at Stonehouse at the end of their journey and disappeared into the night. A complaint can be described as unsolicited only if a person under no suspicion and unknown and unrelated to any party concerned raises a matter related to his or her treatment.

Mr. Brand's advocate raised the question of the relevant receipt. He asked:

"We have not seen the original, we have not had it analysed have we?"

The answer was:

"Not a court of law here."

Presumably referring to something that he had to write out at the hearing, Frank Brand said that the "s" in Stonehouse had a tail on it but on the receipt the "s" had no tail. The chairman replied:

"We have to agree handwriting can differ".

Mr. Brand pointed out that on the second handwriting sample there was no tail on the "s". The advocate said that there was no comparison. The chairman replied:

"At the moment we will have to agree to leave that open".

Yet in his verdict he referred to colour of ink and style of handwriting.

Mr. Woledge's letter to me said that Mr. McMillan, the catering manager, had carried out his investigation in a structured manner, yet according to Mr. Brand he had not seen the receipt until the summary hearing.

There was then a discussion about whether another person might have stolen the receipt book and written out a receipt in a passable forgery while Mr. Brand was clearing up the first-class area. We then learn that on the receipt a figure of £2·50 had been crossed out, but that appeared to be passed over in the hearing. It may seem a minor point, but I suggest that it is more consonant with an amateur offender, such as a boy trying to travel without paying his fare, than with someone out to obtain money by unfair means and versed in that art, as Mr. Brand was alleged to have been.

There are gaps in the transcript. For example, when Mr. Brand asked:

"Why was it made out for £2·50 initially and not £5?"

the chairman apparently replied:

"The name of the gentleman in charge of the case is Detective Constable Moles".

That is a non-sequitur. The chairman went on to say:

"You can confirm for your own satisfaction the colour of the ink".

How could one do that from a photocopy?

The chairman said that there had been previous examples of Mr. Brand's paperwork going missing. That is a serious matter. If the allegation were true, some evidence should be produced at a proper inquiry. But, on the contrary, the chairman at the appeal said that there had been no previous irregularities on Mr. Band's part. Nothing further was added at the time.

When asked if the complainant—who, as I said earlier, was the mother of at least one of the two passengers—had been interviewed, the chairman simply said that a letter had been written asking for a description of the person who issued the receipt.

Incidentally, it took the woman five days to make the complaint. Most parents would have been round at the police station within hours if their children had been involved by a steward in an alleged railway fraud.

What did the chairman mean by saying of the passengers:

"It is very lucky they did not have anything other than the fare on them, what do you think?"

How did he know? Were the boys asked to turn out their pockets? Was he suggesting that they might have been parted from large sums of money for that comparatively short journey?

The chairman asked:

"What motive would there be for a mother to react in this way?"

I should have thought that there was every reason, if a child were found carrying a buffet receipt instead of a rail ticket. Let us assume for a moment that that child has snatched two or three tickets from the book while the steward's back was turned or while he was clearing up the first-class spaces. There would be every reason for saying that the steward issued the receipt. I do not state that that is what happened. I say only that it is necessary to look carefully at statements made by mothers on behalf of children who have been found breaking the law. Once again, the age of the "children" is germane to the case, but remains unknown.

Mr. Impey, the senior steward, who presumably knows Mr. Brand and his handwriting better than most people, was then called to give evidence. When asked whether he thought that the writing on the receipt was Mr. Brand's, he replied, "I would say not" The chairman said immediately:

"I think I should say that I consider Mr. Impey's testament irrelevant."

Why irrelevant? It may have been biased, perjured or the result of acute myopia, but it was not irrelevant. Mr. Impey would not agree conclusively that the writing was Mr. Brand's

Some of the comments in the hearing seem meaningless. When the advocate pointed out that the ink on the original was blue, the chairman is quoted as saying, "One factor of receipt". What does that mean? When the advocate asked, "were British transport police involved?",

the reply was, "Their business not ours". When the advocate asked:

"What about the means of identifying Mr. Brand. Would they be able to identify Mr. Brand? Have they been asked?",

the reply from the chairman was: "I consider that irrelevant." Then the advocate understandably insisted:

"Who did issue that receipt? It would have to be a proper identity parade otherwise there would be lying",

to which the chairman again replied:

"Irrelevant . . . they could know Frank from travelling before."

The press has recently told of several cases in which passengers travelling innocently without correct tickets have been subjected to severe harassment by the inspectors of British Rail—for example, Ian Botham's son. I recall Ian Botham's letter to *The Times* on the subject. At the very least, the boys should have given their names and addresses to the authorities when the allegation was first made.

First, however, came the chairman's comment:

"I find the whole thing strange. I refer to you as a good member of staff, your buffet display is top notch. You got more revenue than others. There is no discrepancy here before on file, so I find it strange. But on the other side to manufacture the story is strange, also. Unless of course a son of yours has tried to travel free and been caught out."

[Mr. John Wilkinson]

After referring again to Mr. Brand's reputation for honesty, Mr. Stevenson added:

"Your hearing officer was taking his job away due to a third hand account. My son could do this type of writing (i.e. Mr. Brand's)—it is possible. You should reinstate and leave the evidence to the police . . . In the modern education system people have a bagful of different pens . . . Mrs. Taylor"—we have the name of the woman now—"has had ample opportunity to come back to you but she hasn't responded. This was November 1990. If she was convinced she would have responded".

Nevertheless, the decision was confirmed.

There is one final point. I have been surprised and very shocked to discover the difficulty that exists in arranging a proper investigation or securing a change in attitude towards an employee in a nationalised industry—British Rail. The reply of the chairman of BR to me on 4 April was curt—two lines of acknowledgement and three of reply. Mr. Watkinson, director of employee relations, simply repeated that the examination had been thorough, the forensic report definite and the hearings correct. He added that Mr. Brand had been employed for less than two years and would not have been eligible to apply to an industrial tribunal. How convenient for British Rail. That fact is certainly no justification for the thoroughly sloppy investigation that it conducted.

A colleague, Mr. Barry Woledge, replied again on 16 April that further investigations had been carried out and that there was no reason to waver from the view that Mr. Rand intended to defraud the railway. No help or involvement could be afforded by the Department of Transport or of Employment, despite my representations to Ministers at both Departments. Mr. Woledge of BR gave no hard factual evidence arising from his series of investigations and I feel that, at the very least, and in view of the many vaguenesses and inadequacies that I have pointed out, we are entitled to such evidence.

I am not making a categorical statement on innocence or guilt, but I do not feel that a fair hearing has been afforded. The matter has been passsed on, with general support being given up the line by different members of the same organisation.

Mr. Brand's last words at the appeal were:

"Looking you in the eye, I did not write that receipt."

I would not have taken such trouble over the case if I did not feel that a man's livelihood had been removed by British Rail without any effective means of redress against allegations which beg more questions than they answer and which British Rail made no effort to substantiate satisfactorily to Mr. Brand, his representatives, his union or even his Member of Parliament.

The gross insouciance of British Rail reflects no credit on any of the management representatives concerned—right the way up to the chairman himself. British Rail should either prove its case—which to my mind it has not—or reinstate Mr. Brand at once as compensation not just for loss of earnings but for the damage done to his character, reputation and family.

2.50 pm

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Christopher Chope): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) for the close interest he has taken in the case of his constituent, Mr. Frank Brand. I congratulate him on securing this debate today.

My hon. Friend has been typically diligent in his pursuit of this matter with British Rail, with both the chairman and the director of employee relations. He has also had correspondence with my hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, West (Mr. McLoughlin), the Minister for Shipping and Public Transport at the Department.

My hon. Friend has set out his concerns very clearly for the House, and set out in detail how this case was handled by British Rail. As he has explained, Mr. Brand was dismissed by BR from his post as a senior steward with InterCity On Board Services—InterCity's train catering division—in November 1990. This followed a complaint alleging that he had issued a buffet receipt to two young passengers in lieu of a travel ticket and failed to account for the £5 received.

The allegations stemmed from a letter received by BR's area manager at Gloucester in November 1990, in which a woman alleged that her son and a friend, while travelling from Stonehouse to Gloucester, were stopped by the steward and asked if they were trying to avoid paying their fare. They are said to have explained that they were looking for the conductor to buy their tickets as Stonehouse station did not sell tickets at that time of night. The steward is said to have issued the boys with a receipt, made out for £5 and indicating that it was for the journey from Stonehouse to Gloucester.

On the return journey, the boys were apparently challenged by the ticket collector on the train, who explained that the receipt was not a valid ticket, and that they would have to pay the full fare. The mother asked that the area manager investigate who had issued the bogus ticket. With her letter, she attached the receipt said to have been issued to her son.

Investigations by BR showed that the only steward on the train in question was Mr. Brand. He was seen by the Gloucester area catering manager. He was subsequently charged, under BR's disciplinary arrangements, to answer the allegations.

A summary hearing was held, chaired by BR's InterCity catering manager at Paddington. My hon. Friend has commented in detail on the transcript of that hearing, including the statements by the witness, Mr. Farrell; the differences of opinion about the handwriting on the receipt; whether someone might have stolen the receipt book and forged the receipt; unsupported allegations about previous examples of Mr. Brand's paperwork being missing; and the apparent lack of follow-up to the mother's original letter.

As my hon. Friend has said, the hearing focused particularly on the buffet receipt and whether or not it was written by Mr. Brand. The type of pen and colour of ink used was believed to match that used by Mr. Brand. I undertand that the British Transport Police yesterday found the receipt and now confirm that the ink is black—the receipt had a reference number written on it, 092, the one issued to Mr. Brand for this journey and known only by InterCity staff. This, with the similarities in handwriting, led the BR manager to conclude that he felt convinced beyond all reasonable doubt that Mr. Brand had committed the offence. He dismissed Mr. Brand with immediate effect, reminding him of his right to appeal in writing within seven days.

The appeal was fixed for 19 December, but was postponed until 16 January this year to allow Mr. Brand

to give notice to his union to arrange a legal representative. The appeal was chaired by the business group manager for Bristol and the original verdict was upheld.

My hon. Friend has set out a number of concerns, including the lack of firm evidence, the way in which the matter was investigated, and the conduct of BR's disciplinary hearing. He has also drawn the attention of the House to the difficulties he has faced in arranging a proper investigation or a change in BR's management's attitude towards an employee. He has made his points in a measured and careful way. He accepts that he cannot make a categorical statement about innocence or guilt, but he feels that his constituent has not been given a fair hearing.

I know that my hon. Friend will recognise that this case is very much a management matter for BR, and the decision to dismiss Mr. Brand was entirely BR's. But my hon. Friend's points are important ones about fairness in handling disciplinary matters, and I shall of course ensure that they are drawn to the attention of BR. I am sure that BR should take careful note of them. With the rediscovery within the past 24 hours of the original receipt and, I am informed, the two statements from the youths involved, I am sure that my hon. Friend would wish to take the matter further. My hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport has said that should he wish to have a meeting with him and a representative of BR, he would be happy to offer that opportunity. I hope that that demonstrates that the persistence of my hon. Friend has, if nothing else, at least found the receipt that hitherto had been missing.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at six minutes to Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 2 December 1991

HOME DEPARTMENT

Sunday Trading

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects the current round of discussions with interested bodies on Sunday trading to conclude.

Mr. Rumbold: I hope to have concluded my current programme of separate discussions with the wide range of interest groups on their proposals or positions on reform of the Shops Act 1950 early next year. When that programme is complete, we shall consider what further consultations may best promote the development and agreement of acceptable proposals for reform.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what meetings he or Ministers or officials in his Department have held in the last six months regarding Sunday trading; and if he will list *(a)* the dates of such meetings and *(b)* the bodies represented on each occasion.

Mrs. Rumbold: Following is the information requested in relation to meetings in or connected with my programme of separate discussions with interested bodies on possible ways of reforming the law on Sunday trading:

Date of meeting	*Body represented*
5 June	Shopping Hours Reform Council
13 June	Sort Out Sunday
20 June	Lord's Day Observance Society
27 June	National Federation of Meat Traders
2 July	GMB
9 July	Keep Sunday Special Campaign
11 July	Lord's Day Observance Society
17 July	British Tourist Authority/English Tourist Board
24 July	Association of District Councils
24 July	Churches Together in England Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland Free Church Federal Council
31 July	Shopping Hours Reform Council
7 August	OPEN (Outlets Providing for Everyday Needs)
22 October	Institute of Safety and Public Protection
24 October	British Retailers' Association
6 November	Association of Private Market Operators
6 November	Keep Sunday Special Campaign
11 November	Board of Deputies of British Jews
19 November	Retail Consortium

Given the general interest in the subject of Sunday trading, it would be impracticable to maintain a record of all other meetings involving Ministers or officials in which the subject has arisen.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will initiate a publicity campaign to remind companies of the requirements of the law on and the need to observe the law in respect of Sunday trading;

(2) what advice his Department offered to companies considering opening on Sunday in contravention of current legislation prior to 27 November.

Mrs. Rumbold: Companies themselves, in consultation as necessary with their legal advisers, are responsible for understanding the law on Sunday trading and for their conformity with it, as they are in respect of any other relevant law. It was not and is not appropriate for us to issue advice or guidance on this to companies, by a publicity campaign or otherwise. The statement by my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General on 27 November at column 913 confirmed the understanding of the law—that it is not in suspense, and that its enforcement is for local authorities—which we had previously given to those who have asked us for that.

EC (Visits)

Mr. Forman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for himself, and for each of the Ministers at his Department, details of *(a)* the number of visits made in the past month to destinations outside the United Kingdom but within the European Community on official business related to the European Community, *(b)* the number of visits made to Brussels within the past month on official business related to the European Community and *(c)* the number of nights spent over the past month away from the United Kingdom on official European Community business.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The information requested is as follows:

Date	*Place*
Home Secretary	
(a) 29-30 October	Berlin: Informal meeting of EC Immigration Ministers.
20 November	The Hague: Informal meeting of EC/Trevi/Immigration Ministers.
25 November	Sangatte near Calais: Signature of Policing and Frontiers Control Protocol with M. Marchand and talks.
(b) None	
(c) One night (29 October)	
Minister of State: Mr. Patten	
(a) 13 November	Brussels: Meeting of EC Justice Ministers including Justice Council.
(b) As at *(a)*	
(c) None	
Minister of State: Mrs. Rumbold	
(a) 13-15 November	Bonn: Visit hosted by Minister for Women and Youth.
(b) None	
(c) 2	
Other Ministers	
None.	

Prison Officers (Brixton)

Mr. Leadbitter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison officers have been transferred from Brixton prison following the escape of two category A prisoners from Brixton; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Since 7 July, the date of the escape, 57 staff in the grades from prison officer to principal officer

have been transferred out of Brixton. Twenty eight had responded to national trawls inviting applications to staff new establishments. The remainder had previously requested a transfer from Brixton and vacancies became available at the establishment of their choice.

Knives (Offensive Weapons)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will take further action to reduce the use of knives as offensive weapons;

(2) if he will bring forward proposals to tighten the law on the sale of knives which may be used as offensive weapons;

(3) what initiatives have been undertaken by his Department to reduce the danger to the public from the use of knives as offensive weapons.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The sale and possession of knives is subject to a number of controls. The sale of flick knives, gravity knives and butterfly knives, which have no legitimate use, is banned. These knives have distinctive mechanisms which can be defined in law. There would be considerable practical problems in seeking to apply more general restrictions on the sale and purchase of knives which have a variety of legitimate everyday uses.

For this reason, the Government have tackled the misuse of knives by tightening the law on possession rather than imposing further restrictions on sale. The Criminal Justice Act 1988 makes it an offence for a person to have a bladed or sharply pointed article (other than a small folding pocket knife) in a public place without good reason. The Act also places the onus on the knife-carrier to show that he has good reason for possessing it in public.

This measure supplements the Prevention of Crime Act 1953 which makes it an offence to be in possession of an offensive weapon in a public place without reasonable excuse or lawful authority.

The Government believe that these measures provide the police and the courts with effective powers to punish and deter the carrying of knives in public places. The Government have no plans to introduce further legislation in this matter.

Parliamentary Constituencies

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the 20 largest and smallest parliamentary constituencies, in geographical terms in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Rumbold: The information requested is set out in the tables. The areas are given in hectares and include land and inland water.

Table 1: The 20 largest constituencies

Constituency	Area
Ross, Cromarty and Skye	954,680
Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber	870,708
Caithness and Sutherland	788,297
Argyll and Bute	661,362
North Tayside	485,104
Galloway and Upper Nithsdale	441,883
Penrith and the Border	327,964
Western Isles	308,717
Brecon and Radnor	301,269
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	265,463
Kincardine and Deeside	261,106
Mid Ulster	257,098
Hexham	250,992
Orkney and Shetland	247,928
Roxburgh and Berwickshire	242,811
Richmond (Yorkshire)	233,012
Berwick-upon-Tweed	231,456
Gordon	229,485
Ceredigion and Pembroke North	227,038
Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale	226,956

Table 2: The 20 smallest constituencies

Constituency	Area
Chelsea	572
Peckham	609
Kensington	623
Fulham	693
Bethnal Green and Stepney	719
Islington North	741
Islington South and Finsbury	748
Westminster North	833
Hackney North and Stoke Newington	845
Vauxhall	872
Newham North West	891
Newham North East	892
Norwood	902
Hammersmith	924
Streatham	953
Holborn and St Pancras	959
Southwark and Bermondsey	1,025
Leyton	1,031
Battersea	1,039
Tooting	1,070

Juvenile Crime

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Government policy on making parents fully responsible for the behaviour of and crimes committed by their children.

Mr. John Patten: In the Criminal Justice Act 1991 the Government have put more responsibility on the parents of young offenders to look after their children properly. The 1991 Act strengthens courts' powers to require parents to attend court with their children, to pay their children's fines and to bind over the parents of convicted juvenile offenders. These provisions will come into force in October 1992.

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Home Office guidelines regarding the number of cautions which the police have to give to juveniles before criminal proceedings can be taken against juvenile offenders.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The decision to caution is a matter for the discretion of the police and it is not for the Home Secretary to specify how many cautions can be given to any offender.

Crime Victims

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the amount of support made available to victims of crime.

Mr. John Patten: Our major financial commitment is through the criminal injuries compensation scheme, which

will pay over £125 million this financial year to victims of violent crime throughout Great Britan, the most generous such scheme in western Europe.

In addition, the Home Office makes a grant to the voluntary organisation Victim Support, chiefly to enable local victim support schemes to employ paid co-ordinators helping them to make the best use of volunteers. This year's grant is £5·7 million and we have announced plans to increase it to £7·3 million next year, an increase of 28 per cent., sustaining and reinforcing the present schemes and allowing some expansion into providing new services to support victims at court.

The third strand of our support for victims of crime is our work with the criminal justice services to improve their response to victims' needs, following up the victims charter which we published in 1990.

New Housing Schemes

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will meet the chairmen of the major house builders to discuss the involvement of the police through formal procedures at an early stage to discuss the design and layout of new housing schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The police have a significant contribution to make to the design of new housing schemes with their ability to offer expert advice to property developers on design measures which can reduce the opportunities for crime. All police forces in England and Wales except Hampshire have designated architectural liaison officers for this purpose. The police's "Secured By Design" scheme, which is a joint initiative with the major companies in the house building industry operating in many parts of the country, is aimed at ensuring that newly built homes and estates are safe and secure. The Government fully support this programme, which is an excellent example of the partnership approach to crime prevention. The Government also believe that the house building industry already recognises the importance of design in preventing crime and making homes and communities safer. My right hon. Friend has therefore at present no plans to meet the chairmen of the major house building companies.

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the involvement of the police at an early stage through formal procedures with planning authorities to discuss security and safety measures for house building schemes.

Mr. John Patten: The police have dedicated architectural liaison officers who advise local authority planners and others in the building industry on the design of housing and estates from a crime prevention perspective. In addition the Department of the Environment is revising its planning policy guidance to include advice for local planning authorities on crime prevention aspects in the design and layout of new developments, and on consulting police architectural liaison officers about planning applications. This will be issued early in the new year.

Car Insurance

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will meet the chairman of the major insurance companies to discuss differential rates of insurance premia charged on individuals, depending on the level of car security undertaken by the motorist; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend has no immediate plans to meet the chairmen of the major insurance companies. He and I did, however, meet representatives of the Association of British Insurers on 16 September to discuss what action the insurance industry was taking to help tackle car crime. This included the development by the association of a new motor insurance rating formula which, for the first time, takes into account security features fitted as standard equipment by vehicle manufacturers. My right hon. Friend attended the launch of this new formula on 16 October.

My right hon. Friend has urged the insurance industry to take further measures to encourage better vehicle security by offering discounts to motorists who fit effective after-sale security devices to their cars.

Emergency Planning Review

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to make the further announcement on arrangements for warning to which he referred in his answer to the hon. Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler), 10 July 1991, *Official Report*, column *391-94*.

Mr. John Patten: We intend to make an announcement on arrangements for warning in the new year.

Young Offenders

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the educational and social opportunities provided in young offender institutions.

Mrs. Rumbold: There are two categories of inmates in young offender institutions: juveniles between the age of 14 and 16 and young offenders up to the age of 21. Juveniles under the school leaving age receive a minimum of 15 hours education per week in academic subjects, life and social skills, leisure activities and work skills. Juveniles over the school leaving age are expected to participate in full-time education, though it is not compulsory. Where the inmate chooses not to participate, alternative constructive activities are provided. They should still receive part-time education averaging two hours per week.

Young offenders should also receive at least an average of two hours education per week, broadly covering the same areas as juveniles, though more flexibility may be exercised in giving greater emphasis on the provision of work-related training or remedial teaching where this would be valuable.

Regarding social opportunities, inmates are given the opportunity to mix with other inmates to preserve and encourage the proper use of leisure time and to relate to their peer group. At least an hour per day should normally be provided to allow inmates to participate in a choice of activities such as table tennis, billiards, board games, as well as the chance to watch television. Inmates are also encouraged to use the library facilities.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any plans to remove teenagers completely from the prison system.

Mr. John Patten: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to a question from him on 26 November at column *444*. We have no plans further to restrict courts' powers to commit young people to custody.

Closed Circuit Television

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many courts have been provided with closed circuit television equipment to enable children to give evidence without being present in the court room; when he expects the central criminal court at the Old Bailey to be so equipped; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: I have been asked to reply.

To date, 35 crown court centres have been supplied with such equipment as part of a programme which will provide equipment in a total of 44 centres by the end of the 1992-93 financial year. The Central Criminal Court was one of the first 14 centres equipped in preparation for 5 January 1989. An application for the use of a television link may be made under s.32(1) of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 to any crown court centre. The decision as to whether an application should be made is for the appropriate party. The granting or otherwise of such an application is a matter of judicial discretion. Where an application is made and granted at a court centre which is not equipped, rules of court provide for the case to be transferred to a convenient equipped centre.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

EC (Visits)

Mr. Forman: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list for himself, and for each of the ministers at his Department, details of *(a)* the number of visits made in the past month to destinations outside the United Kingdom but within the European Community on official business related to the European Community, *(b)* the number of visits made to Brussels within the past month on official business related to the European Community and *(c)* the number of nights spent over the past month away from the United Kingdom on official European Community business.

The Attorney-General: None.

Mr. Forman: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list: the number of visits made by officials in his Department during the past month to destinations outside the United Kingdom but within the European Community on official business related to the European Community, the number of visits made by officials in his Department to Brussels within the past month on official business related to the European Community and the number of nights spent by officials in his Department over the past month away from the United Kingdom on official European Community business.

The Attorney-General: An official from my Department attended a conference in the Netherlands on combating EC fraud and spent four nights away from the United Kingdom.

House of Fraser

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Attorney-General, pursuant to his answer of 6 November, *Official Report*, column *113* to the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery, (Mr. Carlile) when he expects to hear the outcome of Metropolitan police inquiries on matters referred to it by the Select Committee on Trade and Industry regarding the interference with its working on the House of Fraser takeover.

The Attorney-General: The Crown Prosecution Service has not yet received the report from the Metropolitan police.

The Metropolitan police are continuing their inquiries and the Crown Prosecution Service anticipates that the preliminary police report will be submitted by 6 December 1991.

EC (Meetings)

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the EC ministerial council meetings at which his Department has or will be represented during November and December.

The Attorney-General: None.

Fraudulent Share Applications

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the number of prosecutions for fraudulent multiple share applications arising out of each privatisation share issue.

The Attorney-General: One hundred and twenty seven prosecutions have been conducted by the fraud investigation group at Crown Prosecution Service headquarters. A very small number of multiple share application cases are likely to have been submitted by the police to local offices of the Crown Prosecution Service but records are not maintained such as would enable these to be readily identified from other cases of deception.

Statistics relating the number of prosecutions broken down according to individual privatisation issues are not routinely maintained by the Crown Prosecution Service, and the information can only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Law Commission Reports

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Attorney-General how many Law Commission reports recommending legislation remain to be acted upon and for what reasons it has been decided not to present Bills to implement the recommendations.

The Attorney-General: Since 1965 the Law Commission, often in conjunction with the Scottish Law Commission, has published 37 reports relating to the consolidation of existing legislation which, except for the one most recently published, have all been implemented. It has published 14 reports recommending the repeal of obsolete enactments, all of which have been implemented. It has published 93 other reports containing draft legislation of which 59 have been implemented.

The Government have not presented Bills to implement the remaining 34 reports for one or more of the following reasons:

(i) the underlying policy has been rejected;
(ii) the case for reform has not been thought to justify parliamentary time;
(iii) the recommendations have been superseded by later events;
(iv) the report is being given further consideration either within Government or at the Law Commission;
(v) although the recommendations have been accepted, there has been no suitable legislative opportunity.

Probate Registry, Cardiff

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the historic fixtures and fittings removed from the Probate Registry, Cardiff road, Llandaff, Cardiff; when their removal was authorised; how they were disposed of; and whether Cadw was consulted before their removal was authorised.

Mr. Yeo: I have been asked to reply.

So far as I can ascertain, the original internal doors were replaced to comply with fire regulations and the fireplaces were removed when adaptations were made to accommodate increased activity by the registry. This work was carried out in the 1960s. The building was not listed as of historic interest until May 1975. No records are available to indicate who was consulted or how items were disposed of. No historic items have been removed for at least the last 20 years.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Air Pollution

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations his Department has received from the investment casting industry regarding difficulties faced in implementing the new air pollution controls required under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Leigh: The Department has received a number of representations on the guidance note for foundry processes which covers the castings industry. In addition to correspondence with Ministers and officials, the guidance note was the subject of a meeting between Lord Hesketh and representatives of the British Foundry Association in April this year.

Credit Application Forms

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make it his policy to require the credit industry to discontinue using negative options on credit application forms.

Mr. Leigh: Yes. Regulation are to be made under the Consumer Credit Act 1974 prohibiting persons licensed under the Act from presenting or sending to prospective borrowers application forms or agreement containing inertia selling provisions such as negative options.

Telephone Bills

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether his proposed charter for consumers will include a right for users of telephones to have a detailed breakdown of their bills if they so require; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: As a result of BT's £15 billion investment in its network since privatisation, 77 per cent. of BT's customers may now receive itemised bills. The service should be available to more than 90 per cent. of BT's customers by the end of 1995. All Mercury and cellular radio customers can already receive itemised bills.

The additional benefits to customers that will result from the Competition and Service (Utilities) Bill will depend on the final scope of the Bill and the specific regulations that are made under it.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with the chairman of OFTEL concerning the need for British Telecom and other telephone service providers to be able to justify in detail the bills they send to their customers and the programme for enabling detailed bills to be available in all areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: BT invests £11 million every working day to extend services such as itemised billing to all its customers. I meet the Director General of OFTEL from time to time to discuss a wide range of telecommunications issues. He fully shares the Government's view of the importance of customers receiving accurate and properly detailed billing information.

Company Auditors

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from persons seeking to register as being eligible for appointment as company auditors or responsible for company audit work about difficulties in meeting the registration requirements.

Mr. Redwood: None.

New Cars

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether it is his intention to publish simultaneously the two reports by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on the supply of new cars and the supply of new car parts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry received the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the supply of new cars on 31 October and is currently considering it. The report will be published as soon as is practicable. The MMC's report on the supply of new car parts will be received on 20 December; that also will be published as soon as is practicable. I cannot comment at this stage on whether the two reports will be published simultaneously.

The content of all MMC reports remain confidential until publication. If the MMC find no adverse effects the Secretary of State has no power to act. If the MMC have reached any adverse findings he will decide what steps, if any, should be taken to remedy the situation. He will also consider whether or not to announce a period of consultation before reaching his conclusions.

Breweries

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many breweries have reduced their pub ownership numbers to 2,000 or below since 1989.

Mr. Redwood: One brewer which owned more than 2,000 pubs in 1989, Scottish and Newcastle, has reduced its estate to below that figure.

ECGD

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a further statement on progress towards the sale of the short-term business of the Export Credits Guarantee Department.

Mr. Lilley: I am pleased to confirm that the sale of the short term business of ECGD, hitherto conducted by the Insurance Services Group, was successfully concluded yesterday, 1 December, following negotiations between Government and NCM, the preferred purchaser.

As a result of the privatisation, a new group of companies has been established. The credit insurance activities of the group will be undertaken, with immediate effect, by NCM Credit Insurance Limited, a fully capitalised company which has been duly authorised by the relevant United Kingdom authorities to undertake such business. Publicity and customer information for the privatised business will be carried forward by the new group.

The sale negotiations were conducted on a basis which provides value for money for the taxpayer. The sale will be examined by the National Audit Office in due course. The sale price was £70 million, comprising £50 million for the capitalisation of the business, plus a goodwill payment of £20 million. Five million pounds of this goodwill element is payable on a deferred basis, subject to the future performance of the insurance company. If the loss ratios for the first two years of underwriting in the private sector are at least as good as those projected when tenders were submitted, the full balance of £5 million will be payable. If the loss ratios for these years are not as good as those projected, the balance of £5 million will be subject to downward adjustment. The deferred element will be payable in 1996 after the accounts for the first two underwriting years are closed. The amount of the deferred element will be indexed to the retail prices index so as to preserve its present value.

Under private sector ownership the new group will be able to offer a more efficient and flexible service, including domestic credit insurance facilities. It will not be vulnerable to the risk of legal challenge which would have remained for as long as the business had been conducted by a Government Department. The new owners, NCM, are specialist credit insurers who were selected as preferred purchaser following a competitive tendering process against a range of criteria including commitment to, and understanding of, the business and financial robustness, as well as tender price.

The vast bulk of insurance services' risk portfolio—political as well as commercial risks—has been successfully placed in the private sector reinsurance market. This is a major achievement. As already confirmed to Parliament, the Government are providing the company with some limited transitional reinsurance facilities to "top up" private sector reinsurance capacity plus a separate "national interest" facility to maintain a measure of cover for the small number of higher risk markets for which cover is not currently available from the private sector. This "national interest" facility will be kept under close review and will remain available for as long as necessary to meet the reasonable needs of exporters, subject to its satisfactory financial performance.

ECGD will, of course, continue as a separate Government Department, the main activity of which will be the provision of facilities for medium and long term export credit on projects and capital goods exports. These facilities will not be affected in any way by the sale to NCM of the Insurance Services Group.

Rechar

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will set out the legal basis of Her Majesty's Government's case against Commissioner Bruce Millan on Rechar and additionality.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 26 November 1991]:* There have been discussions with the Commission on the subject mentioned by the hon. Gentleman, but there are no legal proceedings pending. For a statement on the Government's general position as regards the question of additionality and article 9 of Council Regulation (EEC) 4253/88, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) on 27 November at column *525*.

Export Licences

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for how many years his Department routinely stores copies of export licences *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused; what criteria has been adopted in deciding the appropriate time period for storage of such licence applications and export permissions; and if he will make a statement on any changes adopted in export licensing policy and the licensing process since 1 August.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 29 November 1991]:* The eighth Schedule on Public Records (22 June 1950) as required by the Public Record Office Acts of 1877 and 1898 laid down the period for which export licence applications should be kept as six years. The Public Record Office Act 1958 gave Departments the authority to determine their own destruction dates for their records. Until recently the Department has seen no reason to depart from the six years period approved by Parliament. However, because of the Trade and Industry Select Committee inquiry into export controls in relation to Iraq, destruction of export licence applications over six years old has been suspended for the time being.

The Government announced in October the adoption of a policy of full scope safeguards the effect of which is that significant nuclear exports will not be permitted to countries with nuclear facilities not subject to IAEA safeguards.

EC Directives

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make it his policy not to support the EC advertising directive.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 28 November 1991]:* I assume that my hon. Friend is referring to the proposal for an EC directive on comparative advertising. The Government support in principle the EC Commission's proposed directive to remove prohibitions and restrictions

on comparative advertising provided the comparisons are factual, fair and honest. Such restrictive laws do not exist in the United Kingdom, but in some member states legislation on comparative advertising can restrict competition and deprive consumers of useful information.

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make it his policy not to support the direct selling directive in respect of its ban on selling by fax.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 28 November 1991]:* I take it my hon. Friend has in mind the proposals for a Distance Selling Directive which were circulated to interested parties by the EC Commission earlier this year. These proposals would not ban selling by fax, but they would seriously restrict it. The Commission has consulted member states on its proposals, and we have made it clear we see no need for a directive in this area. The Commission has not yet formally submitted any proposals to the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make it his policy not to support the proposed alcohol advertising directive.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 28 November 1991]:* I am not aware of any EC proposal on alcohol advertising. However, it is the United Kingdom Government's view that advertising should, so far as possible, be subject to the self-regulatory system of control which works well in this country.

PRIME MINISTER

Irish Republic (Legislation)

Mr. Stanbrook: To ask the Prime Minister of the 32 applications by the United Kingdom under the Irish Criminal Law (Jurisdiction) Act 1976, referred to in his written answer of Monday 11 November, *Official Report*, column *352*, how many cases have been prosecuted in the Irish Republic for offences committed in the United Kingdom; and with what results.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer that my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General gave to him on 19 December 1988 at column *94*, and to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, North, (Mr. McNamara) on 14 May 1990 at column *280*. These answers give information about the outcome of cases prosecuted in the Irish Republic following the 31 applications (and not 32 as stated on Monday 11 November at column *352*) made by the United Kingdom authorities.

Child Care

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister if he will arrange to circulate to other departmental parliamentary clerks a summary of the papers and index on child care made available to European Standing Committee B as a good example of content and presentation.

The Prime Minister: I am glad that my hon. Friend regarded those papers as a good example of content and presentation. I do not propose to circulate the documents to other Departments, but I am sure that they will have noted my hon. Friend's comment.

National Lottery

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister what study has been made of a national lottery; and what consideration has been given to the objectives of a scheme and objections to it.

The Prime Minister: The Rothschild Royal Commission on Gambling, which reported in 1978, studied the matter in detail and recommended that there should be a single national lottery for good causes. A number of organisations have since undertaken studies of the merits of a national lottery, and the Government have kept the matter under review.

The objective most frequently suggested for a national lottery is to raise money for good causes.

Among the many other factors which have to be considered are the implications for gambling and the revenue raised, the impact on existing local charitable lotteries and charitable giving generally, and the use of the proceeds.

Disability

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Prime Minister, further to his answer, 19 November, *Official Report*, column *95* what is the total number of whole-time employees employed by the six departments and agencies which exceeded a 3 per cent. level of staff registered as disabled; and what percentage this is of total employees of all departments and agencies.

The Prime Minister: The total number of full-time equivalent staff employed by the six departments and agencies is 57,400. This is 10·4 per cent. of all full-time equivalent staff in the home civil service.

Sterling (German Support)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister what understandings he reached with the German Chancellor about German support of the £ sterling.

The Prime Minister: It has been the practice of successive Governments not to disclose details of intervention in the foreign exchange markets.

British Youth Council

Mrs. Currie: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to meet representatives of the British Youth Council to discuss a range of issues of concern to young people in the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister: I am well aware of the valuable work of the British Youth Council (BYC) in representing our young people, but I have no immediate plans for a meeting. I understand, however, that a meeting is shortly to be arranged between my hon. Friend the Minister for Sport and representatives of the BYC to discuss youth issues which fall within the responsibilities of the Department of Education and Science.

Welsh Research Organisations

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Prime Minister when the mid-Wales meeting of research organisations in Wales, to be convened by the Cabinet Office, in the autumn of 1991 to encourage greater participation in collaborative

projects under the aegis of European Community framework funds for research and development, that was referred to in his letter to the hon. Member for Cardiff, West in August 1991, will take place; how many organisations have been invited to attend; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The event that I referred to in my letter of 1 August took place in Rossett, Clwyd on 15 November. This seminar was organised by the Mid Wales Export Association Ltd., with sponsorship from the Welsh Office. It included speakers from the Cabinet Office, various directorates of the European Commission, and Welsh businesses. The seminar provided up-to-date information on current and future developments in EC R and D funding for representatives of businesses and research organisations. Thirty-two companies and research organisations took part in the seminar.

Special Financial Allowance

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the public duties undertaken by former Prime Ministers for which the special financial allowance is provided.

The Prime Minister: The allowance that I announced on 27 March is available to former Prime Ministers to assist them with the heavy office and secretarial expenses they incur in handling correspondence and engagements as a result of their special position in public life.

Sunday Trading

Mr. Michael: To ask the Prime Minister for what reasons he decided not to introduce legislation in the current session to provide a new legal framework for the regulation of Sunday trading.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) on 28 November at column *1066* and the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office, on 27 November at column 919.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Student Loans

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many students were refused a loan; and for what reasons were they refused.

Mr. Alan Howarth: No valid applications from eligible students have been refused by the Student Loans Company.

Music Tuition

118. **Mr. Batiste:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will publish figures showing the level of funding from central Government for tuition in musical instruments in schools *(a)* in each year since 1986 and *(b)* estimated funding for 1992.

Mr. Eggar: Resources for tuition in musical instruments in schools are not separately identified within the funding which central Government provide to support local authority expenditure on education. It is for individual authorities and schools to decide how much to allocate for this purpose from their budgets.

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will take measures to ensure that school curricula dealing with music lessons are not limited to the theory and appreciation of music but also provide equal emphasis on practical tuition in musical instruments.

Mr. Eggar: In August, my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Education and Science and for Wales published their proposals for music for ages 5 to 14. In England, these proposals were the subject of a consultation exercise undertaken by the National Curriculum Council, whose advice is due to be submitted by 20 December.

Teachers (Pension Scheme)

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his answer 5 November, *Official Report*, column *53*, regarding equalisation, of female contributor survivor benefits within the teachers superannuation scheme, if equal benefits are available on total service, including periods prior to 1988, without extra charge, for all teachers who have an equal retirement age.

Mr. Fallon: Widows' pensions are payable in respect of service from 1 April 1972. Service prior to that date counts only if the individual teacher elected to cover the period at full cost. Widowers' pensions are payable in respect of service from 6 April 1988. Individual female teachers had the option to cover at reduced cost service in the period 1 April 1972 to 5 April 1988, and at full cost any service before 1 April 1972.

Statemented Children

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will list, for each local education authority in England, what extra resources have been made available for statemented children, expressed as teacher-hours per statemented child.

Mr. Fallon: My Department does not collect the information requested. The latest available data suggest that in 1989-90 overall spending per pupil by local education authorities in England on maintained special schools and related provision was more than four times higher than spending per pupil in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools.

American Studies

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action he proposes to take on the Fulbright Commission report on the future of American studies in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Alan Howarth: My right hon. and learned Friend welcomes this report. He notes with pleasure the commission's endorsement of the provision in the national curriculum for the study of the United States. For further and higher education, the nature of subject provision is a matter for individual institutions.

School Transport

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to respond to the Audit Commission report "Home to School Transport: A System at the Cross Roads".

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend is considering the commission's report carefully and will respond as soon as possible.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to review the Education Act 1944 as it refers to the transport of pupils from home to school.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend will consider whether the transport provisions of the Education Act 1944 should be reviewed when he has completed his consideration of the Audit Commission's recent report on home to school transport.

Higher Education Fees

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the basic mandatory fee level for higher education students for 1992-93.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that my right hon. and learned Friend gave to my hon. Friend the member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) on 6 November 1991 at columns *137-40*, which included details of the higher education fee levels to be reimbursed through student awards at publicly-funded institutions next year.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the estimated cost of the two journeys made by car or plane since July 1990 to Bradford by the Minister of State and the additional associated costs of the journeys.

Mr. Eggar: The total cost of two journeys to Bradford by air for myself and civil servants is as follows:

	£
(a) air fares	490·00
(b) associated costs	410·27

Education (School Premises) Regulations

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what conclusions he has reached in respect of his review of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981; and when he will bring the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981 into force.

Mr. Fallon: The results of the review are expected to be available towards the end of next year. The current regulations came into operation on 1 August 1981, with the exception of certain requirements which would have been likely to require building work at existing schools. Those requirements were covered by a transition period which was due to expire in September 1991 but has been extended until 1996 pending the outcome of the review.

Pupil Testing

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when the 1992 tests for seven-year-olds will be sent to schools.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Distribution of the revised and simplified tests for seven-year-olds for use in 1992 began in late November and will shortly be complete. I have placed copies of the tests in the libraries of both Houses.

EC Education Ministers (Meeting)

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the outcome of the meeting in Brussels on Monday 25 November of the European Community education ministers.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I attended the meeting on Monday 25 November of the Council and the Ministers for Education meeting within the Council. Before the meeting opened formally, the Ministers heard a presentation by the Education Minister of the Russian Federation. The Commission presented its recently published memoranda on higher education and on distance learning. The Council and the Ministers agreed a resolution on the improvement of Community co-operation on research and statistics in education, and conclusions concerning co-operation in relation to quality assessment and transnational mobility in higher education, transnational school partnerships, and questions concerning the teaching profession. The Council and the Ministers noted a report on the implementation of the resolution of 24 May 1988 on the European dimension in education, and they received a report from the Presidency on the work in progress in the Education Committee of the preparation of a draft convention revising the Statute of the European Schools.

WALES

EC Regional Policy

15. **Mr. Raffan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on proposals for a new European regional body to advise on regional policy and the administration of the structure funds.

Mr. David Hunt: The forthcoming inter-governmental conference on political union will be considering proposals put forward by the presidency for strengthening the regional dimension at the Community level. How this is achieved will be determined in the negotiations.

25. **Mr. Denzil Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will meet European Commissioner Millan to discuss the impact of EC regional policies on the economy of Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: I met the Director General of the Regional Policy Directorate, Mr. Landaburu on 22 November and hope to meet Commissioner Millan shortly.

River Quality

16. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has regarding the quality of river water.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The most recent comprehensive information published is contained in the 1985 river quality survey.

19. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he would make a statement on conditions of rivers in Wales in the light of the 1990 river quality survey conducted by the NRA.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The report of the 1990 survey has not yet been published by the National Rivers Authority. When it is, I confidently expect it to show an overall improvement in the quality of rivers in the Authority's Welsh Region since 1985.

Welsh Assembly

17. **Mr. Grist:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for establishing an elected Welsh assembly.

Mr. David Hunt: None.

Homelessness

18. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what information he has concerning the number of people registered as homeless with Welsh local authorities.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The number of people within households accepted as homeless by housing authorities under the Housing Act 1985 in Wales in the first six months of 1991 was 12,153.

Local Government Reform

20. **Mr. Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the consultation process on Welsh local government reform.

Mr. David Hunt: The consultation period closed on 31 October. I am currently evaluating the very full and helpful responses that have been received.

Rural Housing

21. **Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what Tai Cymru's rural housing initiative will be in 1992-93; and how many new tenancies will be available in the rented sector as a result of Welsh Office policy.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend hopes to announce the details of the block distribution very soon. This year, Housing for Wales is devoting 27 per cent. of its resources to rural housing. Together with the additional £3·8 million that I have made available to local authorities, this should produce a total of more than 1,000 additional social housing units this year in rural Wales.

Welsh Language

22. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the quality of teaching in Welsh-medium schools.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The outcome of Her Majesty's inspectorate Wales general inspection reports and the first test results of seven-year-olds in Wales indicate that the quality of teaching in Welsh-medium schools is sound.

Mr. Geraint Howells: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any plans to establish an independent Welsh for Adults funding council; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: No. From 1 April 1993 the Further Education Funding Council for Wales will have a duty to secure for adults the provision of adequate facilities for courses for proficiency or literacy in Welsh.

Unemployment

23. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on trends in unemployment in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Between March 1986 and April 1990 seasonally adjusted unemployment in Wales fell from 172,300 to 83,100—a fall of 51·8 per cent. Unemployment then rose in Wales, like the rest of the United Kingdom, and in September 1991 unemployment stood at 119,900. It is pleasing to note that this trend was broken in October, when there was a fall in seasonally unadjusted unemployment in Wales.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

24. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what measures he proposes to protect and enhance designated areas of outstanding natural beauty in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: We have no plans to change the existing legislative basis and policies for designating areas of outstanding natural beauty. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment gave a full statement of the Government's view on the protection of such areas in England and Wales in reply to a question by my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) on 17 January 1991.

East Glamorgan District General Hospital

26. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he last met the chairman of the Mid Glamorgan health authority to discuss the replacement of the East Glamorgan district general hospital; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: In addition to informal meetings, my right hon. Friend last met the chairman of Mid Glamorgan health authority on 20 November 1991 along with other DHA chairmen. The authority is currently working up the design for the new hospital, which received approval in principle on 29 April 1991.

A465

27. **Mr. Hain:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement about the start date for construction of the A465 missing link.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Subject to the overall management of the programme it is the intention to start the A465 Aberdulais-Glynneath scheme in 1992-93.

Inward Investment

28. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the proportion of United Kingdom inward investment attracted to Wales in 1990-91.

Mr. David Hunt: In the financial year 1990-91, Wales secured almost 18 per cent. of the foreign inward

investment projects coming to the United Kingdom. Already this year another 165 projects have been secured promising capital expenditure of £830 million and more than 15,500 new or safeguarded jobs.

This figure is based on information provided by companies to Welsh Development International and the Invest in Britain Bureau at the time of the announcement of the decision to invest. It takes no account of subsequent developments.

GP Fund Holders

29. **Mr. Gareth Wardell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to require all health authorities in Wales to adopt policies at unit management level which prevents any consultant from treating his waiting list for general practitioner fund holders more favourably than for non-fund holders.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: We will shortly be issuing guidance on contracting for services in 1992-93 which will confirm that the management of waiting lists must be on the basis of clinical need. All district health authorities, provider units and GP fund holders are aware of, and conform to, this principle.

Cardiff-Wales Airport

Mr. John P. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will allocate any funds from his Department's budget to enhance the effectiveness of Cardiff-Wales airport in making a contribution to the economy of south Wales, including the maintenance of high standards of security and all other arrangements at the airport.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Cardiff-Wales airport is a successful business and should continue to operate on a commercial basis. It has been able to finance its recent investment without needing to borrow. Applications for supplementary credit approval to cover additional investment are matters for consideration by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Community Councils

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what review he has made of the spending by community councils in Wales, especially where spending is in excess of a community council's precept; what record he has of borrowings by community councils; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: No review of spending by individual community councils in Wales has been undertaken recently. Community councils can spend in excess of their precept only where they have the necessary reserves or have received my consent to borrow. Consents to borrow in the present financial year are as follows:

	£
Towyn town council	35,000
Whitland town council	50,000
Cwm Cadnant town council	10,000
Overton community council	2,000
Pennard community council	12,000
Aberaeron town council	70,000

Nitrogen Oxides

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what action he has taken to achieve implementation in Wales of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe agreement on the reduction of emissions of nitrogen oxides or their transboundary fluxes;

(2) what action he has taken through the relevant Government departments to achieve implementation in Wales of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe agreement on the reduction of emissions of nitrogen oxides or their transboundary fluxes.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This agreement requires parties to reduce total national emissions of nitrogen oxides (NOx) to 1987 levels by 1994, and to apply emission standards to major sources based on best available technologies which are economically feasible.

This will be achieved in Wales and throughout the United Kingdom principally through implementation of the European Community Directives on emissions from large combustion plants, from cars, and from heavy diesel vehicles; and through the operation of the new systems of air pollution control and integrated pollution control being introduced under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

NHS Wales

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether it remains his policy that the future of the NHS in Wales should be based on the district health system as defined by the World Health Organisation global programme committee in 1986.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend is mindful of the views of the World Health Organisation. It remains a cornerstone of our policy to devolve management responsibility within the NHS wherever possible. Our reforms are aimed at improving accountability by bringing the management of health services closer to the local community.

EMPLOYMENT

Low Pay

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he will set out the proportion of manual and non-manual workers, male and female, in each standard industrial classification division, who earned below £100, £120, £150, £170, £180 and £200 according to the 1990 earnings survey.

Mr. Forth: The information available from the 1990 new earnings survey (NES), and the more recent 1991 NES, is given in the following tables:

Percentage of full time employees on adult rates whose pay was unaffected by absence and whose gross weekly earnings were below the following specified amounts

	<£100	<£120	<£150	<£170	<£180	<£200
Manual men—April 1990						
Div. 0	3·8	10·2	36·3	51·0	58·2	69·3
Div. 1	0·2	0·2	0·6	2·0	4·2	10·1
Div. 2	0·3	1·5	6·1	11·3	14·9	23·1
Div. 3	0·4	1·6	7·0	13·6	17·9	27·8
Div. 4	1·2	4·6	13·9	23·0	27·3	38·1
Div. 5	0·9	2·6	12·2	21·8	26·9	38·2

	<£100	<£120	<£150	<£170	<£180	<£200
Div. 6	4·6	13·4	30·1	43·2	49·5	60·5
Div. 7	0·5	1·4	7·0	14·5	19·1	29·2
Div. 8	2·7	6·9	17·4	27·4	32·0	43·5
Div. 9	1·9	7·9	23·5	39·3	47·2	60·4
Non-manual men—April 1990						
Div. 0	3·0	4·8	10·9	17·0	21·2	29·7
Div. 1	[2]	0·4	1·5	2·9	4·6	8·5
Div. 2	0·3	0·6	2·2	5·0	6·2	9·7
Div. 3	0·2	0·5	2·1	4·1	5·6	9·6
Div. 4	0·6	1·3	4·3	6·9	9·0	13·0
Div. 5	0·8	1·3	3·5	5·7	7·2	10·8
Div. 6	2·1	7·0	15·3	22·9	26·6	33·7
Div. 7	0·3	1·4	3·4	6·4	8·0	12·0
Div. 8	0·8	2·3	6·9	10·5	12·5	16·8
Div. 9	0·4	1·3	4·4	8·5	10·5	14·8

Percentage of full time employees on adult rates whose pay was unaffected by absence and whose gross weekly earnings were below the following specified amounts

	<£100	<£120	<£150	<£170	<£180	<£200
Manual women—April 1990						
Div. 0	25·3	52·7	72·5	79·1	83·5	87·9
Div. 1	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Div. 2	5·4	20·4	47·6	62·5	68·3	79·1
Div. 3	4·3	20·8	50·5	69·1	73·7	83·3
Div. 4	13·8	32·8	61·6	74·3	79·3	86·8
Div. 5	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Div. 6	25·3	50·1	76·2	86·5	89·6	93·0
Div. 7	4·8	8·9	26·1	37·3	45·5	57·1
Div. 8	10·8	29·7	46·8	57·0	61·4	71·5
Div. 9	18·2	36·5	63·4	80·0	84·6	90·3
Non-manual women—April 1990						
Div. 0	[1]	8·8	33·3	57·9	68·4	71·9
Div. 1	0·5	1·2	8·1	16·7	26·1	48·8
Div. 2	1·5	5·6	22·3	36·4	44·3	55·8
Div. 3	2·4	8·0	29·7	46·5	53·8	65·1
Div. 4	2·7	10·2	30·1	44·9	51·1	61·3
Div. 5	5·4	15·1	37·4	53·8	63·0	72·3
Div. 6	8·7	29·3	54·3	66·3	71·2	78·5
Div. 7	2·2	6·7	19·1	35·7	40·6	52·4
Div. 8	2·6	8·6	24·0	35·7	41·1	50·6
Div. 9	1·5	5·7	18·2	29·9	34·8	43·3

Source: New earnings survey.
Notes:
[1] Denotes sampling error too large or sample size too small for reliable estimate.
[2] Denotes information not available.

Percentage of full time employees on adult rates whose pay was unaffected by absence and whose gross weekly earnings were below the following specified amounts

	<£100	<£120	<£150	<£170	<£180	<£200
Manual men—April 1991						
Div. 0	3·7	5·9	25·2	42·4	50·2	59·7
Div. 1	0·2	0·3	1·1	2·2	2·7	5·8
Div. 2	0·2	1·0	5·0	9·4	12·4	19·6
Div. 3	0·3	1·3	5·3	11·4	14·9	23·9
Div. 4	0·7	3·1	11·2	19·0	23·3	32·7
Div. 5	0·6	1·5	7·5	15·4	20·1	31·7
Div. 6	3·2	10·2	25·5	36·7	43·2	53·5
Div. 7	0·3	0·7	3·9	9·0	12·8	22·2
Div. 8	2·0	4·3	14·5	22·0	25·9	35·7
Div. 9	1·2	4·3	16·4	27·6	34·8	48·7
Non-manual men—April 1991						
Div. 0	1·9	6·1	11·8	18·9	21·2	29·7
Div. 1	[2]	[1]	0·7	1·6	2·2	4·6
Div. 2	0·4	0·7	2·2	4·3	6·1	8·5
Div. 3	0·2	0·5	2·1	4·4	6·0	9·5
Div. 4	0·3	1·2	4·6	8·0	9·5	13·7
Div. 5	0·5	1·0	2·5	5·0	6·2	9·5
Div. 6	1·3	4·2	13·3	20·6	24·5	31·9
Div. 7	0·2	0·5	2·2	5·0	6·3	9·8
Div. 8	0·6	1·7	4·8	8·0	9·9	13·6
Div. 9	0·3	1·0	3·3	6·0	7·7	11·5

Source: New earnings survey.
Notes:
[1] Denotes sampling error too large or sample size too small for reliable estimate.
[2] Denotes information not available.

Percentage of full time employees on adult rates whose pay was unaffected by absence and whose gross weekly earnings were below the following specified amounts

	<£100	<£120	<£150	<£170	<£180	<£200
Manual women—April 1991						
Div. 0	14·1	31·5	68·5	76·1	77·2	85·9
Div. 1	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Div. 2	2·5	11·8	36·5	54·9	60·1	70·2
Div. 3	3·0	13·3	42·5	61·7	70·3	80·3
Div. 4	8·5	24·9	52·3	68·1	74·5	83·4
Div. 5	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Div. 6	13·8	37·2	68·7	80·8	84·2	90·3
Div. 7	3·1	7·1	17·0	26·3	30·8	42·0
Div. 8	11·3	21·4	41·1	48·2	53·6	61·3
Div. 9	14·2	30·8	58·0	70·5	76·7	84·8
Non-manual women—April 1991						
Div. 0	[2]	4·6	29·2	36·9	43·1	64·6
Div. 1	[2]	0·3	4·0	10·1	15·4	23·6
Div. 2	1·4	4·3	14·7	26·3	33·2	45·0
Div. 3	0·9	4·4	17·4	33·2	41·0	53·4
Div. 4	1·4	6·2	22·5	35·4	42·0	53·7
Div. 5	3·4	11·1	26·2	42·8	50·4	63·8
Div. 6	3·9	17·2	42·9	57·0	62·9	71·9
Div. 7	1·7	4·6	14·1	24·9	31·3	43·4
Div. 8	1·4	5·0	17·1	27·7	33·1	43·5
Div. 9	1·1	3·4	11·5	20·8	26·7	35·8

Source: New earnings survey.
Notes:
[1] Denotes sampling error too large or sample size too small for reliable estimate.
[2] Denotes information not available.

Employment, Northumberland

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many men and women are in *(a)* manual and *(b)* non-manual employment in each local authority district in the county of Northumberland.

Mr. Jackson: This data is available only from the decennial census of population. The latest information published is for 1981 and can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library. Information from OPCS on the 1991 census of population is expected to be available in mid-1992.

Apprenticeship Statistics

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the numbers of completing apprenticeship as bricklayers, joiners, electricians, plasterers, and plumbers in each year since 1981.

Mr. Jackson: Reliable information about the numbers completing apprenticeships in these trades each year is not available.

Earnings Statistics

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the percentage increase in the average gross weekly earnings of all adult males between 9 April 1990 and 8 April 1991.

Mr. Forth: The increase in average gross weekly earnings between the April 1990 new earnings survey and the April 1991 survey for all adult males is estimated to be 7·7 per cent.

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what is the average length of time taken from the date of suspension of unemployment benefit and the reduction of income support until a decision is made by the adjudication officer to allow or disallow the claim; and, of the number of claims suspended, how many have now been decided upon;

(2) what statistics are compiled by local unemployment benefit offices concerning claimants whose benefit is suspended, when a doubt arises as to the circumstances under which their last job ended;

(3) how many claims for unemployment benefit made in the Oxford area in October 1991 were suspended on the grounds that the claimant may have left his or her job voluntarily or may have been dismissed for misconduct; and what proportion of the total fresh claims this number represents;

(4) what specific guidance and procedural instructions are given to staff in local unemployment benefit offices, to decide which claims for unemployment benefit and income support should be suspended on the grounds that the claimant may have left his job voluntarily or may have been dismissed for misconduct, and those which should not; and if he will make this information available publicly.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service Executive Agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish the response from the training and enterprise council's chief executive network on staffing arrangements to his proposal for the future of civil service staff now seconded to the TECs.

Mr. Jackson: The TEC chief executive consultative group is still involved in discussions with the Department. We have no plans to publish its views.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement about the impact of the autumn statement on the monitoring of expenditure of local enterprise companies and training and enterprise councils.

Mr. Jackson: The autumn statement as the Government's plan for public spending does not have a direct bearing on the monitoring of expenditure of local enterprise companies or training and enterprise councils.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to change the monitoring of training and enterprise councils and local enterprise companies.

Mr. Jackson: The TEC operating agreement for next year is currently being reviewed and this includes monitoring arrangements. Arrangements for monitoring the performance of local enterprise companies is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to change the method of output-related funding for training and enterprise councils and local enterprise companies.

Mr. Jackson: In 1992-93 the method of output-related funding of youth training and employment training for training and enterprise councils will be largely unchanged. However, there will be a new category of output for trainees who achieve literacy and numeracy qualifications.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to end the secondment of civil service staff for local enterprise companies and training and enterprise councils.

Mr. Jackson: As my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State announced on 26 July, we have asked officials to take forward discussions with TECs, trade unions and seconded staff about future staffing arrangements and the practicalities of TECs as private companies, being free to employ directly all their own staff. Discussions are now well under way.

The position with local enterprise companies in Scotland is different in that legislation determined that all secondments would be for a maximum three-year period from 1 April 1991.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the organisations consulted on the future arrangments for seconding civil service staff for local enterprise companies and training and enterprise councils.

Mr. Jackson: Discussions about the future staffing arrangements for training and enterprise councils (TECs) have been with TECs, staff on secondment to TECs and with the two main trade unions representing members on secondment. No other organisations have been involved in the discussions.

Arrangments for secondments to local enterprise companies in Scotland were agreed prior to 1 April 1991 and there are no proposals to change them.

Large Goods Vehicle Licence

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether drivers who hold an LGV licence, who do not take the medical examination required once drivers reach the age of 46 years or to renew their licence, are deemed to be unavailable for work.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service Executive Agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of employment in manufacturing was lost in the Coventry area from May 1979 to the latest convenient date; how many jobs that represents; and what has been the change in employment levels so far in 1991.

Mr. Jackson: The earliest and most recent estimates of employment in local areas are from the censuses of employment for September 1981 and September 1989. Between those dates, the number of employees in employment in manufacturing in the Coventry local authority district fell by 19,900 or 29 per cent.

Employees' Earnings

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish in the *Official Report*, figures for Merseyside giving *(a)* the proportion of full-time employees, male, female, and total earning less than (i) £140 per week and (ii) £130 per week, and *(b)* the proportion of part-time employees, male, female, and total earning less than (i) £3·80 per hour and (ii) £3·60 per hour in each case excluding overtime, shift, and payment-by-results premiums.

Mr. Forth: The information available from the 1991 new earnings survey is given in the following tables.

Percentage of employees in the Merseyside metropolitan county whose pay was unaffected by absence and whose gross earnings (excluding overtime) were below the specified amounts

Per cent.

	Full time (weekly earnings)	
	<£130	*<£140*
Men	5·4	7·7
Women	17·3	22·6
Adults	9·9	13·3

Per cent.

	Part time (hourly earnings)	
	<£3·60	*<£3·80*
Men	—	—
Women	48·7	57·5
Adults	—	—

Source: New earnings survey April 1991.
Note—"—" denotes information not available.

Bank Holidays

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for The Wrekin of 26 November, *Official Report*, column 764, he will identify the source of his figures on public holidays in the Netherlands; and if he will list each of the seven public holidays to which he referred.

Mr. Forth: The figures that I gave to the hon. Member are contained in the HMSO official diary for 1991 and have been confirmed by Employment Department officials with the royal Netherlands embassy in London. These are new year's day; Good Friday; Easter Monday; Ascension day; Whit Monday; Christmas and Boxing day.

I am aware that the Netherlands also has one or two days taken as holidays by some groups of workers; these are not considered public holidays by the Dutch Government.

CIVIL SERVICE

Executive Agencies

45. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will make a statement about progress under the "Next Steps" initiative.

Mr. Renton: "Next Steps" is progressing well. On 19 November the Central Statistical Office was launched as the 57th agency: now almost 40 per cent. of the civil service is covered, with more to come. The Government's second "Next Steps" annual review, published last month, shows agencies meeting and beating targets for quality of service, financial performance and efficiency. It gives many instances of improved service to customers.

Women Civil Servants

46. **Mrs. Gorman:** To ask the Minister for the Civil Service how many women are employed in the upper grades of the civil service.

Mr. Renton: On 1 April 1991 there were 3,156 women in grades 1 to 7 and equivalents. This represents just over 12 per cent. of all staff in these grades, up from almost 7 per cent. in 1984 when the programme of action to achieve equality of opportunity for women in the civil service was launched.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Canadian Lobsters

Mr. Harris: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations Her Majesty's Government are making to the European Commission on the problem of imports of Canadian lobsters.

Mr. Curry: Our officials have raised this with the Commission, which as a result has the matter under review.

Food Marketing

Mr. Amos: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on Government support to help farmers market their product better.

Mr. Curry: The Prime Minister launched the Government's initiatives at a seminar on food marketing which he chaired in November. We are introducing a new group marketing grant to encourage the development of producer groups with real commercial expertise. We have set up in the Ministry a market task force to stimulate interest and action by producers. It will be working with major buyers in the retail, catering and processing sectors to identify broad production opportunities for farmers and growers. Meanwhile, we shall continue to ensure that the burdens on industry are kept to reasonable levels. These and other initiatives are explained in the policy statement "Our Farming Future", which was also published in November.

Farmers (Early Retirement)

Mr. Amos: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to introduce a scheme to enable farmers to take early retirement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The EC Commission has tabled proposals which would require all member states to set up an early retirement scheme linked to the amalgamation of small farms. This is not relevant to UK conditions, and we are arguing that the scheme should be optional.

Sheep Annual Premium

Mr. Amos: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will investigate the delays in paying out the first advance payment of sheep annual premium to farmers in Northumberland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: The Department has met its declared target of making the majority of first advance payments under the sheep annual premium scheme by the early autumn and payment of the second advance is already under way. The position in Northumberland is in line with the rest of the country.

Food Labelling

Mr. Amos: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy that all British-produced food, both at the farm gate and at the retail stage, be labelled with country of origin; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: We believe that consumers should know the origin of the products they buy, since it is as a result of public concern that we have set stringent welfare and safety standards in the United Kingdom which are more severe than those of our major competitors. The consumer cannot be informed of this unless food at the retail stage is labelled with the country of origin—whether the United Kingdom or an overseas country. The country of origin is usually clear on branded goods, but it is not always evident on goods marketed under retailers' own labels unless they voluntarily declare it. We are, therefore, encouraging retailers to state the country of origin on own-label goods, and are very pleased that those who attended the Prime Minister's food marketing seminar last month agreed, where appropriate, to do so. We are now approaching other retailers to ask them to do likewise.

Environmental Controls

Mr. Amos: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to ensure that farmers are properly compensated for the imposition of environmental controls; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Farmers should not normally expect to be compensated for avoiding pollution, complying with regulations or observing rules which do not go beyond good farming practice.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Amos: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his policy on proposals for reform of the common agricultural policy.

Mr. Curry: The Government's approach to reform of the common agricultural policy is clearly set out in the policy statement "Our Farming Future", launched by my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture on 15 November. Copies have been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses, and sent to all MPs, MEPs, Peers and farming organisations.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Westminster Station

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will give consideration to seeking the opening of the entrance to Westminster station on the Victoria embankment to facilitate access and egress for hon. Members.

Mr. MacGregor: This is primarily a matter for London Underground so I am arranging for a copy of the hon. Member's question to be sent to the chairman.

Ministers' Pay

Mr. Page: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make a statement about Ministers' pay.

Mr. MacGregor: The salaries of Ministers and other paid office holders were last increased from 1 January 1991 under the terms of the Ministerial and other Salaries Order 1990. The Government have considered carefully the level of Ministerial salaries and, taking all factors into account, propose a 4·5 per cent. increase in all Ministers and paid office holders salaries. The details are set out in the following table and I have today laid the draft Ministerial and other Salaries Order 1991 to implement these changes from 1 January 1992.

In accordance with the resolution of the House of Commons of 21 July 1987, the reduced parliamentary salaries of Commons' Ministers and paid office holders will increase by 6·5 per cent. to £23,227 from 1 January 1992.

Ministerial and other paid office holders' salaries

	Current salary (£)	*Proposed January 1992 salary (£s)*	*Proposed increase (Per cent.)*
Commons			
Prime Minister	50,724	53,007	4·5
Cabinet Minister	38,105	39,820	4·5
Minister of State	26,962	28,175	4·5
PUSS	20,463	21,384	4·4
Government Chief Whip	31,715	33,142	4·5
Government Deputy Chief Whip	26,962	28,175	4·5
Government Whips	17,349	18,130	4·5
Assistant Government Whips	17,349	18,130	4·5
Opposition Chief Whip	26,962	28,175	4·5
Assistant Opposition Whip	17,349	18,130	4·5
Speaker[1]	39,982	41,781	4·5
Chairman Ways and Means	26,962	28,175	4·5
First Deputy Chairman Ways and Means	23,696	24,762	4·5
Second Deputy Chairman Ways and Means	23,696	24,762	4·5

	Current salary (£s)	Proposed January 1992 salary (£s)	Proposed increase (Per cent.)
Leader of Opposition	34,937	36,509	4·5
Attorney General	40,492	42,314	4·5
Solicitor General	33,201	34,695	4·5
Lords			
Cabinet Minister	48,381	50,558	4·5
Minister of State	43,010	44,945	4·5
PUSS	36,066	37,689	4·5
Government Chief Whip	43,010	44,945	4·5
Government Deputy Chief Whip	36,066	37,689	4·5
Government Whips	32,519	33,982	4·5
Opposition Chief Whip	32,519	33,982	4·5
Chairman of Committees	43,010	44,945	4·5
Principal Deputy Chairman of Committees	39,202	40,966	4·5
Leader of Opposition	36,066	37,689	4·5
Lord Advocate	48,457	50,638	4·5
Solicitor General (Scotland)	42,433	44,342	4·5

[1] Speaker has opted to take the salary of a Commons' Cabinet Minister, ie. £38,105 in 1991.

Notes:

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster does not accept his Ministerial salary.

The Lord Chancellor's salary is governed by Section 3 of the Ministerial and other Pensions and Salaries Act 1991 and is not affected by this Order. His salary effective from 1 December 1991 is £106,750.

The Solicitor General for Scotland is in neither House.

Payroll Giving

Sir Barney Hayhoe: To ask the Lord President of the Council what proportion of members of staff directly employed in the House of Commons are participating in the give-as-you-earn scheme.

Mr. Beith: I have been asked to reply.

The proportion of staff directly employed by the House of Commons Commission who are participating in the give-as-you-earn scheme is 2·28 per cent.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Turks and Caicos

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his meeting with the Chief Minister of Turks and Caicos.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I saw the Chief Minister of the Turks and Caicos Islands on 28 November and had a full and thorough discussion of the Turks and Caicos Islands' political and developmental priorities and the good government of the territory. I also met the Chief Minister at the West India Committee's Caribbean conference in Brussels on 21 November.

Children's Rights

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Her Majesty's Government intend to ratify the United Nations convention on the rights of children; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Her Majesty's Government hope to be in a position to ratify the United Nations convention on the rights of the child soon.

Single Market

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a table showing the transposition rates of single market laws within each member state of the European Community.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The latest European Commission figures on implementation of single market measures cover the period up to 15 October 1991.

Of 137 measures that should already have been implemented, member states have not implemented:

		Per cent
Denmark	12	9
France	19	14
United Kingdom	26	19
Portugal	29	21
Germany	31	23
Greece	31	23
Spain	32	23
Belgium	38	28
Netherlands	39	28
Luxembourg	43	31
Ireland	49	36
Italy	63	46

The Commission is preparing updated figures. These will be made available to Parliament when published.

Arms Control

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the decision taken for the new organisational format for his Departmental forum on arms control and disarmament held with non-governmental organisations on 26 November; what range of issues was addressed; and with which organisations.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: At my meeting with 34 non-governmental organisations on 26 November discussion concentrated on the three major topics previously

agreed with a broad selection of the NGOs, namely NATO in the wider Europe, arms transfers and nuclear arms control. The proceedings of the meeting, which was held under Chatham house rules, were off the record.

Gibraltar

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, further to his answer of 25 November, *Official Report*, column *378*, if he will give details of the informal arrangement whereby a number of British Members of the European Parliament take a close and active interest in Gibraltar; and if he will list such Members and the convenors or secretaries who arrange any meetings or other functions.

Mr. Garel-Jones: There are two small groups of British MEPs, Labour and Conservative, who informally represent Gibraltar's interests in the European Parliament. They are led by Lord Bethell and Mr. Alf Lomas. There are no convenors or secretaries.

British Mercenaries

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has about British citizens fighting as mercenaries in any part of Croatia, Serbia or other parts of Yugoslavia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have seen press reports, and have some independent corroboration, that a small number of British citizens are fighting in Yugoslavia. We have also seen reports of the deaths of two British citizens, which British consular staff in Yugoslavia are investigating. We deplore any foreign encouragement of this tragic conflict.

EC Business

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a statement of forthcoming business in the European Community Council of Ministers.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Foreign Affairs Council will meet on 2 December. The main agenda items are preparations for the European Council on 9 and 10 December and Yugoslavia (including the question of positive additional measures). The Council will also agree a common position for the EC-Egypt Co-operation Council. There may also be discussion on the EC investment partners scheme which is designed to promote joint ventures between private enterprises in the Community and developing countries. There will also be a Ministerial session of the inter-governmental conference on political union on 2 and 3 December.

The economic and Finance Council will meet on 3 December. There will be discussion of food credit guarantees for the USSR and balance of payments assistance to Bulgaria and Romania. Ministers will also discuss the Council conclusion on the Commission's communication on

"a Community strategy to limit carbon dioxide emissions and improve energy efficiency".

This includes a proposal for a tax on the use of energy. There will be a Ministerial meeting of the intergovernmental conference on EMU on 1 and 2 December.

The Labour and Social Affairs Council will meet on Tuesday 3 December. Ministers are likely to discuss the proposed Directives on Working Time; European works councils; proposed recommendations on minimum resources; childcare; proposed directive on safety signs; the declaration on dignity at work (sexual harassment); social security for migrant workers and the Commission report on the second poverty programme.

The Agriculture Council will meet on 11 and 12 December. Ministers will discuss reform of the Common Agriculture Policy and agricultural aspects of the GATT Uruguay round. They may also discuss food quality.

The Environment Council will meet on 12 and 13 December. Ministers are likely to discuss proposals for regulations on eco-labelling, existing chemicals, the import and export of chemicals and a new environment fund (LIFE). Ministers may also consider the proposals for a directive on the protection of habitats and wild fauna and flora, and on the proposed regulation on the shipment of waste. The United Nations conference on environment and development and climate change will also be discussed.

Joint Energy and Environment Council will meet on 13 December. Ministers will discuss the Council conclusion on the Commission's communication on

"a Community strategy to limit carbon dioxide emissions and improve energy efficiency".

This includes a proposal for a tax on the use of energy.

The Economic and Finance Council will meet on 16 December. Ministers are likely to discuss the Portuguese convergence programme and the Investment Services Directive. Following detailed negotiations, political agreement on the draft Directive for the post-1992 transitional VAT arrangements was reached at ECOFIN on 11 November. Formal adoption of, and final agreement on, the legal text are expected at this Council, provided texts are available from the Jurists-Linguists. Any agreement will be subject to United Kingdom Parliamentary scrutiny. Following the agreement reached in principle at the July ECOFIN that case by case consideration of European Investment Bank lending should be available to countries with trade and co-operation agreements with the Community, the Council will now discuss the detailed terms and conditions under which lending might take place. Ministers may also consider road transport tax and a package agreed by OECD consenses participants to reduce trade distortive export credit and tied aid subsidies.

The Foreign Affairs Council will meet on 16-17 December. It may discuss the current state of negotiations in the GATT Uruguay round. The Council may approve the Community instruments for implementation of the new Mediterranean policy which was agreed at the 18 December 1990 FAC. On the Soviet Union, the Council will review the EC's programme of food and medical aid. Association agreements with Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland may be signed at the FAC. The Council will also discuss a possible association agreement with Bulgaria and Romania. Political agreement on the EEA was reached in October and it is hoped that Ministers will sign the draft EEA agreement.

The Transport Council will meet on 16 and 17 December. Ministers will discuss road issues including: access to the road haulage market, international passenger transport liberalisation, speed limiters and speed limits, road friendly suspensions for HGVs and the high level

report on road safety, maritime cabotage, external relations relating to inland waterways, and the Loran-C navigation system. Transport access for the disabled, transport research, transport infrastructure and shipping consortia are likely to be discussed.

The Fisheries Council will meet on 17 and 18 December. Ministers will discuss total allowable catches and quotas, and agreements with third countries.

The Internal Market Council will meet on 19 December. Ministers are likely to discuss the intellectual property supplementary protection certificate for pharmaceuticals regulation; copyright in the context of the accession to Berne and Rome conventions; public procurement of services; second diplomas directive; motor and motorcycle type approval; internal frontiers control on goods; future system for the free movement of medicinal products; cosmetics and the third non-life insurance directive. Ministers may also discuss homeopathic medicine; electro-magnetic compatibility; CE mark; units of measurement and tractor type approval consolidation. Ministers are likely to consider a Commission progress report on the implementation of the Single Market White Paper.

The Telecommunications Council may meet on 20 December. Ministers may discuss a Commission green paper on "postal Europe" and consider, for the forthcoming World administrative radio conferences, proposed negotiation Directives covering frequency allocation issues. Ministers are also likely to discuss the Commission's revised proposal for a Directive on technical standards for satellite broadcasting.

European Community

Sir Nicholas Fairbairn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will state when it became the practice to refer to the European Economic Community, the European Coal and Steel Community and Euratom as the European Community; for what reasons this practice was adopted; and what parliamentary authority has been given to this change of usage.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The European Economic Community, the European Coal and Steel Community and the European Atomic Energy Community are collectively referred to as the European Communities, for example in the Single European Act and the European Communities Act, 1972. The term European Community is generally used as a shorthand reference to the European Economic Community, established by the treaty of Rome in 1957. Members of Parliament need no authority to refer to these institutions in whatever way they choose.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Fixed Profit Car Scheme

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 21 November, what are the fixed profit car scheme tax free rates for *(a)* hon. Members, *(b)* volunteer hospital drivers and *(c)* civil servants compared with the rates of mileage allowances paid to each group.

Mr. Maude: The fixed profit car scheme rates which may be used by honourable Members and civil servants, like any other employees and office holders, to work out the taxable elements of their motor mileage allowances and which form the basis of the tables drawn up by the Inland Revenue to enable volunteer hospital drivers to read off a profit figure for their motor mileage allowances, are the same in all cases.

The 'tax-free' rates for the full tax year 1991-92 are:

Per mile

Cubic capacity	*Up to 4,000 miles*	*Over 4,000 miles*
Up to 1,000	24·5p	11·0p
1,001-1,500	30·0	13·0p
1,501-2,000	34·0p	16·0p
Over 2,000	45·0p	20·5p

The rates of mileage allowances paid to each group for 1991-92 are as follows:

(a) Honourable Members

Cubic capacity	*Up to 20,000 miles*	*Over 20,000 miles*
Up to 1,300	28·8p	15·1p
1,301-2,300	43·4p	19·9p
Over 2,300	68·2p	34·1p

(b) Volunteer hospital drivers.
The rates vary between health authorities

(c) Civil Service

Cubic capacity	*Up to 7,000 miles*	*Over 7,000 miles*
Up to 1,500	35·7p	13·0p
1,501-2,000	37·0	15·0
Over 2,000	39.0p	17·0p

Civil Service Pay

Mr. Skinner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with civil service trade union representatives regarding pay and conditions of service.

Mr. Maples: Treasury Ministers meet representatives of the civil service trade unions from time to time. The Minister of State last met representatives of the Institution of Professionals, Managers and Specialists on 19 November to discuss the institution's claim for a single scale maximum for the different occupational groups covered by the long-term pay agreement with the IPMS.

Travelling Costs

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which EC member states allow employees to put travel to work costs against their income tax, together with approximate sterling equivalents of the amounts involved; and which member states allow employees to make fixed-amount or fixed-percentage deductions.

Mr. Norman Lamont: The latest available information is given in the table.

All distances have been converted to miles and all amounts have been converted to sterling using the latest available purchasing power parities.

Country	Tax treatment of travel to work costs
Belgium	A lump sum deduction is allowed for employment expenses. This deduction is deemed to include home-to-work travel expenses and is calculated as a percentage of income on a degressive scale. The maximum permitted deduction is £1,533, but if taxpayers can prove higher actual expenses they can claim the higher amount.
Denmark	A deduction is allowed for home-to-work travel which exceeds 12·5 miles per working day. For distances between 12·5 and 34 miles the deduction is 11p per mile per working day, and 3p per mile for distances over 34 miles. If the taxpayer uses his own car and the daily travelling exceeds 34 miles the deduction may be made at the rate of 10·5p per mile for a distance in excess of 12·5 miles per working day, if public transport cannot be used.
France	Actual costs are deductible, but if the distance from home-to-work is more than 18·75 miles the taxpayer must provide evidence of expenditure and must have sound reasons (other than personal preference) for living so far from the place of work.
Germany	Costs in respect of one journey per day by public transport are fully deductible. The costs of travel by the taxpayer's own vehicle are deductible as follows: car —25p per mile motorcycle—11p per mile bicycle —6p per mile
Greece	No specific provisions have been found.
Ireland	No deduction is allowed.
Italy	There is no specific deduction or tax credit for home-to-work travel expenses, but all employees receive a tax credit in respect of expenses incurred in the course of employment. That tax credit is £269 for all employees plus £84 if employment income does not exceed £5,138.
Luxembourg	An annual deduction is allowed amounting to £93·60 per mile up to 18·75 miles. As no additional deduction is permitted for distances over 18·75 miles, the maximum deduction is £1,755.
Netherlands	A fixed deduction is allowed, based on the method of transport and the home-to-work distance. The annual deductions range from £204 where the distance is between six and nine miles, to £887 where the distance is over 44 miles. The deductions for distances over 18·75 miles apply only to travel by public transport. Travel by private car is limited to a maximum deduction of £419. There are provisions to encourage car-sharing: drivers may receive up to 19p per mile as a tax-free reimbursement from their passengers.
Portugal	No special provisions have been found.
Spain	No special provisions have been found.
United Kingdom	No deduction is allowed.

Uncollected Tax

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are his best estimates for the levels of uncollected *(a)* value added tax, *(b)* income tax, including schedule D, and *(c)* corporation tax, excise duties and capital gains tax, expressed both as a sum figure and as a percentage of total tax due for each category.

Mr. Maude: The amounts remitted or written off as irrecoverable as a sum figure and as a percentage of tax collected were as follows:

		Remitted or written off £ million	*Net receipts* £ million	*Remittances etc. as a percentage of receipts* Per cent.
(a)	Value added tax	212·716	30,542	0·7
(b)	Income tax	364·862	52,847	0·69
(c)	Corporation tax	184·725	22,347	0·83
	Excise duties	0·408	22,385	0·002
	Capital gains tax	12·076	1,801	0·67

The figures for value added tax and excise duties are for calendar year 1990 and the figures for income tax, corporation tax and capital gains tax as for the year to 31 October 1990.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Amos: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to pay interest on moneys outstanding to small business men as a result of a mistake by a VAT office; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Finance Act 1991 introduced a statutory provision under which Customs and Excise are required to pay interest to businesses, irrespective of size, on moneys outstanding as a result of error by VAT officials.

European Monetary Union

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what commitment is made for the provision of convergence funds by those who sign the present draft of the EMU treaty; and how this provision applies to those countries who at any stage have not yet opted to be covered by the single currency.

Mr. Maude: There is no provision in the draft treaty articles on EMU prepared by the Dutch presidency for a convergence fund to be established. The question of the role of non-participants in stage 3 of EMU in such a fund does not therefore arise. The Government believe that convergence is best promoted by the adoption of sound economic policies.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

Mr. Shore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will list the public sector borrowing requirement from 1970-71 to the 1992-93 estimate *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* adjusted for inflation, and *(c)* as a percentage of gross domestic product.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 28 November 1991]:* The figures are in the table. An estimate of the PSBR in 1992-93 will be published in the next Financial Statement and Budget Report.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

£ million	*Cash*	*at 1991-92 prices*[1]	*Percentage of money GDP*[2]
1970-71	777	5,723	1·5
1971-72	973	6,566	1·7
1972-73	2,435	15,205	3·7
1973-74	4,342	25,323	5·9
1974-75	8,001	38,996	9·1
1975-76	10,251	39,824	9·4
1976-77	8,263	28,276	6·5
1977-78	5,381	16,195	3·6

£ million	Cash	at 1991-92 prices[1]	Percentage of money GDP[2]
1978-79	9,174	24,894	5·4
1979-80	9,926	23,074	4·8
1980-81	12,519	24,595	5·4
1981-82	8,631	15,470	3·4
1982-83	8,904	14,899	3·2
1983-84	9,678	15,476	3·2
1984-85	10,134	15,434	3·1
1985-86	5,622	8,114	1·6
1986-87	3,559	4,973	0·9
1987-88	−3,406	−4,514	−0·8
1988-89	−14,657	−18,124	−3·1
1989-90	−7,932	−9,210	−1·5
1990-91	−472	−505	−0·1
[3]1991-92	10,500	10,500	1·8

[1] Using the GDP deflator.
[2] Adjusted for the distortion caused by the abolition of domestic rates.
[3] Autumn Statement forecast.

EC Funds

Mr. Shore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the level of the United Kingdom's contribution to European Community funds since 1973 up to and including the estimate for 1992 *(a)* gross and *(b)* net, both in cash terms and after adjusting for inflation.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 28 November 1991]:* The United Kingdom's total gross and net contributions to the European Community budget, in current and constant 1990 prices for the years 1973-90, are set out in the table. A forecast for 1991, in current prices of £3,973 million (gross) and £1,225 million (net) was published in the "Statement on the 1991 Community Budget" (Cm 1490). The outturn for 1991 and a forecast for 1992 will be included in the 1992 statement, which will be published early next year.

£ million

Year	Gross (after refunds or abatement)		Net (after receipts and refunds or rebatement)	
	Current prices	Constant[1] prices	Current prices	Constant[1] prices
1973	181	987	102	556
1974	179	850	29	138
1975	342	1,276	−56	−209
1976	463	1,500	167	541
1977	737	2,096	369	1,050
1978	1,348	3,444	822	2,100
1979	1,606	3,587	947	2,115
1980	1,669	3,119	706	1,320
1981	1,481	2,484	397	666
1982	1,844	2,875	606	945
1983	2,169	3,213	647	958
1984	2,676	3,790	656	929
1985	3,774	5,055	1,808	2,422
1986	2,792	3,614	572	740
1987	4,049	4,992	1,721	2,122
1988	3,544	4,101	1,362	1,576
1989	4,431	4,794	2,315	2,505
1990	4,658	4,658	2,475	2,475

[1] Constant prices have been constructed using the GDP deflator at market prices.

Export Licences

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what time period Her Majesty's Customs is required to store details of sensitive technology export licences after permission for export has been granted.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 29 November 1991]:* Export licences are examined and endorsed, but not retained by Customs and Excise. Questions about their storage after this action are a matter for the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Tax Revenue

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what percentage of British Tax revenue was made up from *(a)* direct taxes, and *(b)* indirect taxes in each of the years 1979, 1983, 1987 and 1990; and what were the comparable figures in 1990 for each of the other European Community countries.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 29 November 1991]:* Government taxes, including rates, are classified in the national accounts as taxes on income, expenditure and capital, and not as direct and indirect taxes. Non-tax items, such as social security contributions and the community charge, are classified separately. Internationally, there is no general agrement on the criteria for distinguishing between direct and indirect taxes. Broadly speaking, however, taxes on income and capital can be regarded as direct taxes and taxes on expenditure as indirect taxes. On this basis, including the relevant non-tax items, the figures requested for the United Kingdom are as follows:

Percentage of total taxes, national insurance contributions and community charge

	Taxes on income[1] Per cent.	Taxes on expenditure[2] Per cent.
1979	46·2	53·8
1983	48·7	51·3
1987	46·7	53·3
1990	51·5	48·5

[1] Taxes on income, taxes on capital, employees' social security contributions, community charge and royalties.
[2] Taxes on expenditure (including rates) and employers' social security contributions.

Data for other European Community countries can be found in the OECD publication "Revenue Statistics of OECD Member Countries." The last year for which complete figures are presently available is 1989 and these are shown in the table. The allocation between direct and indirect taxes corresponds, as far as is possible on the available data, with that used in the preceding table. Because of minor differences in accounting conventions, the component OECD figures for the United Kingdom do not in all cases correspond to those given in the national accounts.

	1989	
	Taxes on income[1] Per cent.	Taxes on goods and services[2] Per cent.
Belgium	51	49
Denmark	62	38
France	37	63
Germany	53	47
Greece	37	63
Ireland	41	59
Italy	47	54
Luxembourg	53	47
Netherlands	54	46
Portugal	38	63

	1989	
	Taxes on income[1]	*Taxes on goods and services*[2]
	Per cent.	*Per cent.*
Spain	41	59
United Kingdom	47	53

[1] Taxes on income and profits, social security contributions except those by employers, and other taxes.
[2] Taxes on goods and services, employers' social security contributions, payroll taxes, and property taxes.

Value Added Tax

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the effect on tax revenues in 1992-93 and 1993-94, respectively, of the EC proposals for new systems for the collection of VAT, excise duties and customs duties after the abolition of controls at EC internal borders on 1 January 1993 giving separate figures for VAT, excise duties and customs duties; and if he will estimate the difference it would make to the VAT figures if the proposed new system for VAT on imports of goods and related services from other EC member states were extended also to such imports from non-EC countries.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The effects of the single market on tax revenues are difficult to predict because they depend on behavioural responses and the pattern and terms of trade.

The abolition of travellers' allowances for tax-paid goods from 1 January 1993 will reduce the yield from VAT and excise duties by about £15-40 million in 1992-93 and by about £100-300 million annually in subsequent years.

The introduction of postponed accounting for VAT on EC imports from 1 January 1993 will create a once-off cash flow loss to the Exchequer in 1992-93 of about £1½ billion because VAT will be collected later. There will be no effects in subsequent years.

To offset the revenue loss resulting from the introduction of postponed accounting, the Government have decided to introduce monthly VAT returns for the largest VAT payers in autumn 1992. This change is not a direct requirement of EC single market legislation. However it will produce an offsetting once-off cashflow gain to the Exchequer in 1992-93 of about £1½ billion because VAT will be collected earlier. Again, there will be no effects in subsequent years.

If postponed accounting were subsequently extended to non-EC imports there would be an additional once-off cashflow loss to the Exchequer of about £1 billion. There would be no effects in subsequent years.

As a consequence of the changes to the VAT technical system to operate in the single market, the VAT treatment of non-Community goods imported under inward processing relief (IPR) will change. VAT will no longer be chargeable at importation, but will be relieved while the goods remain under the IPR regime. As a result, in 1992-93 there will be a once and for all cash-flow loss to the revenue, estimated at some £40 million. However, that figure may be lower depending on the number of IPR traders required to submit monthly returns.

The introduction, for those traders who will wish to put EC goods directly on to the market, of the system of registered excise dealers and shippers, may also lead to a small revenue loss in 1992-93. However, this will depend on the details of the accounting arrangements eventually adopted and the numbers of traders wishing to use them. The revenue from customs duties will not be affected by the completion of the single market.

EMS (Norway)

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will list the grounds upon which the Norwegian Government's request for association with the European monetary system was rejected; and whether he will make a statement upon the United Kingdom's position.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 29 November 1991]:* No request for a formal association with the EMS has been received. In common with other EC member states the United Kingdom welcomed the Norwegian decision to link the krone to the ecu in October 1990 as a positive contribution to exchange rate stability in Europe. The Government also fully support the related bilateral swap arrangements between EC central banks, including the Bank of England, and the Norwegian central bank which give the Norwegian central bank access to short-term funds for intervention purposes.

ENERGY

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Alan W. Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to his answers to the hon. Members for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) and for Fulham (Mr. Carrington) on 11 November, *Official Report*, column *359*, if he will detail what part of the expenditure spent by the public sector on energy efficiency is allocated to direct investments in public sector-owned or operated buildings, transport and other activities; and what proportion is allocated to promoting energy efficiency to those outside the public sector.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Detailed splits in the form requested of the expenditure on the various programmes which made up the total public sector spend on energy efficiency are not available. However, the bulk of the expenditure does relate to direct investment of over £900 million by the Department of the Environment to improve the energy efficiency of local authority housing.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will state the total sum available for grants under the home energy efficiency scheme for 1991-92 and in 1992-93, and total spending in 1989-90 and 1990-91 under the same scheme and its predecessors.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The home energy efficiency scheme came into operation on 1 January 1991. In the period 1 January to 31 March 1991 approximately £1·3 million was paid out in grants under the scheme. In the current financial year £24 million is available for grant. My Department's budget for the promotion of energy efficiency in low-income households for 1992-93 is some £40 million. The bulk of this will go in support of HEES, but is is not yet possible to give a precise figure for the amount which will be available for grants.

Prior to the introduction of HEES, expenditure on grants for draughtproofing materials under the energy grant scheme operated under the employment training programme, was £10·08 million in 1989-90 and £9·31 million in 1990-91.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will indicate the allocation of funding to each network installer for the first year of the home energy efficiency scheme, and the proportion of each allocation paid out by 1 October 1991.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Allocations to individual network installers are made by the Energy Action Grants Agency on a quarterly basis, as provided for under section 15(2) of the regulations (SI 1990 No. 1791). It is not the Department's policy to make public information on individual network installers or other contractors working under the home energy efficiency scheme, but in aggregate the total amount allocated to network installers in respect of the three quarters to end December 1991 was £14 million, of which £6·3 million had been paid by 1 October.

Oil and Gas Extraction

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the prospects for oil and gas extraction in the Firth of Clyde area.

Mr. Moynihan: There are no petroleum licences extant in the firth of Clyde area. My Department knows of no present plans for oil and gas activity in the area.

EC (Visits)

Mr. Forman: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list for himself, and for each of the Ministers at his Department, details of *(a)* the number of visits made in the past month to destinations outside the United Kingdom but within the European Community on official business related to the European Community, *(b)* the number of visits made to Brussels within the past month on official business related to the European Community and *(c)* the number of nights spent over the past month away from the United Kingdom on official European Community business.

Mr. Wakeham: *(a)* The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), represented the United Kingdom at the Energy Council in Luxembourg on 29 October. *(b)* None.

(c) One night in Luxembourg, 28 October, before the Energy Council.

Mr. Forman: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list (i) the number of visits made by officials in his Department during the past month to destinations outside the United Kingdom but within the European Community on official business related to the European Community, (ii) the number of visits made by officials in his Department to Brussels within the past month on official business related to the European Community and (iii) the number of nights spent by officials in his Department over the past month away from the United Kingdom on official European Community business.

Mr. Wakeham: The statistics requested for the period 22 October to 22 November are 31, 21 and 34.

EC Councils

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the EC ministerial council meetings at which his Department has or will be represented during November and December.

Mr. Wakeham: The Department of Energy expects to be represented at a joint Energy and Environment Council planned for 13 December.

Electricité de France

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what amount of electricity has been imported into the United Kingdom from Electricité de France in each of the past five years.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Figures on the amount of electricity imported into the United Kingdom for the years 1986 to 1990 are found in table 50 of the "Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics 1991", a copy of which is kept in the Library of the House. For the first nine months of 1991 imports of electricity total 12,132 GW hours and exports 14 GW hours. Since 1986 all the United Kingdom's imports and exports of electricity have been carried out solely with France.

Subsidence Compensation Scheme

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects to receive British Coal's annual report on the administration of the subsidence compensation scheme for 1990-91.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have now received this report from British Coal and have arranged for copies to be placed in both Libraries of the House today.

North Sea Oil

Mr. Marlow: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what proportion of North sea oil lies *(a)* north and *(b)* south of a line drawn in an extension of the general direction of the border between England and Scotland.

Mr. Moynihan: No such calculations are made by my Department. Estimates of oil reserves remaining on the United Kingdom continental shelf as a whole were published in the latest report of April this year on the "Development of the Oil and Gas Resources of the United Kingdom", also known as the "Brown Book", which is available in the Library of the House.

SCOTLAND

Enterprise Zone Status

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his response to the recommendation of the Lanarkshire working group that strategic industrial development sites in north Lanarkshire should be given enterprise zone status.

Mr. Lang: The Government undertook to consider that recommendation against the background of its existing policy on enterprise zones, and the costs which might be involved. This we are doing.

Proposals for an enterprise zone in Lanarkshire would also have to comply with the European Commission's competition and sectoral aids regimes.

Scottish Bus Group

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he is now in a position to state the selling price of each company within the Scottish Bus Group, and the principal conditions of sale.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I have given today about sale proceeds to my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Sir H. Monro). As previously indicated, the principal conditions in each sale relate to property clawbacks, employee pensions and concessionary fare arrangements for employees, former employees and their families on the basis of the criteria set out in the disposal programme.

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish details of the proceeds obtained from the sales of the bus operating subsidiaries of the Scottish Bus Group, and the price obtained for each.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The proceeds of the sales of the Scottish Bus Group's bus operating subsidiaries were £96·2 million, of which £56·4 million represents dividends before sale, net of capitalisation, and £39·8 million represents the amounts received for the sale of shares. The table shows details relating to each bus company sale. The disposal of insurance, engineering and property interests, and the wind up of the pension funds, is not yet complete.

Scottish bus group privatisation: sale proceeds

Subsidiary	[1] *Number of interests*	*Number of bids*	*Date of sale*	*Purchaser*	*Date of last balance sheet*	[2] *Latest audited profit/ (loss)* £'000	[3] *Pro-forma net assets* £'000	[4] *Dividends/ (capitalisations) before sale* £'000	[5] *Sale price* £'000
Lowland	19	4	17 August 1990	MEBO	31 December 1989	685	1,359	—	3,100
Scottish Citylink Coaches	7	4	30 August 1990	MEBO	30 June 1990	(2,455)	(1,552)	(1,500)	265
Midland	10	8	13 September 1990	GRT Holdings plc	31 December 1989	1,090	23,272	17,920	8,500
Eastern	11	4	27 September 1990	MEBO	22 April 1990	(12)	25,717	19,143	9,500
Kelvin Central[6]	8	1	18 February 1991	MEBO	20 May 1990	(1,710)	6,981	(3,484)	—
Northern	11	4	27 March 1991	Stagecoach (Holdings) Ltd.	12 August 1990	60	10,566	5,550	5,667
Strathtay	6	2	19 June 1991	Yorkshire Traction Co. Ltd.	31 December 1990	(92)	386	(2,120)	1,900
Fife	10	5	23 July 1991	Stagecoach (Holdings) Ltd.	31 December 1990	1,264	14,605	8,500	9,111
Highland	8	2	16 August 1991	Highland Bus and Coach Ltd.	31 December 1990	(377)	3,764	531	800
Western[7]	12	2	14 October 1991	MEBO	31 December 1990	(2,016)	20,081	11,851	1,000
							105,179	56,391	39,843

[1] The number of interests is the number of those registering an interest and receiving a copy of the information memorandum on the company concerned.
[2] Profits are stated before exceptional items. The figures in each case relate to the profit or loss in the period from the preceding 1 January to the date of the last balance sheet. In some cases this period is less than 12 months.
[3] The pro forma net assets are the net assets at the last balance sheet date, adding back all dividends paid to the parent company since 1 January 1990 and adjusted for any subsequent property transfers and waivers of intra-group debt. Net asset values are on a modified historic cost basis that is, properties are included at current use valuation and all other assets and liabilities are accounted for on a historic cost basis.
[4] Dividends declared before sale include all dividends paid to the parent company, stated after deduction of capitalisations, in both cases since 1 January 1990. Capitalisations are further subscription of share capital by the parent in the subsidiary or waiver of inter-company debt.
[5] The sale price is the price paid for the shares of the relevant subsidiary including deferred consideration in the case of Western (see below).
[6] The consideration for the share capital of Kelvin Central was a nominal £1. In addition, STG has retained the right in specified circumstances, such as a resale of the company, to participate in any future uplift in the value of the company, by way of an option to subscribe for 20 per cent. of its share capital. The right expires on 18 February 1998 or, if later, the last date of repayment of debt due by Kelvin Central to STG. This debt amounts to £1 million due to be repaid in instalments by 18 February 2001.
[7] The £1 million consideration for the share capital of Western includes £600,000 on deferred terms, the last payment being due on 14 October 1998. In addition, STG has retained the right in specified circumstances, such as a resale of the company, to participate in any future uplift in the value of the company, by way of an option to subscribe for 20 per cent. of its share capital. The right expires on 14 October 1996 or the date of the last payment of deferred consideration, if later. Immediately following the sale of Western to the MEBO, the company (by prior agreement with STG) sold assets, corresponding broadly to those previously owned by the former Clydeside Scottish subsidiary, to an employee buy-out company.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many directors of training and enterprise councils are (i) men, (ii) women, (iii) from ethnic minority backgrounds and (iv) from the private sector; what information he has about from which industrial sectors directors with a private sector background come; and, of those non-private sector directors, how many are from *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* local education authorities, *(c)* other educational organisations, *(d)* trade unions, *(e)* voluntary organisations, *(f)* ethnic minority organisations, *(g)* employers' associations and *(h)* others.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information requested, in respect of the board of Scottish Enterprise, is shown in the table, with the exception of information about the ethnic origins of board members on which records are not maintained. At least two-thirds of the board members of local enterprise companies are drawn from the private sector. Individual appointments are for the local enterprise companies themselves. Board membership is listed in the published summaries of the companies' business plans.

Category		*Number of board members*
Women		2
Men		10
Private sector directors of which		
a. publishing	1	
b. manufacturing	2	
c. electronics	1	
d. financial services	2	
e. automotive industry	1	
f. textiles	1	
TOTAL		8
Non-private sector directors of which		
a. local authority	1	
b. other educational organisations	1	
c. trade union	1	

Category	Number of board members
d. voluntary organisations	1
TOTAL	4

EC Meetings

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the European Community ministerial Council meetings at which his Department has, or will be, represented during November and December.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Where they or their officials do not personally attend, Scottish Office Ministers are represented at all such meetings by their colleagues in the United Kingdom Government. Scottish Office Ministers will be present at the Environment Council on 12 December and the Fisheries Council on 17-18 December; were represented by Scottish Office officials at the Agriculture Council and informal Regional Policy Council on 18-19 November; and will be represented by Scottish Office officials at the Agriculture Council on 11-12 December.

EC (Visits)

Mr. Forman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list (i) the number of visits made by officials in his Department during the past month to destinations outside the United Kingdom but within the European Community on official business related to the European Community, (ii) the number of visits made by officials in his Department to Brussels within the past month on official business related to the European Community and (iii) the number of nights spent by officials in his Department over the past month away from the United Kingdom on official European Community business.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The figures for October 1991, the latest complete month for which details are available, are as follows:

(i) 17
(ii) 13
(iii) 32

Mr. Forman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list for himself, and for each of the Ministers at his Department, details of (i) the number of visits made during the past month to destinations outside the United Kingdom but within the European Community on official business related to the European Community, (ii) the number of visits made to Brussels within the past month on official business related to the European Community and (iii) the number of nights spent over the past month away from the United Kingdom on official European Community business.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Scottish Office Ministers have not had occasion to undertake any travel outside the United Kingdom on European Community business within the past month. They are however, if not themselves present, represented at all European Community Ministerial Council meetings.

THE ARTS

Regional Arts

34. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Minister for the Arts when he next intends to meet the director of North West Arts to discuss funding for arts in the region.

Mr. Renton: I met the director of North West Arts when I visited the region on 6 November to launch Business in the Arts North West. I am pleased that the North West Arts Board will receive a 13·9 per cent. increase in grant from the Arts Council next year.

Blue Box Theatre, Keswick

35. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Minister for the Arts whether he intends to visit the Blue Box theatre in Keswick.

Mr. Renton: I would be happy to consider an invitation to visit the theatre when I am next in the region.

Birmingham (City of Music)

36. **Mr. Andrew Hargreaves:** To ask the Minister for the Arts, pursuant to his answer of 11 November, *Official Report*, column *347*, to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) what response he has received to his invitation to EC Ministers of Culture to visit Birmingham in 1992.

Mr. Renton: In the course of the meeting of EC Ministers of Culture which I attended in Brussels on 14 November I asked my European colleagues to a special meeting in Birmingham on 7 September 1992, which will be preceded by a gala promenade concert at the Royal Albert Hall on 6 September. The invitation was received with great pleasure.

City of Dance Festival

37. **Mr. Haynes:** To ask the Minister for the Arts if he intends to visit the east midlands to discuss the region's preparations for being host to the Arts Council's city of dance festival in 1993.

Mr. Meale: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will visit the east midlands to discuss the region's preparations for being host to the Arts Council's city of dance festival in 1993.

Mr. Renton: I hope to visit the east midlands as part of my programme of regional visits early next year. I look forward to hearing about the region's preparations for hosting the Arts 2000 Region of Dance 1993.

Teesside Arts

38. **Mr. Hague:** To ask the Minister for the Arts when he next plans to visit Teesside to inspect progress in arts provision.

Mr. Renton: I spent a most enjoyable and informative day on Teesside on 21 November. I visited the "Marking the Ways" project at Bassleton Woods, Thornaby, and the "Riverscape" project at the Dorman museum in Middlesbrough. I also launched Cleveland Arts' publication "On the Map", which celebrates the cultural

achievements of the partnerships forged between the public and private sectors in Cleveland. I also met the chairman and chief executive of the Teesside development corporation.

Arts Funding

39. **Mr. Simon Coombs:** To ask the Minister for the Arts if he will make a statement on public funding of the arts.

Mr. Renton: I announced on 7 November details of the Government's support for the arts for the three years commencing 1992-93. The Arts Council has since announced its detailed allocations for 1992-93, and my hon. Friend will have noted with pleasure its decision to increase the funding of Southern Arts, the regional arts board which covers his constituency, by a very handsome 20·9 per cent.

Libraries

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Minister for the Arts what was the number of public libraries and branch libraries in operation in the United Kingdom for each year since 1981; and if he will list the number of persons borrowing from them for each since 1981.

Mr. Renton: Statistics about the public library service are collected and published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. They do not include information about the number of borrowers but show the following numbers of central, branch and mobile libraries:

Year (at 31 March)	*Number of returning library authorities*[1]	*Number of libraries*
1981	160	5,451
1982	163	5,456
1983	164	5,444
1984	164	5,395
1985	158	5,295
1986	162	5,364
1987	155	5,174
1988	161	5,457
1989	164	5,325
1990	166	5,587

[1]Not all library authorities make a statistical return each year. Figures for England include information received direct by the Office of Arts and Libraries from authorities.

Concerts, London

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Minister for the Arts if he has any plans to fund special concerts for the youth and pensioners of London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: Responsibility for funding individual arts organisations or artists in London lies with the Arts Council and the new London Arts Board. One of the main aims of both bodies in funding arts organisation is to promote access for people regardless of age. But a number of music organisations which offer services specifically for the young or for pensioners do receive grants, among them Youth and Music and Live Music Now.

SOCIAL SECURITY

EC (Visits)

Mr. Forman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list for himself, and for each of the Ministers at his Department, details of (i) the number of visits made during the past month to destinations outside the United Kingdom but within the European Community on official business related to the European Community, (ii) the number of visits made to Brussels within the past month on official business related to the European Community and (iii) the number of nights spent over the past month away from the United Kingdom on official European Community business.

Mr. Jack: As the Minister responsible for Europe in the Department, I made the following visits between 28 October and 27 November: to Brussels on 6 November; and to Lisbon on 25-26 November, which involved an overnight stay.

Mr. Forman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list (i) the number of visits made by officials in his Department during the past month to destinations outside the United Kingdom but within the European Community on official business related to the European Community, (ii) the number of visits made by officials in his Department to Brussels within the past month on official business related to the European Community and (iii) the number of nights spent by officials in his Department over the past month away from the United Kingdom on official European Community business.

Mr. Jack: The latest available information relates to October 1991. The Department arranged 37 visits to European Community countries, of which 19 were to Brussels. Officials spent 58 nights away, although this figure includes additional overnight stays for officials also involved in non-European Community business, such as attending Council of Europe meetings. If the primary purpose of a visit is for European Community business, any additional stay for other business is not recorded separately.

Pension Age Equalisation

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what progress has been made towards publishing a consultation paper on the equalisation of pension ages for men and women.

Miss Widdecombe: Work on the proposed discussion paper is well advanced.

Community Care Grants

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether any special arrangements exist for consideration for community care grants from the social fund for those recently released from prison.

Miss Widdecombe: People recently released from prison who are in receipt of income support are eligible to apply, in the normal way, for the full range of help available from the social fund, including community care grants.

Correspondence

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the hon. Member for Coventry, South-East can expect a reply to his written question of 18 November, concerning the state pension and the Christmas bonus.

Miss Widdecombe: I replied to the hon. Member today.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 18 November, *Official Report*, column *80*, concerning the transfer to local authorities of expenditure which would otherwise have been incurred by his Department on the care element, whether the amount transferred will be based on the number of individuals applying, a block grant on average numbers applying or expected, or some other basis.

Miss Widdecombe: The amount transferred will be based on the estimated number of people who would have claimed the higher income support limits for residential care and nursing homes. It will also reflect trends in average payments.

Pensioners

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update to 1988 his reply to the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham, *Official Report*, 20 May 1991, column *389*, showing the numbers of retirement pensioners with incomes other than state pensions within the given bands of income.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is in the table:

Numbers (thousands)

	Married	*Single*
Up to £5	130	650
£5-£10	100	350
£10-£15	140	370
£15-£20	160	430
£20-£30	340	950
£30-£40	200	400
£40-£50	200	230
£50-£60	120	150
£60-£70	90	120
£70-£80	100	130
£80-£90	80	110
£90-£100	60	70
£100-£110	70	60
£110-£130	120	120
£130-£150	90	60
£150-£200	190	100
£200 and over	330	130
Total	2,510	4,430

Note: The figures show respectively thousands of pensioner couples and single pensioners in receipt of gross incomes other than retirement pension, supplementary pension and income support. This definition conforms with that used in the answer provided to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Sir I. Gilmour) on 20 May 1991 at columns *388-89*. The income bands have been aggregated in some cases to provide a statistically adequate sample.
Source: 1988 family expenditure survey.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the current value of the state retirement pension had its 1979 value been increased each year by either the percentage rise in prices or in average earnings whichever in each year was the higher; and what would be the current value of the pensioners' Christmas bonus had it been increased since its introduction by *(a)* the percentage rise in prices, *(b)* the percentage rise in average earnings or *(c)* the percentage rise in either prices of average earnings whichever, in each year, had been the higher.

Miss Widdecombe *[holding answer 18 November 1991]*: The basic pension would now be worth £65·85 had it been increased since 1979 by the higher of earnings or prices. The extra cost to the national insurance fund of this increase would require the combined employer and employee National Insurance contributions to rise by £8·70 per week for a male employee on average earnings.

The Christmas bonus would now be worth £57·30 had it been increased since 1972 in line with prices, at an extra cost of £568 million; £77·40 had it been increased in line with average earnings, at an extra cost of £809 million; and £88·10 had it been increased in line with the higher of average earnings or prices, at an extra cost of £937 million. As the bonus is paid to all pensioners regardless of income, any increase in its present level would be a poorly targeted use of resources and would also require higher national insurance contributions.

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has any plans to enable those who are partially sighted to qualify for mobility allowance.

Mr. Scott: Disability living allowance, which will replace mobility allowance in April 1992, will introduce a new rate of benefit for disabled people who, although physically able to walk, are unable to get around on unfamiliar routes without guidance or supervision from another person. We expect that substantial numbers of people with severe visual impairments will benefit from this extension.

Benefit Offices

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) whether he will review staffing levels in local benefit offices; what steps he proposes to increase the staff available; and if he will make a statement;

(2) whether he will review the criteria to determine the number of staff required to cope with the workload in local benefit offices; and what steps he proposes to take to relieve the build-up of work being undertaken by existing staff in local benefit offices.

Miss Widdecombe: The staffing of district offices is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of the benefit offices staff wage bill has been paid in overtime payments for each of the last five years.

Miss Widdecombe: It is not possible to isolate from general Departmental salaries those costs in respect of staff employed in payment of benefits.

The overall figures for staff salaries and overtime are as follows:

Year	Salaries £ million	Overtime £ million	Percentage
1986-87	690·5	21·4	3·1
1987-88	784·2	25·7	3·28
1988-89	838·8	17·4	2·07
1989-90[1]	802·6	31·9	3·97
1990-91[1]	894·9	45·9	5·13

[1] 1989-90 and 1990-91 show the costs for the Department of Social Security alone. Previous years' totals include costs for the Department of Health. It is not possible to separate the information in respect of what were then the component parts of the Department of Health and Social Security.

Citizens Charter

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what specific redress will be available to claimants who are in receipt of benefits from local offices as a result of the citizens charter.

Miss Widdecombe: The question of redress for claimants who are in receipt of benefits from local offices is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Income Support

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what study has been made on the effect on 16 or 17-year-olds of the change in benefit regulations that removed their right to income support.

Mr. Jack: Research from MORI was commissioned in July 1990 about 16 and 17-year-olds who claim income support under the severe hardship provision. The results were published on 16 July 1991 in the report, "A Survey of 16 and 17 year Old Applicants for Severe Hardship Payments", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what loans or benefits are available to enable people on income support to pay deposits and rent in advance to enable them to move into accommodation.

Miss Widdecombe: Budgeting or crisis loans are available from the social fund to help with rent in advance for private accommodation. Help with deposits for securing accommodation is excluded from the social security system.

Cost of Living

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what evidence he has of the comparative cost of living of a 24-year-old and a 25-year-old.

Miss Widdecombe: The structure of income support is based on the Green Paper which introduced the 1988 social security reforms. This noted that there is no one age dividing line relevant to all claimants and that the clear majority of claimants under 25 were living in someone else's household. Evidence from the most recent family expenditure survey confirms that this remains the position.

Sources:

1. The Reform of Social Security (Cmnd 9518, June 1985), Vol. 2, page 23, paragraph 2.73.
2. 1988 family expenditure survey.

Young Persons (Benefits)

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pregnant women aged 16 and 17 years, respectively, received any kind of benefit in 1988-89 and 1990-91; and which benefits they received.

Mr. Jack *[holding answer 21 November 1991]:* Such information as is available is set out in the tables.

Year	Age	Expectant mothers in receipt of income support as a claimant	Expectant mothers in receipt of income support as the partner of a claimant	Total
1988	16	600	200	800
	17	1,400	200	1,600
1989	16	600	200	800
	17	1,100	400	1,500
1990	16	400	100	500
	17	1,700	100	1,800

Notes:

1. Figures on income support relate to the date of enquiry not over the whole year.
2. Figures are not yet available for income support for May 1991.
3. All figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred.
4. As the figures are based on a 1 per cent. sample, small figures may be unreliable.

Source: Annual Statistical Enquiry, May 1988, May 1989 and May 1990.

Year	Age	Maternity allowance	Sickness benefit
1989	16	Nil	Nil
	17	600	500

Notes:

1. Figures relate to the number of awards in the 12 months ended 2 April 1989. Figures are not yet available for 1990-91.
2. All figures are based on a 1:100 sample. As the number of sample cases is so small, in relation to the total population they cannot be considered reliable.
3. Additionally, 1,400 16-year-old women and 1,500 17-year-old women were awarded national insurance credits although no benefit was payable.

Source: Annual Enquiry, April 1989.

DEFENCE

Challenger II Tanks

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration was given to the use of a global positioning system in Challenger II tanks in the

evaluation of alternative specifications between 1988 and 1990; and why it was decided not to use the system at that time.

Mr. Alan Clark: None. During the period in question, the specification for the Chieftain replacement included an inertial, rather than a satellite-based, navigation system. Subsequent experience in operating Challenger 1 in the Gulf demonstrated that a global positioning system would be adequate to meet our operational needs.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the global positioning system proposed for Challenger II tanks can be used to transfer tactical information to other units as part of a battlefield control system.

Mr. Alan Clark: Yes, when linked with the necessary interfaces and communication facilities.

Royal Naval Reserve

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out the necessary technical qualifications of Royal Navy reservists serving in *(a)* the port divers branch and *(b)* the degaussing branch; in what other branches of the Royal Naval Reserve they will be able to use those qualifications; and whether those other branches will be funded to provide for higher strengths than at present.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Naval Reserve personnel he estimates will have to leave the Royal Naval Reserve as a result of the disbandment of 11 branches and four communications training centres.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We expect the establishment of the Royal Naval Reserve to reduce by some 1,200. The number of personnel who have to leave will depend on the level of natural turnover.

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what are the principal peacetime and wartime roles of *(a)* the port divers and *(b)* the degaussing branches of the Royal Naval Reserve; who will carry out these roles when the branches are disbanded; and what considerations have led to the proposed closure of these branches.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The principal peacetime role of the port divers and degaussers is to train in preparation for their war role, which includes underwater first aid ship repair and ship husbandry and the monitoring and reduction of surface ships magnetic signatures. Longer warning times and the changing international situation mean that adequate arrangements can be made for these tasks during the longer period of force regeneration.

Tanks

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information is available to him about the type of inertial navigation system and/or global position system which is in service or planned for tanks in the armies of NATO member states and France.

Mr. Alan Clark: Our NATO allies provide information on a confidential basis on a wide range of systems, in-service or planned for service with their forces.

EC (Visits)

Mr. Forman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list for himself, and for each of the Ministers at his Department, details of *(a)* the number of visits made in the past month to destinations outside the United Kingdom but within the European Community on official business related to the European Community, *(b)* the number of visits made to Brussels within the past month on official business related to the European Community and *(c)* the number of nights spent over the past month away from the United Kingdom on official European Community business;

(2) if he will list the number of visits made by officials in his Department during the past month to destinations outside the United Kingdom but within the European Community on official business related to the European Community, the number of visits made by officials in his Department to Brussels within the past month on official business related to the European Community and the number of nights spent by officials in his Department over the past month away from the United Kingdom official European Community business.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Neither Ministers nor officials in this Department have made visits to Brussels or any other locations on European Community business in the last month.

Unoccupied Homes

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 19 November, *Official Report*, column *152* to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) about the number of Ministry of Defence residential properties that are currently standing empty, what intentions the Department has for their future use.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence housing task force, under the chairmanship of my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces, is currently considering ways in which surplus dwellings could be utilised to help those service personnel leaving the services over the next few years on redundancy terms who may experience housing difficulties.

Not all Ministry of Defence empty properties are surplus to our requirements. We will always need to retain an appropriate management margin of vacant properties because of the frequent moves undertaken by service families. In addition, any properties undergoing or awaiting major maintenance work or modernisation will be brought back into use as the work is completed. Surplus properties are normally disposed of at the earliest opportunity.

Operation Granby

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if there were any occasions during Operation Granby when global positioning systems in United Kingdom fighting vehicles did not function either because of equipment failure, environmental or physical obstruction, or because of any risk of location by the enemy; and if he will make a statement on the performance of this equipment.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The detailed assessment of equipment performance in the Gulf is not yet complete. As the statement on the defence estimates 1991 makes clear, satellite global positioning equipment was crucial to accurate navigation over the desert and in Gulf waters.

Near Misses

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his practice to keep central records of near misses involving military jet aircraft and shipping; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No.

TRANSPORT

West Yorkshire Electrification

Mr. Waller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the west Yorkshire electrification project.

Mr. Freeman: I am happy to say that I have informed the West Yorkshire passenger transport authority that the Government are willing to provide credit approvals for the infrastructure, and have opened the way for the PTA to take an operating lease on the rolling stock on terms previously proposed.

Radioactive Material (Transport)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list by year for the last four years, and for the current year to date, the number of vehicle journeys on *(a)* the A1(M), *(b)* the M18, *(c)* the M180, *(d)* the M1 and *(e)* the M62 involving the transport of (i) medium and (ii) high-level radioactive material.

Mr. Chope: My Department does not collect data of the kind requested.

Lifejackets

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out the European Commission proposals for *(a)* inflatable and *(b)* non-inflatable lifejackets.

Mr. McLoughlin: The European Commission's proposals for inflatable and non-inflatable lifejackets are set out in the European Council directive 89/086/EEC, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out the United Kingdom proposals for lifejackets.

Mr. McLoughlin: The United Kingdom requirements for lifejackets are contained in the International Maritime Organisation's safety of life at sea—SOLAS—convention 1974, as amended, and the Merchant Shipping (Life Saving Appliances) Regulations 1986. For non-SOLAS ships the British standard for lifejackets—BS 3595:1981 may, under specific circumstances, be accepted as an equivalent. Copies of each of these documents have been placed in the Library.

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the representations he has received and made about the European Commission's lifejackets proposals.

Mr. McLoughlin: Responsibility for the European Commission's directive on lifejackets lies with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. My Department, along with other organisations within the United Kingdom, provides input to the relevant British standards technical committee, which represent the United Kingdom's interest in the appropriate European Commission's Comité Européen de Normalisation—European Committee for Standardisation—technical committee 162.

Merchant Navy

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the names of Merchant Navy training establishments and the number of places in each; and if he will give details of establishments and places which have been closed since 1980.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Department of Transport is responsible for the approval of seafarer training programmes and for setting monitoring standards for the issue of certificates. It is not responsible for the provision of Merchant Navy training establishments and does not maintain records of the number of places in each; nor does it have a complete record of establishments and places which have been closed since 1980.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the number of *(a)* officer cadets and *(b)* ratings who entered Merchant Navy training establishments for each year since 1980, including the number who commenced training and completed training for each of those years.

Mr. McLoughlin: The total numbers of officer cadets and ratings who entered Merchant Navy training establishments each year are given in the table. The number of ratings recruited is taken from the annual report of the National Sea Training college, Gravesend, which goes back to 1984.

Year	*Officer cadets*	*Ratings*
1980	1,274	—
1981	656	—
1982	296	—
1983	152	—
1984	183	193
1985	182	373
1986	177	217
1987	162	230
1988	227	240
1989	413	229
1990	521	212

For officer cadets there is a wastage factor of 25 per cent. over the period of training, but for ratings the wastage factor has been just over 5 per cent. for the considerably shorter training periods.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give the yearly cost to his Department of the Government scheme of assistance for training for the Merchant Navy since its introduction.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Merchant Shipping Act 1988 makes provision for building on existing training arrangements and the Department of Transport is providing financial assistance for training for the Merchant Navy. The yearly cost to this Department since the scheme was introduced in 1988 is as follows:

Financial year	Cost £
1988-89	843,844
1989-90	1,757,518
1990-91	2,341,540

Citizens Charter

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the British Rail Board about its plans for complying with the requirements of the citizens charter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Ministers and officials have had a number of discussions with British Rail about the implementation of the citizens charter. British Rail is currently working up its proposals and hopes to publish its passengers charter early in the new year.

Training

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish a projection of *(a)* the number of officer cadets and *(b)* ratings whom he expects to commence training in each year up to the year 2000.

Mr. McLoughlin: There are some indications that the number of officer cadets commencing training each year is stabilising, but it is too early to predict what the level of recruitment will be each year up to the year 2000. However, the Department welcomes the commitment given by industry in the joint working party report "British Shipping: Challenges and Opportunities" to recruit at least the minimum number of trainees needed to fill its projected requirements for United Kingdom nationals, and will keep the numbers recruited under review.

Car Security

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will meet motor manufacturers to discuss the installation of security devices on all cars as a matter of standard practice; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: Immobilisers are already fitted as standard practice on all cars. Possible improvements to installed car security devices are the subject of discussion between my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and motor manufacturers. The last discussions were held on 23 September 1991 and further meetings are planned.

Large Goods Vehicle Licence

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secetary of State for Transport what financial assistance is available to assist drivers who are unemployed and in receipt of benefit, to pay for medical examinations required for drivers of LGVs once they reach 46 years of age or to renew their licence.

Mr. Chope: The Department of Transport has no power to provide financial assistance towards the cost of the medical examination required by any driver who applies to renew a large goods vehicle driving licence at age 45.

Driving Licences

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many short-period driving licences were issued or renewed in 1990-91.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer Friday 29 November 1991]:* A total of 6,228,634 licences were issued during 1990-91. Of these, 748,955 were short-period licences issued to and renewed by drivers of 70-plus years and 130,720 were short-period licences renewed by drivers with medical conditions.

HEALTH

EC (Visits)

Mr. Forman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list (i) the number of visits made by officials in his Department during the past month to destinations outside the United Kingdom but within the European Community on official business related to the European Community, (ii) the number of visits made by officials in his Department to Brussels within the past month on official business related to the European Community and (iii) the number of nights spent by officials in his Department over the past month away from the United Kingdom on official European Community business.

Mr. Dorrell: There were two meetings excluding visits to Brussels and seven meetings of the Health Council and council working groups involving nine officials. Officials spent a total of 14 nights away from the United Kingdom.

Information on the number of other visits to EC countries by officials which may have involved discussions relating to EC business is not readily available.

Mr. Forman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for himself, and for each of the Ministers at his Department, details of *(a)* the number of visits made in the past month to destinations outside the United Kingdom but within the European Community on official business related to the European Community, *(b)* the number of visits made to Brussels within the past month on official business related to the European Community and *(c)* the number of nights spent over the past month away from the United Kingdom on official European Community business.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the EC ministerial Council meetings at which his Department has or will be represented during November and December.

Mr. Dorrell: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State attended the Health Ministers Council on 11 November 1991 and met informally a number of MEPs on 27 November. This involved spending one night in Brussels on each occasion.

There were no other visits by Ministers to European Community or other countries on official business related to the European Community.

Cholesterol Testing

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to be in a position to respond to the report of the standing medical advisory committee on blood cholesterol testing; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: We are considering the large number of responses to the report and intend to make an announcement as soon as possible.

Alcohol Consumption

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish figures showing the average alcohol consumption in units for men and for women each year since 1975.

Mr. Dorrell: Information is not available in the form requested. The following table shows the average numbers of units of alcohol consumed by men and women in 1987 and 1989 in England and Wales:

Average alcohol consumption in units, England and Wales by sex
England and Wales — *Units of alcohol*

Year	Average number of units consumed in previous week per person[1] Males	Females	Average number of units consumed in previous week per person[2] Males	Females
1987	14·5	4·8	18·7	7·7
1989	14·1	4·2	18·5	7·2

Source: OPCS Survey: Drinking in England and Wales in the late 1980s.

[1]This average takes into account all those who took part in the survey, including non-drinkers.

[2]This average only takes into account those who were drinkers, excluding non-drinkers.

Mr. Sims: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish figures showing for each year since 1975 *(a)* the incidence of alcoholic cirrhosis for men and women and *(b)* the alcoholic cirrhosis mortality rate for men and women.

Mr. Dorrell: The available information is given in the tables.

(a) Estimated completed consultant episodes, England by year, diagnosis and sex
Diagnosis = alcoholic cirrhosis of liver, ICD 571·2
England — *Numbers*

Year	Estimated completed episodes alcoholic cirrhosis of liver ICD 571·2 All	Males	Females
1988-89	2,376	1,547	827
1989-90	2,807	1,894	913

Notes:
1. These figures include ordinary admissions and day cases.
2. Figures have been grossed grossing factors collected from from acute sector KP70, HES A6A and the percentage of diagnosis not known for 1988-89 and 1989-90.
3. These numbers are provisional estimates based on incomplete data and may be subject to revision.

Source: hospital episode system (HES)

(b) Deaths from alcoholic cirrhosis of liver, ICD 571·2(1) and mortality rates
England and Wales, mortality rate per 100,000 population, by year and sex
England and Wales — *Numbers/Rate*

Year	Males Number of deaths	Males Rates per 100,000 population	Females Number of deaths	Females Rates per 100,000 population
1979	347	1·9	167	0·8
1980	385	2·0	216	1·1
1981	413	2·2	221	1·1
1982	399	2·1	248	1·2
1983	430	2·2	266	1·3
1984	435	2·3	242	0·5
1985	401	2·1	219	1·0
1986	385	2·0	203	1·0
1987	384	2·0	229	1·1
1988	404	2·0	241	1·1
1989	397	2·0	250	1·2

Notes:
1. ICD = International Classification of Diseases
2. A revised ICD list came into effect in 1979. Figures for ICD 571·2 are not available before 1979.

Source:
OPCS Mortality Statistics OPCS Population Statistics

Birth Statistics

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his reply of 10 June, *Official Report*, column *446*, how many women delivered in England during the financial year 1990-91; and how many *(a)* complete and *(b)* incomplete delivery records have been included in the maternity hospital episode system data file for 1990-91.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The 1990-91 birth registration and the 1990-91 hospital episode statistics data have yet to be finalised.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the originating debt and its division between public dividend capital and interest-bearing debt for each of the second wave national health service trusts;

(2) what is the originating debt and its division between public dividend capital and interest-bearing debt for each of the first wave national health service trusts.

Mr. Dorrell: Interest charges for first wave NHS trusts have been calculated on the basis of estimated asset value. Detailed opening valuations will be published after they have been finalised. Opening valuations of second wave NHS trusts will not be available until after the next financial year.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health to what extent trusts within the national health service are required to comply with guidelines issued in department circulars.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 27 November 1991]:* It is normally the responsibility of purchasing health authorities to ensure that all NHS providers observe departmental policy guidance. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State also has powers to direct NHS bodies, including NHS trusts, to implement particular guidance.

Immunisation

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on current NHS immunisation facilities for children; and what were the comparable facilities for 1978.

Mr. Dorrell: NHS facilities for childhood immunisation are provided in child health clinics and by general practitioners. It is for health authorities to decide how best those facilities should be provided. Since GPs were first invited to participate (in the mid-1970s) they have taken an increasing part in the immunisation programme. We introduced the target payment scheme from April 1990 to encourage them further in this activity.

Information on the rates of immunisation is shown in the table.

Percentage of children immunised (England)

	1978	[1]1991
Diptheria and Polio	78	92
Measles	48	[2]90
Whooping Cough	31	87

[1] The latest available estimates for August.
[2] Measles, mumps and rubella.

Scanning and Kidney Machines

Sir John Stanley To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has as to the number of *(a)* body scanning machines, *(b)* brain scanning machines and *(c)* kidney machines available to the NHS, and the number of patients benefiting from their use, in 1978 and in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Dorrell: Complete information on the availability of scanners in the NHS is not collected centrally. However, we are aware of 15 whole-body scanners and 37 head-only scanners which were operating in the NHS in 1978. At present we believe that the NHS is using 293 whole-body scanners and one head-only scanner. It is estimated that in 1978 approximately 195,000 patients benefited from the scanners then in use, compared with approximately 1,040,000 patients in 1991. According to information provided by the European Dialysis and Transplant Association, the number of patients receiving haemodialysis in 1978 was 2,833, compared with 4,582 in 1990, the latest year for which information is available. The number of patients being treated through continuous ambulatory peritoneal dialysis has risen from 114 to 4,006 over the same period.

Nasogastric Feeding Tubes

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the resource and other implications of making nasogastric feeding tubes available on general practitioners' prescription first began to be considered.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The resource and other implications of making nasogastric feeding tubes available on prescription were considered in this year's public expenditure exercise.

Westwood Hospital

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what approval he is required to give in respect of a closure proposal for the Westwood hospital by the district health authority or the trust.

Mr. Dorrell: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gives the final decision if a closure proposal is contested by the local community health council.

Cervical Smears

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cervical smears were taken under the NHS in 1978 and in the latest year for which figures are available; what is the level of NHS cervical smear facilities for women currently; and what was the level in 1978.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The number of cervical smears taken in England under the NHS were:

	million
1978	2·470
[1]1989-90	4·743

[1] The latest year for which data are available.

GPs, practice nurses, hospitals and clinics take cervical smears as part of the normal provision of health care, both under the NHS cervical screening programme and for clinical purposes. No separate facilities are required.

Heart Operations

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* heart bypass and *(b)* heart transplant operations were carried out under the NHS in 1978 and in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Dorrell: The number of coronary artery bypass grafts performed in the United Kingdom in 1978 was 3,190 *(a)* compared with an estimated 14,543 *(b)* in 1990-91, the latest year for which figures are available. According to information provided by the United Kingdom Transplant Support Service Authority, three heart transplants were carried out in 1979, the first year for which figures were collected, and 329 in 1990, the latest year for which figures are available.

(a) Figures provided by the Society of Cardiothoracic Surgeons.
(b) Figures based on outturn reports in England, Scotland and Wales for 1990-91 and in Northern Ireland for 1989-90.

Resettlement

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what resources in respect of resettlement are allocated to the Northern region; what is the figure expressed per capita; and what is the per capita average for other regions.

Mr. Dorrell: Resources for resettlement of patients into the community are not separately identified in health authorities' allocations.

Mammograms

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many mammograms were taken under the NHS in 1978 and in the latest year for which figures are available; what is the level of provision of mammogram facilities for women in the NHS currently; and what was the comparable level in 1978.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information on the total number of mammograms taken in the NHS is not available. Data are now being collected centrally on the number of mammograms taken under the NHS screening programme, but these are not yet available for 1990-91. Initial figures collected by radiologists within the NHS breast screening programme suggest that more than 709,000 women had a mammogram under the screening programme in the United Kingdom in 1990-91.

The United Kingdom NHS breast screening programme was launched in 1987 and implemented over the three years to 1990. The aim is to screen all women aged 50 to 64 every three years; screening for older women will be available on request. In England, the screening programme is being provided through 82 new special screening units, to some of which mobile units are attached. Figures for mammogram facilities outside the screening programme are not collected centrally.

Kidney Transplants

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many kidney transplant operations were carried out under the NHS in 1978 and in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Dorrell: According to information provided by the United Kingdom Transplant Support Service Authority the number of cadaveric kidney transplants carried out in the United Kingdom in 1978 was 849, compared with 1,730 in 1990, the latest year for which figures are available. This represents an increase of 104 per cent.

Cataract, Hip and Knee Operations

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* cataract operations, *(b)* hip replacements and *(c)* knee replacements were carried out under the NHS in 1978 and in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Dorrell: The table gives the number of operations for 1978 and the latest year for which figures are available.

Operation	[1] *1978*	*Latest year* *1989-90 (provisional)*	*1990-91*
Cataract	[2]35,270	—	[3]94,739
Hip replacements	28,060	—	[3]44,477
Knee replacements	[4]3,130	10,974	—

[1] 1978 Figures are estimates from Hospital In-patient Enquiry information.
[2] Figure for 1978 for total eye lens operations, mainly cataracts.
[3] Figures taken from 1990-91 regional outturn reports—collected by financial year.
[4] Figures are for 1979 and not 1978, for which the relevant information is not available.

NORTHERN IRELAND

EC (Visits)

Mr. Forman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list (i) the number of visits made by officials in his Department during the past month to destinations outside the United Kingdom but within the European Community on official business related to the European Community, (ii) the number of visits made by officials in his Department to Brussels within the past month on official business related to the European Community and (iii) the number of nights spent by officials in his Department over the past month away from the United Kingdom on official European Community business.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is as follows:

	Number
Number of visits outside the United Kingdom but within the European Community	25
Number of visits to Brussels	10
Number of nights spent away from the United Kingdom	27

EC Meetings

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the EC ministerial Council meetings at which his Department has or will be represented during November and December.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Department of Finance and Personnel was represented by one official at the informal meeting of European Community Ministers responsible for regional policy and physical planning at the Hague on 18 to 19 November 1991.

The Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland was represented by one official at a meeting of the Council of Agriculture Ministers on 18 to 19 November 1991. An official from the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland will also attend meetings of the Council of Agriculture Ministers to be held on 11 to 12 December 1991 and the Fisheries Council to be held on 17 to 18 December 1991.

There are no plans for the Northern Ireland Office or the Northern Ireland Departments to be represented at any other ministerial council meetings during November and December 1991.

Road Surfaces

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total surface area of roads treated to *(a)* bitumen macadam resurfacing, *(b)* asphalt resurfacing, *(c)* slurry sealing and ralumac, *(d)* grouting and *(e)* other surface dressing in each district council area in each year since 1985.

Mr. Needham: The information is not available in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Newry Bypass

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details on the progress towards constructing stages 2 and 3 of the Newry bypass.

Mr. Needham: A notice of intention to make a vesting order for stages 2 and 3 of the Newry bypass was published earlier this month. While it is currently planned that work should start in the 1992-93 financial year the implementation of the scheme is dependent upon the completion of the statutory process and, ultimately, the availability of finance.

Club (Registration)

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give details of *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful prosecutions brought under the Registration of Clubs (Northern Ireland) Order 1987.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is as follows:

	Prosecutions	*Guilty*	*Not guilty*
1988	23	19	4
1989	48	45	3
1990	29	26	3
[1]1991	—	—	—

[1] Figures not yet available.

Fergal Caraher

Mr. Mallin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make available the autopsy report on Fergal Caraher to his family.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 28 November 1991]:* Under the Coroners (Practice and Procedures) Rules (N.I.) 1963, the decision whether, and if so when, to make available to properly interested persons a report of a post mortem examination of the body of a person whose death has been reported to a coroner, is entirely a matter for the coroner concerned. The coroner is an independent judicial officer.

Autopsy Reports

Mr. Mallin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will state the policy on the release to relations of autopsy reports on persons killed by the security forces; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 28 November 1991]:* Rule 38 of the Coroners (Practices and Procedure) Rules (N.I.) 1963 provides that a coroner (who is an independent judicial officer) has a discretionary power to permit any person who, in his opinion, is a properly interested person to inspect the report of a post mortem examination. In addition, rule 37 confers a discretion on the coroner to provide a summary of a post mortem report to the deceased's medical practitioner.

I understand that many coroners in Northern Ireland make it their normal practice to release post mortem reports to relatives as soon as they become available. However, whether or not to allow access in a particular case is entirely a matter for the individual coroner concerned.

ENVIRONMENT

Environmental Assessments

Sir David Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment for what reasons Her Majesty's Government gave powers to the EC to require environmental studies of the nature which lead to EC complaints concerning the M3 and channel tunnel; and when these powers were given.

Sir George Young: Directive 85/337/EEC on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment were unanimously adopted by the Council of Ministers on 27 June 1985. The directive, which came into force on 3 July 1988, sets out procedures for the environmental assessment of certain projects which are likely to have significant environmental effects. While the objectives of the directive were largely achieved in the United Kingdom by well-established legislation such as the Planning and Highways Acts, it is in the interests of both the environment and of industry and commerce that similar requirements should apply throughout the Community.

EC Meetings

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the European Community ministerial council meetings at which his Department has, or will be, represented during November and December.

Mr. Heseltine: A Minister from this Department will attend the Environment Council meeting on 12-13 December.

Coastal and Estuarial Waters

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the exact details of the criteria used to designate United Kingdom coastal and estuarial waters will be made public; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: A consultation document on the criteria proposed for identifying sensitive areas under the urban Waste Water Treatment Directive and polluted waters under the Nitrate Directive will be issued in the new year.

Water Designation

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when and how the designations given to United Kingdom coastal and estuarial waters under the European Community urban waste water directive will be made public; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Identification of coastal and estuarial waters is required to be made by the end of 1993, and will be reported to the House.

Estate Action Funding

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when a decision will be reached on the bid for estate action funding, 1992-93, for improvements on Northfield house, Peckham Park road, Peckham, London, SE15; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: Decisions on the schemes that will be invited to proceed will be made shortly.

Public Registers

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of public registers of information on environmental pollution and potential ecological contamination since the system was introduced last year.

Mr. Baldry: Improved public access to information has been an important part of Government policies on the environment.

Part 1 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 establishes public registers of information about processes coming under the new integrated pollution control and local authority air pollution control systems, which took effect from 1 April 1991.

Public registers of prescribed information under Part II of the Act will be established in April 1993.

A new public register of information on genetically modified organisms will be set up in 1992 to coincide with the coming into effect of part VI of the Act and associated regulations on which consultations are currently in progress.

Section 143 of the Act, placing a duty on local authorities to compile and maintain registers of land which may be contaminated, is not yet in force. Regulations setting out detailed requirements for these registers will be laid early in 1992.

Registers maintained under other statutes cover subjects including the control of water pollution, water

supply quality, industrial air pollution and licensed dumping at sea. In addition, the Government propose that Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution will analyse the data it receives to produce from 1992 aggregate totals of releases by substance, by category of process and by location in an annual inventory.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many planning applications for wind farms and for small hydro-schemes have been placed; and how many have been granted planning permission in the current year.

Mr. Yeo: This information is not held centrally.

Council Tax

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, under the provisions of the Local Government (Finance) Bill, a married couple residing in a chargeable dwelling where one spouse is serving abroad or away from home with the armed forces, will be entitled to a council tax discount.

Mr. Key: There will be an entitlement to discount for service personnel serving away from home, whether abroad or elsewhere, if their sole or main residence is in the place where they are serving. This will be for the local authority to determine taking into account all the circumstances. I have placed in the Library of the House a copy of the Department's guidance to local authorities on this subject.

Tree Felling

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about water companies felling mature trees to carry out works under the Water Act 1989.

Mr. Baldry: None.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Butterfill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing the amount of standard spending assessments distributed on the basis of the domestic and overseas visitor rights indicator in £ million for 1992-93 by authority; and if he will give his estimate of what the amounts of standard spending assessments would be if day visitors were included in his computations.

Mr. Key: A table showing the provisional amounts of standard spending assessment distributed on the basis of the domestic and overseas visitor nights indicator for 1992-93 has been placed in the Library. There is no information available about day visitors which is sufficiently reliable to be used within SSAs.

Community Charge

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance his Department is giving to East Anglian local authorities that have still not collected all the community charge for 1990-91; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The Government strongly support local authorities' efforts to collect the community charge. The Audit Commission has recently issued a module on the community charge with advice on how to maximise collection. We warmly welcome this advice to authorities. An authority which is failing to collect the charge is merely passing the burden on to those who do pay. This cannot be right. Authorities must make every effort to ensure a high collection rate and must pursue non-payers vigorously.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) how many individuals failed to pay the total or part of their community charge for 1990-91 in the Waveney district council area; and what percentage this represents of the total number of charge payers in the Waveney district area;

(2) what was the total percentage amount of community charge paid in the Waveney district council area for 1990-91; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The number of individuals in Waveney who failed to make any payment of community charge in 1990-91 was 5,677, 7 per cent. of all individuals liable in Waveney. Information on individuals making partial payments is not available.

The authority had received 93 per cent of its budgeted community charge income for 1990-91 by 31 March 1991.

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will allow 100 per cent. rebates in appropriate cases for community charge in 1992-93.

Mr. Key: We do not propose to make any change in the existing basis of liability or the benefit arrangements for the remaining period of the community charge.

Government Grant

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what will be the total level of Government grant per adult head of population for 1992-93 for *(a)* Wandsworth, *(b)* Westminster and *(c)* each of the district councils of Greater Manchester.

Mr. Key: Under my right hon. Friend's proposals, the total of revenue support grant and, where relevant, area protection grant and inner London education grant per head of adult population will be as follows:

	£
Wandsworth	1,077
Westminster	1,293
Bolton	532
Bury	390
Manchester	998
Oldham	598
Rochdale	600
Salford	600
Stockport	377
Tameside	468
Trafford	442
Wigan	427

Civil Servants (Leeds)

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many civil servants from the Leeds office are allocated to assist projects in Bradford such as the Bradford and Leeds city action team and the Bradford task force.

Mr. Key: The Leeds-Bradford city action team is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for the Environment. The team has a full-time secretariat of six drawn from three Government Departments. Regional directors, as CAT members, also contribute significantly towards projects and partnerships, as do their various staff employed on Departmental programmes relevant to Bradford. Bradford task force, with a staff of six, is the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Dog Register

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will introduce legislation for a dog register with provisions to ensure that local authority dog warden services provide advice and guidance on the care and control of dogs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: No. The Government have already secured the necessary legislation for the control of dogs, in the Environmental Protection Act 1990. We intend to bring the relevant sections into force on the 1 April 1992. A draft circular on the implementation of these provisions has been published.

Regional seminars entitled "Dogs in the Community" have recently been held to explain the new provisions to local authorities and other bodies. These form part of a general campaign I launched in August to promote responsible dog ownership and the proper care of dogs. This will also include a special campaign week next spring aimed at increasing public awareness on this topic.

Many local authorities already employ dog wardens and others will be recruiting before the new provisions come into force. Local authorities may well wish to ask their dog wardens to provide advice and guidance on the care and control of dogs.

Registration of Waste Carriers

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he intends centrally to collect information on registration of waste carriers when this measure becomes compulsory for local authorities; what information he currently has on how many local authorities have begun the process of registration; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 29 November 1991]:* Waste regulation authorities are responsible for the administration of waste carrier registration. Following discussion between the local authority associations, agreement has been reached on the establishment of a co-ordinated local authority database of waste carriers (CLADWAC). The database is held by the London Waste Regulation Authority and all participating authorities have access to it. In our view, the co-ordinated database will be help to ensure the efficient and effective operation of waste carrier registration and DOE circular 11/91 (paragraphs 8 and 9) commends authorities' participation in it.

With effect from 14 October 1991, all waste regulation authorities were placed under a duty to establish and maintain a register of waste carriers, and to accept and process applications for registration. Implementation of the Control of Pollution (Amendment) Act 1989 will be completed on 1 April 1992 when the offence provisions of sections 1 and 5 are brought into force.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 3 December 1991

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Children Act 1989

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Attorney-General what information he has on the nature and extent of training or briefing organised for judges, by the Judicial Studies Board or otherwise, in connection with the introduction of the Children Act 1989.

The Attorney-General: Twenty one one-day seminars on the Children Act 1989, held in London and the large provincial centres, were attended by High Court judges, circuit judges, district judges, magistrates and justices' clerks. The speakers included paediatricians, child psychiatrists, directors of social services, guardians, court welfare officers and legal academics and the philosophy and new approach required by the Act were thoroughly explored. Residential seminars were attended by the designated family liaison judges and the nominated care judges. At further one-day seminars, district judges and justices' clerks worked out the local operation of the Act. A training pack was commissioned from the Open university for the use of those who train justices of the peace. A special seminar was arranged for the Law Lords and the judges of the Court of Appeal.

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Attorney-General how many days of training have had to be undertaken by magistrates who serve on domestic benches in the current year both in respect of their normal duties and of their work in connection with the Children Act 1989.

The Attorney-General: Since training for magistrates is organised locally by magistrates courts committees and no records are kept centrally it is not possible to state how many days of training have been carried out. However, the Children Act training syllabus requires 13·5 hours, and an extra three hours for panel chairmen. How much other training magistrates undertake depends on local requirements.

ENERGY

Gas-Powered Generation

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what proportion of the power generated in the United Kingdom is derived from gas; what power stations now use gas and how much in each case; what increase in the use of gas for power generation is forecast over the years 1991 to 1995; and if he will make a statement on his policy towards the use of gas for this purpose.

Mr. Moynihan: Gas accounted for just over 1 per cent. of the total amount of fuel used for power generation in the United Kingdom in 1990. The total amount of gas used for power generation in the United Kingdom in 1990 was estimated to have been in the region of 400 million therms —"Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics 1991", table 53, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. The amount of gas used by individual stations is a commercial matter for the companies concerned.

Those stations currently operating in England and Wales with the capacity to use gas as a fuel for electricity generation of 50 MW or above, and that hold such consent under section 14 of the Energy Act 1976, are as follows:

Organisation	*Location*
Lakeland Power	Roosecote, Cumbria
London Transport Executive	Greenwich, London
London Transport Executive	Lots Road, Chelsea, London

Any increase in the use of gas in the period up to 1995 will depend upon commercial decisions taken by the companies currently in, or proposing to enter, the electricity generation market. My Department is currently aware of around two dozen projects for power stations intending to use gas as their fuel.

I refer my hon. Friend to my answer given to the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) on 11 November, at column *768*, which outlines my Department's policy towards the use of gas for power generation.

Renewable Energy Programme

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how much his Department has spent on each form of renewable energy programme since 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: The Government are committed to the development of all sources of renewable energy which have the potential to be economically viable and environmentally acceptable. From 1 April 1979 up to 31 march 1991 over £174 million has been spent on renewables research and development. The budget for this year is a record £24 million.

Outturn expenditure from 1979-80 on my Department's renewable energy research, development and demonstration programme is set out, by technology, in the table.

Department of Energy R, D & D expenditure on renewable energy

£ million

	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Wind	0·6	0·8	0·9	2·5	2·5	4·8	5·4	3·7	4·0	3·9	4·8	4·5
Wave	3·0	3·3	4·4	3·1	1·0	0·4	0·4	0·1	0·2	0·1	0·1	0·4
Geothermal aquifers	1·3	1·7	2·6	1·5	1·8	1·1	0·3	0·1	0	0·1	0·2	0
Geothermal hot dry rocks	0	0·6	5·6	3·0	2·9	4·6	3·5	3·5	3·6	3·5	3·3	2·6
Solar	1·2	0·9	0·7	1·4	0·9	0·5	0·7	0·9	1·1	1·4	1·9	2·1
Biomass[1]	0·1	0·4	0·4	1·2	0·7	1·1	0·8	1·3	2·2	1·5	1·4	1·8

	1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
Tide	0·6	1·4	0·4	0	0	0·3	0·1	0·1	1·4	1·2	1·1	1·9
Hydro/General studies	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·8	0·8	0·8	1·0
Technology transfer and promotion	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	0·7	1·0	1·6	2·7
ETSU services	1·4	2·2	2·3	2·0	1·9	2·1	2·0	2·3	2·3	2·5	2·7	3·8
	8·2	11·3	17·3	14·7	11·7	14·9	13·2	12·0	16·3	16·0	17·9	20·8

[1] Includes expenditure on "waste as a fuel" projects under the Energy Efficiency Office Demonstration scheme.

Note: Up to 1986-87 total for R & D also includes expenditure on low head hydro and general studies to 1986-87. These are separately identified for 1987-88 and include work carried out by the Chief Scientist Group, ETSU.

Coal Task Force

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when the final report of the coal task force is to be published; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The report of the coal task force about the way forward for coal research development and demonstration in the United Kingdom was published in August as a consultation document. This has led to a substantial number of comments from United Kingdom industry and overseas organisations. The great majority of the comments we have received acknowledged the thoroughness of the work undertaken by the coal task force. The Department is in the process of reviewing the comments and in some cases we may need to seek further clarification concerning the technical issues raised by the consultation. The Department intends to publish the results of the consultation process and its response next year.

The completion of this review is not holding up the initiation of new coal R and D projects. In partnership with United Kingdom industry, British Coal and overseas agencies we have recently launched five new clean coal projects with a contract value of £20 million. A number of further projects are at the planning stage for which announcements will be made in due course.

On-site Generation

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects to reach a decision under the terms of the pooling and settlement agreement about on-site generation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is fully seized of the importance of the issue and is concerned to find the most appropriate solution. He will announce his decision in due course.

Live Television Feed

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list the locations of the television sets in his Department which can receive the live television feed from the Chamber, and the total cost to his Department of this service.

Mr. Wakeham: The only television set in my Department which can receive the live feed from the Chamber is in the press office. It is supplied by the Central Office of Information at a total cost of £15,427·25 for the 12 months to 30 November 1991.

"Ten Years Cold"

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what consideration he has given to Dr. Brenda Boardman's study on behalf of Neighbourhood Energy Action entitled "Ten Years Cold", and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I received a copy of this report when I attended its launch on 12 November. I am studying it with interest. The Energy Efficiency Office's budget for the promotion of energy efficiency in low-income households for 1992-93 is some £40 million, an increase of 50 per cent. on this year's budget.

ENVIRONMENT

European Court of Justice

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all incidences where the United Kingdom Government have been reported to the European Court of Justice on the ground of failure to comply with an EC environmental directive; and what has been the adjudication of the court.

Mr. Baldry: The European Commission has to date made two applications to the European Court of Justice against the United Kingdom under article 169 of the treaty of Rome in connection with alleged infringements of EC environmental directives:

Case 337/89 concerns various aspects relating to the implementation of directive 80/778/EEC on the quality of water for human consumption.

Case 56/90 concerns implementation of directive 76/160/EEC on the quality of bathing water at Blackpool, Southport and Formby.

The court has not yet issued a judgment in either case.

London Docklands Development Corporation

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the employment/unemployment aims and targets of the London Docklands development corporation.

Mr. Key: The 1990 corporate plan provides forecast outputs of 53,000 jobs within the urban development area by the end of 1990-91 and 65,600 by 1991-92. The corporation aims to improve the training and job opportunities available to local people and assist them to enter the employment market.

Probate Registry, Cardiff

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement concerning investigations by the Property Services Agency into the removal of historic fixtures and fittings from the Probate Registry in Cardiff road, Llandaff, Cardiff.

Mr. Yeo: The National Audit Office report claimed that considerable internal alterations some time ago had resulted in the removal of virtually all historic internal elements and little of much value remains within the Probate Registry in Llandaff.

It is clear that some of the early contents of this building, such as internal doors and fireplaces, were removed when part of it was converted into offices over 20 years ago—well before the building was listed. Much of the original interior still remains, however, including most of the ceilings, although these were hidden from the NAO inspector by false ceilings.

This property became the responsibility of Property Holdings on 1 April 1990 and during the financial year 1990-91 Property Holdings initiated masonry repairs, stonework cleaning and renewal of windows. In fact, previous masonry repairs using cement and stone dust have now been replaced with stonework closely matching the original Ashlar work and these high-standard repairs have been favourably commented upon by NAO in its report. The Lord Chancellor's Department, the occupant, accepted total maintenance responsibility for this property from 1 April 1991. It is, however, aware of the need to keep Property Holdings and the DOE conservation unit fully involved in any proposals to carry out future repairs or alterations.

Council House Sales

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by district authorities in Cumbria all capital receipts from the sale of council houses received each year since the introduction of the right to buy, together with totals to date.

Sir George Young: The total discounted values of all sales of houses and flats for each year from 1980-81, as reported by local authorities, are in the table. Actual cash receipts in any year will depend on the extent to which the sales were financed by loans from the authorities.

Cumbria[1]

Discounted value of all sales (£ 000)

Local authority	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*
Allerdale	117	1,591	1,330	1,772
Barrow-in-Furness	40	1,195	n/a	n/a
Carlisle	7	4,205	3,885	3,422
Copeland	70	1,138	6,140	3,284
Eden	—	1,678	1,897	1,114
South Lakeland	—	2,522	4,427	2,639

	1984-85	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*
Allerdale	1,692	1,016	1,086	n/a
Barrow-in-Furness	1,270	n/a	n/a	n/a
Carlisle	2,464	2,277	2,832	4,654
Copeland	1,796	1,458	1,827	n/a
Eden	664	692	829	1,475
South Lakeland	2,762	2,385	2,266	3,243

	1988-89	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*Total April 1980 to March 1991*
Allerdale	n/a	1,636	2,554	n/a
Barrow-in-Furness	n/a	n/a	3,238	n/a
Carlisle	6,364	8,783	3,967	42,860
Copeland	n/a	n/a	2,354	n/a
Eden	3,172	2,483	1,477	15,181
South Lakeland	4,222	5,744	3,669	33,879

[1] Figures shown are as reported by individual authorities.
n/a indicates that the information is not available.

Local Government Finance, Cumbria

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the total usable capital receipts held by each district authority in Cumbria, together with outstanding loans at the latest convenient date.

Sir George Young: The outstanding loan debt as at 31 March 1990 and the total accumulated usable capital receipts as at 1 April 1990 and also 1 April 1991, for all district authorities in Cumbria are in the table:

Authority	*Outstanding Loan Debt 31 March 1990*	*Accumulated Usable Receipts 1 April 1990*	*1 April 1991*
Allerdale	57,707	1,693	1,200
Barrow-in-Furness	37,206	1,471	2,497
Carlisle	46,106	4,168	690
Copeland	30,861	1,101	642
Eden	14,140	1,954	814
South Lakeland	23,313	2,911	1,809

[1] Outstanding loan debt as at 31 March 1989
(*Source:* Departmental returns)
The data are expressed in £'000s.

Power Stations (Pollution)

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what estimates he has made of the likely increases in emissions of vanadium and other heavy metals that would result from the conversion of Pembroke and other power stations to burning orimulsion, and the effect this would have on the United Kingdom's ability to meet its obligations under The Hague convention on discharges into the North sea.

Mr. Baldry: Power stations that are currently burning orimulsion or which are proposing to burn orimulsion will be required by HM pollution inspectorate to meet an emission limit for particulate material as tight or tighter than that required for heavy fuel oil. They will also be required to use adequate abatement equipment to meet this limit. An increase in the emission of vanadium and other heavy metals is not expected. This will not affect our obligations under The Hague convention.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research has been undertaken into the effectiveness of electrostatic precipitators in capturing vanadium and other heavy metals emitted from burning orimulsion in power stations and into whether wet flue gas desulphurisation systems in addition to electrostatic precipitators would be efficient in capturing these pollutants.

Mr. Baldry: The power station operators are assessing the effectiveness of electrostatic precipitators in capturing emissions of vanadium and other heavy metals from the

burning of orimulsion. It is expected that they will be at least as effective as for other particulate matter. There is only limited experience of the effectiveness of wet flue gas desulphurisation in series with electrostatic precipitators, but, in any event, care will be taken to control emissions of heavy metals from power stations fitted with wet flue gas desulphurisation systems.

Retailers (Accommodation)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what consultations he has had with the promoters of the over-the-shop campaign about achieving better residential use of excess retail outlets accommodation;

(2) what guidance he has given to high-street retailers in relation to the alternative potential residential use of unused capacity in their premises;

(3) what guidance he has given local authorities to help them promote the use for residential accommodation of spare capacity in retailing outlets.

Mr. Yeo: We have invited local authorities to bid for £25 million over the next three years to bring flats over shops into residential use. Officials have had discussions with two organisations: Homes over the Shop and Living over the Shop. The latter receives grant from the Department and its director is on our steering group.

A guidance note for local authorities was sent out on 25 November. Similar information will be made available to retailers shortly.

Hedgerow Protection

Mr. Graham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to bring forward legislation to secure the protection of outstanding hedgerows.

Mr. Baldry: We shall seek to introduce legislation to secure the protection of key hedgerows when parliamentary time permits. Meanwhile, we are taking steps to draw up our proposed scheme to provide new incentives for hedgerow management, and hope to make a further statement on the proposed new scheme early in the new year.

Housing Debt Repayment

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his current estimate of the total cost of paying back the debt on *(a)* a council house and *(b)* a housing association property over the full repayment period.

Mr. Yeo: I will write to the hon. Member.

Local Government Commission

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy that the local government commission should complete its examination of the overall structure of local government before making decisions about individual local authority areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: We propose to ask the local government commission to review the structure of local government in the shire counties area by area. The Local Government Bill provides for orders to implement changes to be laid before both Houses of Parliament, following recommendations from the commission.

Homelessness

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what extra measures he intends to take this winter to provide help for homeless people sleeping rough in Coventry in snow or extreme cold; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: In the event of severe weather this winter, I would expect individual local authorities to make emergency provision for people sleeping rough in their areas. In 1991-92 the Government are already providing just under £6 million in grants to voluntary organisations throughout the United Kingdom for practical projects to prevent and relieve homelessness. Among those being funded are Coventry Cyrenians and the Coventry day centre.

Toxic Waste Disposal, Ewelme

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in relation to the toxic waste disposal site at Ewelme, Oxfordshire *(a)* what reports he has received of leakage and contamination of groundwater, *(b)* what is the extent of the contamination, *(c)* what measures are being taken to clear up the pollution and *(d)* whether he will call in the planning application to extend the site submitted by S. Grundans Ltd.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 2 December 1991]:* I understand that routine monitoring of the waste disposal site at Ewelme by Oxfordshire county council, as the waste disposal authority, has identified chlorinated solvents in nearby groundwater. Mains supply drinking water is unaffected, but local environmental health officers are making urgent quality checks on water from nearby boreholes and wells. The site operator, S. Grundans, is also seeking consultants' advice on the extent of pollution and on possible remedial measures.

The county council, as planning authority, has the planning application under consideration and are presently consulting on a submitted environmental statement. When consultation is completed it will be in a position to consider the matter further in the light of local criteria. The Secretary of State would generally consider calling in the application only if planning issues of more than local importance were involved.

NATIONAL FINANCE

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what would be the revenue yield for *(a)* the first year and *(b)* in a full year, asssuming this is introduced at the beginning of 1991-92, and *(c)* in the first year and *(d)* in a full year, assuming this is introduced at the beginning of 1992-93, in Northern Ireland of national insurance contributions on unearned income at a rate of 9 per cent. for individuals under retirement age, subject to (i) a £3,000 exemption, (ii) a £3,500 exemption and (iii) a £4,000 exemption, respectively;

(2) what would be the revenue yield *(a)* in the first year and *(b)* in a full year, asssuming this is introduced at the beginning of 1991-92, and *(c)* in the first year and *(d)* in a full year, assuming this is introduced at the beginning of 1992-93, in Great Britain of national insurance

contributions on unearned income at a rate of 9 per cent. for individuals under retirement age, subject to (i) a £3,000 exemption, (ii) a £3,500 exemption and (iii) a £4,000 exemption, respectively;

Mr. Maude: The yield in a full year at 1991-92 levels of income from a charge of 9 per cent. on investment income of individuals in the United Kingdom is estimated at:

Threshold £	*Yield* £ million
3,000	870
3,500	820
4,000	780

The amount of revenue collected in the first year would depend on the administrative arrangements for collecting such a charge.

The corresponding yield in 1992-93 would depend on the levels of investment income for that year.

I regret that it is not possible to provide separate information for Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

These estimates take no account of any possible behavioural changes following the introduction of such a charge.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many *(a)* basic rate and *(b)* higher-rate taxpayers in 1991-92, in Northern Ireland would be affected by the introduction of national insurance contributions on unearned income at a rate of 9 per cent. for individuals under retirement age, subject to a £3,000 exemption, giving the average annual charge per individual with gross incomes between (i) £10,000 and £20,000, (ii) £20,000 and £30,000, (iii) £30,000 and £40,000, (iv) £40,000 and £50,000 and (v) over £50,000, respectively;

(2) how many *(a)* basic rate and *(b)* higher-rate taxpayers in 1991-92, in Great Britain would be affected by the introduction of national insurance contributions on unearned income at a rate of 9 per cent. for individuals under retirement age, subject to a £3,000 exemption, giving the average annual charge per individual with gross incomes between (i) £10,000 and £20,000, (ii) £20,000 and £30,000, (iii) £30,000 and £40,000, (iv) £40,000 and £50,000 and (v) over £50,000, respectively.

Mr. Maude: Estimates for the United Kingdom are in the table.

Individuals aged under 65 with investment income over £3,000 in 1991-92

Individual total income (£ per annum)	*Basic rate taxpayers*[1] *Numbers (000s)*	*Average*[2] *(£)*	*Higher rate taxpayers Numbers (000s)*	*Average*[2] *(£)*
0-10,000	230	160	—	—
10,000-20,000	340	280	—	—
20,000-30,000	180	440	20	800
30,000-40,000	neg.	—	120	800
40,000-50,000	—	—	60	930
50,000 and over	—	—	160	2,990

[1]Liable at basic rate only.
[2]Average charge payable at a rate of 9 per cent.

I regret that it is not possible to provide information for Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

These estimates take no account of any possible behavioural changes following the introduction of such a charge.

Capital Gains Tax

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the number of taxpayers who were liable in the latest financial year for which information is available, to capital gains tax in *(a)* Great Britain and *(b)* Northern Ireland.

Mr. Maude: The current estimate of the number of individuals and trusts liable to pay capital gains tax on gains realised in 1990-91 is 100,000. I regret that separate figures for Great Britain and Northern Ireland are not available.

Disabled Staff

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many disabled people are currently employed in his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The Treasury currently employs 33 registered disabled workers, four of them part time. We also employ disabled people who choose not to register.

The Treasury seeks to implement the relevant parts of the civil service code of practice on the employment of people with disabilities. We seek to provide a working environment that allows all colleagues, including the disabled, to compete equally, while respecting an individual's right not to be seen as seeking special treatment. £100,000 has been spent on a series of adaptions to the central Treasury office building in Whitehall to allow wheelchair-bound staff and visitors independent access to and use of most of the building. Further money has been spent making similar improvements to the five other Treasury office buildings and on other forms of support for people with different disabilities.

The Treasury has appointed a number of staff to offer advice and support in response to individual needs. Line managers across the whole Department have been sent a personal copy of the summary of the civil service code of practice. Work is in hand to draw together and publish a guide on the support available to disabled staff.

Excise Duty

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has concerning the extent to which other member countries of the European Community have adopted systems of lower levels of excise duties on the products of smaller brewers.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Beer produced by smaller brewers in Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands is subject to lower rates of excise duty. Their daily systems provide either a single reduced rate for

brewers producing less than a certain annual quantity, or a number of lower rates which are applied as a sliding scale according to production levels.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to introduce into the United Kingdom a system of lower levels of excise duty on the products of smaller brewers.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have no present plans to introduce lower levels of excise duties on the products of smaller brewers.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has concerning the policy of the European Commission to the system of lower levels of excise duties on the products of smaller brewers which is adopted by other member countries of the European Community.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: In framing its proposals concerning the harmonisation of beer duty, the Commission included an option for member states to apply a single reduced rate of duty on beer brewed by small brewers. At the Economic and Finance Council meeting on 24 June it was decided that this option would apply to brewers producing less than 200,000 hectolitres per annum —122,250 barrels—with the reduced rate set at not more than 50 per cent. below the standard national rate.

Live Television Feed

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the locations of the television sets in his Department which can receive the live television feed from the Chamber, and the total cost to his Department of this service.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The television sets in my Department which can receive the live television feed from the Chamber are located in the following Treasury offices in Whitehall:

Chancellor of the Exchequer
Chief Secretary
Financial Secretary
Minister of State
Economic Secretary
Permanent Secretary
Parliamentary Section
Information Division

The cost to the Department is £13,421·65, inclusive of VAT.

Large Goods Vehicle Licence

Mr. Madden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether people required to have a medical examination to renew an LGV licence or on reaching the age of 46 years are able to claim the cost of the medical examination against income tax.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 2 December 1991]:* The cost of a medical examination to renew an LGV licence is an allowable expense for income tax purposes.

THE ARTS

Disabled Staff

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister for the Arts how many disabled people are currently employed in his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: One member of staff in my Department is registered as disabled, but there may be others who have chosen not to register.

The Office of Arts and Libraries is committed to the implementation of the code of practice on the employment of people with disabilities in the civil service.

CIVIL SERVICE

Disabled Staff

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service how many disabled people are currently employed in his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: There are 16 registered disabled staff currently working in my Department, and there may be others who have chosen not to register their disability. We are committed to the employment of disabled people and to the implementation of the code of practice on the employment of people with disabilities in the civil service.

DEFENCE

Environmental Measures

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of his departmental budget is earmarked for environmental restoration, environmental decontamination, and the publication of literature on his Department's environmental programme; and if he has any plans to increase expenditure on environmental matters.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Expenditure on environmental measures cannot be separately identified. Future expenditure on the environment will be funded through the normal process of resource allocation.

Almondbank Establishment

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration is currently being given to the closure of the MOD establishment at Almondbank, Perth.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the comments I made to the House on 27 November, *Official Report*, columns 1047-50.

"Options for Change"

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what reassessment has taken place of the maintenance requirements for service helicopters as part of "Options for Change".

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Future arrangements for the maintenance of service helicopters are under consideration as part of our review of the support area.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all the base closures or reorganisations that have been announced as part of the "Options for Change" study.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: All significant base closures or reorganisations arising from the "Options for Change" study and which have been announced are as follows.

Other announcements have been made such as the closure of RAF Kemble, but these are not included as they do not form part of the "Options for Change" exercise.

RN

HMS Royal Arthur—Close
RN diesel repair depot Blackbrook Farm—Close
HMS St. Vincent—Close
HMS Daedalus—Close/relocate facilities
Nelson (Gunwharf)—Close/relocate

Proposals announced but awaiting final decision following consultation:

Rosyth Naval Base—Reduce to operating base for Minor War Vessels
RNSD Copenacre—Close storage facilities
RNAD Trecwn—Close
RNAD Ernsettle—Transfer weapons processing
OFD Invergordon—Close

Royal Naval Reserve Units and Royal Naval Auxiliary Service establishment affected:

HMS Hallam—Closure of Royal Naval Reserve Unit
HMS Paragon—Closure of Royal Naval Reserve Unit
HMS Palatine—Closure of Royal Naval Reserve Unit
HMS Essex—Closure of Royal Naval Reserve Unit
HMS President—Reduced capacity
HMS Camperdown—Reduced capacity
Isle of Man—Closure of Royal Naval Auxiliary Service establishment
Broughton Moor—Closure of Royal Naval Auxiliary Service establishment
Stornaway—Closure of Royal Naval Auxiliary Service establishment
Scarborough—Closure of Royal Naval Auxiliary Service establishment
Stranraer—Closure of Royal Naval Auxiliary Service establishment
Lowestoft—Closure of Royal Naval Auxiliary Service establishment
Canterbury—Closure of Royal Naval Auxiliary Service establishment

RAF

RAF Honington—Transfer 13 Squadron to Marham
RAF West Raynham—Probable closure
RAF Marham—Transfer in 2 Tornado Squadrons
RAF Wattisham—Disband 2 Phantom Squadrons.
RAF Cranwell—Expand Basic Flying Training School activities
RAF Swinderby—Delete RAF Elementary Flying Training School
RAF Kinloss—Co-locate Nimrod Maritime Patrol Aircraft operations
RAF Lossiemouth—Replace 2 Buccaneer Squadrons with 2 Tornado Squadrons
RAF Abingdon—Close/Transfer
RAF St. Athan—Transfer in Engineering/Servicing for Jaguar/Hawk/VC10 + civilianisation
RAF St. Mawgan—Transfer out of Nimrod Maritime Patrol Aircraft operations
RAF Church Fenton—Close
RAF Linton on Ouse—Expand Basic Flying Training School activities
RAF Topcliffe—Add RAF Elementary Flying Training School activities
RAF Catterick—Change of RAF Regiment Squadrons
RAF Cutersloh—Close
RAF Wildenrath—Close
RAF Laarbruch—Disband 3 Tornado GR1 Squadrons
RAF Hullavington—Close

Army

Bramcote—Transfer in Army Junior Leaders Regiment
Aldershot—Transfer out RAMC—Phase 1 Training
Arborfield—Transfer out Training Battalion and depot REME—Phase 1 Training
Dover—Transfer out Army Junior Leaders Regiment. RE
Pirbright—Transfer in Army Junior School of Music Training Battalion and depot REME—Phase 1 Training
Lichfield—Transfer in of RAMC—Phase 1 Training
Scarborough—Close TA Training Camp
Shorncliffe—Transfer out Army Junior Leaders Regiment
Brecon—HQ Wales District subsumed into new Wales and Western District—Transfer HQ to Shrewsbury
Chester—HQ 42 Infantry Brigade to move to Preston
Preston—HQ Western District subsumed into new Wales and Western District—Transfer HQ to Shrewsbury
York—HQ of new Army Eastern District on site of former North Eastern District HQ
Colerne—Transfer out of Army Junior Leaders Regiment RCT/RAOC
Bovington—Transfer in of Army Junior Leaders Regiment RCT/RAOC

One or more barracks or installations will be released in the following places in Germany:

Hildesheim
Woelfenbutel
Hameln
Hannover
Verden
Celle
Soltau
Muenster-Oertze
Bielefeld
Dusseldorf
Krefeld
Duisberg
Muelheim
Dortmund
Hemer
Iserlohn
Menden
Hamm
Werl
Soest
Paderborn
Detmold
Lemgo
Meenchengladbach
Herford
Bunde
Luebbecke
Minden

The following Army logistics support establishments will close:

Moenchengladbach—37 Rhine workshops
Recklinghausen—Forward Vehicle Depot
Krefeld—232 Mobile Civilian Engineer Group
Viersen—Ordnance services and associated Supply Depot
Willich—40 Army Engineer Support Group
—64(RCZ) Workshop
Antwerp—Ordnance Depot and other units at Antwerp Station.

For information relating to regimental mergers and restructuring I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend) on 11 November at columns *338-40*.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all the bases that are currently being examined as part of the "Options for Change" study.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: "Options for Change" entails a major restructuring of the armed forces with implications across the whole range of defence activities and infrastructure. All establishments are considered as part of this work and any decisions will be announced in the usual way.

Civilian Staff (Redundancy)

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many MOD civilian personnel have applied for voluntary redundancy; what are their grades; what plans

exist to make MOD civilian personnel compulsorily redundant; whether further offers of voluntary redundancy will be made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: Redundancies have been confined mainly to industrial and non-mobile, non-industrial grades. Volunteers in these grades who apply for redundancy are considered locally by the establishment concerned; details are not held centrally.

We have announced publicly that civilian numbers in MOD will reduce by around 20,000 posts over the period 1991-92 to 1996-97. This figure represents total job losses rather than anticipated redundancies.

It is our policy to restrict the number of compulsory redundancies to a minimum. This will be achieved by a number of measures including redeployment to other MOD establishments or Government Departments, and extending the availability of early retirement schemes; about 700 non-industrial staff across all grades have recently applied to retire under the approved early retirement category. Where redundancy becomes inevitable, volunteers will be given priority.

Ceremonial Uniforms

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether any non-MOD organisations have ever contributed towards the cost of purchasing ceremonial uniforms.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There is no indication that any such contributions have been made.

Nuclear Non-proliferation

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with his Soviet counterpart regarding the non-proliferation of nuclear technology.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As two of the depositary powers to the non-proliferation treaty, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union are represented at meetings to discuss nuclear non-proliferation. Our aim is to co-operate with our NPT partners in achieving the objectives of the treaty.

UN Peace-keeping Operations

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration his Department has given to participating in United Nations peace-keeping operations in *(a)* south-east Asia and *(b)* Europe.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Secretary-General has asked us to provide three military observers for the United Nations advance mission in Cambodia—UNAMIC; we expect them to deploy shortly. The Secretary-General's special reprentative, Mr. Vance, is currently in Yugoslavia. He is expected to pursue his contacts with the Yugoslav parties as rapidly as possible so that the Secretary-General can present early recommendations to the Security Council, including any recommendation for the establishment of a United Nations peace-keeping operation in Yugoslavia.

Tactical Air-to-Surface Missiles

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 13 November, *Official Report*, column *615*, when *(a)* the SRAM-T system and *(b)* the SLAT system are due to complete their development stage.

Mr. Alan Clark: Both are United States programmes whose timings are matters for the United States Government.

Arms Control

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 13 November, *Official Report*, column *615*, if he will state the nature of the naval transparency measures that are currently being considered.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Ships above 850 tonnes will be included in the register of arms transfers which we expect soon to be initiated by the United Nations. Informal consultations have now started on the agenda for arms control following the review conference planned for Helsinki next spring. It is possible that information exchange for naval forces will also be considered in this context.

Future Equipment Deployment

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his assessment of how many *(a)* armoured personnel carriers, *(b)* armoured infantry fighting vehicles, *(c)* heavy armoured combat vehicles, *(d)* artillery pieces, *(e)* combat aircraft and *(f)* attack helicopters the United Kingdom will deploy by 1995.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Our plans envisage deployment of some 450 armoured infantry fighting vehicles, some 330 artillery pieces, some 400 combat aircraft and some 250 attack helicopters, as defined by the conventional forces in Europe treaty, within the Army and RAF. The exact quantity of armoured personnel carriers and heavy armoured combat vehicles to be deployed is still under review, but will be within the limits set in the CFE treaty.

Budget Holders

Mr. O'Neil: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will state the subordinate budget holders within each of the top level budget holder's chain of command, and the amount of money allocated to each of them, to which he referred in his answer of 25 July 1991, *Official Report*, columns *930-31*.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate effort and cost.

Frigates

Mr. David Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on co-operation with France on a future frigate.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: In a recent exchange of letters with the French Minister of Defence, M. Pierre Joxe, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and M. Joxe have agreed to begin exploratory work lasting about 18 months on a joint project for a future anti-air warfare frigate to enter service early in the next decade. The new frigate would be equipped with anti-air missiles of the FAMS programme. Its task would be escorting and protecting maritime forces in the Atlantic or elsewhere.

This bilateral initiative concludes a series of discussions initiated one year ago, and follows a joint statement of need by the two navies and a joint technical report on the feasibility of a co-operative programme.

Both countries recognise the potential benefits of co-operation through standardisation, rationalisation and interoperability of equipments. A number of difficult issues will need to be addressed in this next phase of work, but my right hon. Friend and M. Joxe are determined that every effort shall be made to resolve them. The outcome of this phase will enable a final decision on the development of the frigate to be taken in 1993.

The participation of the other nations co-operating on FAMS remains an option for any subsequent phase.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Missing Weapons

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many occasions weapons, explosives or ammunition have been found missing at *(a)* police barracks, *(b)* Ulster Defence Regiment barracks and *(c)* other barracks or security installations in Northern Ireland in each year since 1988.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 28 November 1991]:* I shall write to the hon. Gentleman as soon as possible and place a copy of that letter in the Library.

Police National Computer

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what computer links exist, or are planned, for the Royal Ulster Constabulary to the existing police national computer or PNII.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 29 November 1991]:* The Royal Ulster Constabulary does not have direct access to the police national computer, but can obtain information from it indirectly by arrangement with police forces in Great Britain. It is anticipated that the RUC will become an on-line user of PNC II in the near future; in the meantime, a link has been established for training purposes.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

GCSE

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what assessment he has made of the value of target-setting techniques in the Suffolk science course in drawing up the assessment scheme for the GCSE in science;

(2) if he will allow periodic assessments to continue to be included in final assessments of GCSE achievement.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend is currently considering advice from the School Examinations and Assessment Council about the future assessment arrangements of modular GCSE courses. He expects to announce his decisions, based on that advice, very shortly. It will then be for the GCSE examining groups to develop assessment arrangements consistent with those decisions.

Student Funding

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the average unit of resource per full-time equivalent student for each academic year between 1979-80 and 1991-92 *(a)* gross domestic product deflated and *(b)* university pay and prices index deflated, with both answers expressed in £ sterling.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Expenditure data for financial years 1979-80 to 1989-90 per full-time equivalent student in universities are given in the table.

Unit costs in universities, financial years[1] 1979-80 to 1989-90

	Using the GDP deflator[2]	*Using the UPPI deflator[3]*
1979-80	6,435	7,825
1980-81	6,840	7,485
1981-82	6,600	7,155
1982-83	6,830	7,355
1983-84	6,885	7,380
1984-85	6,815	7,295
1985-86	6,630	7,140
1986-87	6,555	6,845
1987-88	6,780	6,740
1988-89	6,620	6,655
1989-90	6,410	6,410

[1] The unit of public funding for universities is estimated using the total of the University Funding Council recurrent grant (which is based on the financial year) and tuition fee income (excluding fees for overseas students) and the number of full-time equivalent students in the financial year. The recurrent grant figure includes UFC grant for research.

[2] Real terms at 1989-90 prices, calculated using November 1991 GDP deflator.

[3] Real terms at 1989-90 prices, calculated using Universities' Pay and Prices Index published September 1990.

IQ Assessment

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, pursuant to his answer of 27 November, why his Department decided not to fund research into the validity of assessing children's IQ; and what plans he has to fund such research in the future.

Mr. Eggar: The Department has only a limited budget for the support of educational research work; priority has to be given to policy-related projects needed to guide policy decisions; improve the quality of the educational process in areas of policy concern; facilitate the implementation of policy decisions; or which evaluate the effects of the implementation of policy decisions. There are no plans at present to fund research into the validity of IQ as a measure in the light of these criteria.

Polytechnics

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the average polytechnic lecturer's salary adjusted for retail prices index, for each year from 1981 to 1991.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Average polytechnic lecturer salaries are not readily available for this period. The table for lecturers in further education generally may be helpful.

Average salary of full-time teachers in maintained, assisted and grant-aided establishments of further education in England & Wales

Year (as at 31 March)	Average salary (£) Cash All[2] further education institutions	Real terms[1] (1990 prices) All[2] further education institutions
1981	9,953	16,784
1982	10,741	16,414
1983	11,354	16,583
1984	11,931	16,558
1985	12,547	16,414
1986	13,456	16,888
1987	14,268	17,218
1988	15,831	18,462
1989[3]	16,847	18,212
1990[3]	18,261	18,261

[1] Real terms series derived on the basis of the (March) All Items Retail Price Index.
[2] Includes Polytechnics, PCFC Colleges and other FE establishments as well as adult education centres, youth welfare centres and nursery training centres.
[3] Figures for 1989 and 1990 are provisional.
Note:
(i) Figures for 1991 are not yet available.
(ii) Percentage increase in real terms since 1981 = 8·8.

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what has been the staff/student ratio for polytechnics for each year from 1981 to 1991.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The available data are as follows:

Student: Staff Ratios
England
Academic Years 1981-82 to 1989-90

Polytechnics	Staff ratios
1981-82	9·7
1982-83	10·3
1983-84	11·1
1984-85	11·6
1985-86	12·0
1986-87	12·4
1987-88	12·9
1988-89	13·6
1989-90	14·5

Source: Annual Monitoring Survey.

Higher Education (Cash Flow)

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what evidence he has of exceptional cash flow problems in higher education resulting from a failure on the part of local education authorities of the prompt payment of grants for student fees; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations 1991 require local education authorities to make fee payments promptly and in termly instalments. The first instalment is required to be paid on or before 30 November 1991 or within one month of the receipt of a valid request for payment from the academic authority, whichever is the later. These new arrangements are designed to minimise cash flow problems; it is too early to assess their impact.

Student Loans

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the criteria upon which a student is judged before being able to obtain a loan.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The conditions for eligibility are laid down in the Education (Student Loans) Regulations 1991, SI 1991/1299, and set out in a booklet entitled "Student Grants and Loans" published jointly by my Department and the Welsh Office. The main criteria relate to the student's course, age and residence status. In general, students taking full-time courses of higher education below post-graduate level which last at least one academic year will be eligible for a loan, if they are aged less than 50 when the course begins and have been ordinarily resident in the British islands for the three years before the start of the course. Applicants must also hold a bank or building society account capable of handling direct credits and debits; must not be in default on repayments on a previous loan under the Government's loans scheme; and must enter into a loan agreement by 31 July in the relevant academic year.

Sex Education

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many applications have been received, and from which education authorities for specific grant support for training programmes in relation to sex education for *(a)* teachers, *(b)* parents and *(c)* governors.

Mr. Atkins: All LEAs in England, with the exception of Isles of Scilly, applied for and are receiving support under the grants for education support and training programme for preventative health education; and all LEAs are receiving support for school governor training. It is for LEAs to decide whether and to what extent these resources should be used to fund training in relation to sex education.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to ensure that students with learning disabilities following courses of further education are not placed in classes with much younger pupils.

Mr. Eggar: The arrangements for grouping students in further education are a matter for local decision. The Government believe that all students, including those with disabilities, should be grouped in the light of their needs.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to ensure that students with special educational needs are enabled to choose between specialist and integrated courses of further education.

Mr. Eggar: The Further and Higher Education Bill currently before Parliament will ensure that a wide range of educational provision continues to be available for students with special educational needs. This includes both mainstream and special courses.

Children Act 1989

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what advice he has given to local education authorities regarding their responsibilities in respect of the Children Act 1989.

Mr. Fallon: The Department has issued to local education authorities a document entitled "The Children

Act 1989: A Guide for the Education Service", commissioned from the Open university. The document describes the scope and framework of the Act and its particular implications for local education authorities and schools. A copy has been placed in the Library. The Department has also collaborated with the Department of Health in the preparation and issue of detailed guidance on relevant aspects of the Children Act, which has gone to local education authorities. Advice of particular interest to LEAs is contained in the Department's circulars 2/91 and 3/91 about the approval of independent schools to admit children with statements of SEN and the approval of special schools; in the document "Family Support, Day Care and Educational Provision for Young Children"; and in guidance issued on the operation of education supervision orders.

Student Costs

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the average amount in real terms spent on a university, college and polytechnic student for each year since 1979.

Mr. Alan Howarth *[holding answer 2 December 1991]:* Expenditure data for financial years 1979-80 to 1989-90 per full-time equivalent student are given in the table:

Unit costs in universities, polytechnics and colleges, financial years 1979-80 to 1989-90

	Universities[1]	*Polytechnics*[2]	*Colleges*[2]
1979-80	6,435	5,035	3,085
1980-81	6,840	4,960	3,070
1981-82	6,600	4,730	3,105
1982-83	6,830	4,465	3,060
1983-84	6,885	4,115	3,070
1984-85	6,815	3,975	3,050
1985-86	6,630	3,915	3,015
1986-87	6,555	4,000	3,065
1987-88	6,780	3,830	3,070
1988-89	6,620	3,795	3,045
1989-90	6,410	—	[3]2,785

[1] The unit of public funding for universities is estimated using the total of the University Funding Council recurrent grant and tuition fee income (excluding fees for overseas students) and the number of home full-time equivalent students in the financial year. The recurrent grant figure includes UFC grant for research.

[2] Expenditure in polytechnics and colleges is derived from the local education authorities' returns of their spending to the Department of the Environment. The data cover net recurrent institutional expenditure and include overseas students' fees. Student enrolment data are taken from the FESR. The mode of attendance weights used to calculate the number of full-time equivalent students were changed in 1983-84 and in 1989-90. Source: CIPFA Handbook of unit costs, 1988-89. Up to 1988-89 the figure for colleges covers all LEA maintained HE and FE, other than in polytechnics. From 1989-90 onwards polytechnics and some colleges were incorporated into the PCFC and unit costs for polytechnics alone are not collected centrally. For 1989-90 the college figure covers all HE and FE in those establishments which remained with an LEA.

[3] Provisional.

Real terms at 1989-90 prices, calculated using November 1991 GDP deflator.

PRIME MINISTER

Visual Handicap

Mr. Pike: To ask the Prime Minister what response he has made to the Royal National Institute for the Blind survey on blind and partially sighted adults in Britain; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I wrote to the director general, Ian Bruce, congratulating the RNIB on the report which I believe will be a useful resource to agencies in the statutory and voluntary sectors in planning and developing services.

Unfair Competition

Mr. Michael: To ask the Prime Minister whether he will make it his policy to ensure that there is a level playing field in business and commerce, including the retail sector, and that observance of the law does not lead directly to a commercial penalty for law-abiding companies.

The Prime Minister: Law enforcement authorities required to act in the public interest are themselves responsible—not the Government—for determining what action is most appropriate and effective to uphold the law.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Prime Minister whether he will make it his policy to protect small and family businesses in the retail trade from unfair competition.

The Prime Minister: Businesses of all sizes and in all trades are protected from unfair competition by the Fair Trading Act 1973 and the Competition Act 1980. The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Director General of Fair Trading, in conjunction with the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, ensure the effective application of the Acts.

Upholding the Law

Mr. Michael: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it the Government's policy to ensure that the law is upheld consistently by all Departments of state and agencies and organisations responsible to them.

The Prime Minister: All Departments of state and agencies and organisations responsible to them are aware of the need to uphold the law. In the case of law enforcement authorities required to act in the public interest, it is the responsibility of those authorities—not the Government—to determine what action is most appropriate and effective to uphold the law.

Clearance Procedures

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Prime Minister which grades of civil servants require clearance before taking up posts with outside organisations and companies; what are the procedures involved for such a clearance; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: All civil servants at grade 3 or above must obtain approval before taking any form of outside employment within two years of leaving Crown employment, unless it is unpaid employment in a non-commercial organisation.

The circumstances in which other civil servants must seek approval before taking up outside employment and the detailed procedures for dealing with applications, including the role of the independent Advisory Committee on Business Appointments, are set out in the rules on the acceptance of appointments by Crown servants. These are included in the 1989 statistical report "Acceptance of Outside Appointments by Crown Servants", a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House of Commons.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Lockerbie Bombing

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the public offers made by representatives of the Libyan Administration to Her Majesty's Government to help resolve the issue of responsibility for the Lockerbie bombing.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The evidence that led to charges against two Libyan officials resulted from one of the most painstaking and exhaustive inquiries ever undertaken. A detailed statement of the facts has been passed to the Libyan authorities in support of our demand for the surrender of the two accused. The Lord Advocate's statement on 14 November, and our own joint statements with our United States and French partners on 27 November, made our position absolutely clear. The Libyans know what they are required to do. It is now up to them to respond.

European Community

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the subject matters which are within the competence of the Community and which are decided by the Council of Ministers by majority, qualified majority and unanimous voting; and if he will state those areas of policy on which there is co-operation and co-ordination although they lie outside Community treaty obligations.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The treaties define the areas of activity which fall within Community competence, and the voting provisions for them. There is intergovernmental co-operation on many subjects, bilaterally and among the Twelve, outside Community competence; in particular on foreign policy and aspects of judicial and home affairs.

Albania

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of negotiations with Albania on the gold issue, and on diplomatic representation.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The last round of negotiations between the United Kingdom and Albania on the outstanding bilateral issues took place in Tirana in July. We have yet to take final decisions concerning the form of British diplomatic representation to Albania.

Officials Travel

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to which European countries officials of his Department are prohibited from travelling without obtaining special permission or with other qualifications; and when he next intends to review this list.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: It has been long-standing practice to give advice to all staff on the problems they may face in travelling to certain countries, and to require them to give notice of such visits, particularly if they have access to classified information. On security grounds we do not publish the list of countries concerned, but it is kept regularly under review.

Nuclear Testing

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his assessment of the contribution made by nuclear testing to global security.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The NATO summit reaffirmed that NATO's security depends on the possession of nuclear weapons. Nuclear testing maintains the effectiveness and safety of our nuclear deterrent.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Foreign Aid Grants

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the total amount of foreign aid grants in the current financial year.

Mrs. Chalker: I expect aid to developing countries this financial year to amount to £1,787 million, of which £1,720 million will be in the form of grants. The balance is made up of aid loans, Commonwealth Development Corporation loans and administrative costs.

Guyana

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the ODA has contributed either directly or indirectly to Demerara Woods Ltd. or the Guyanese National Timber Company of Guyana for aid purposes.

Mrs. Chalker: There have been no bilateral aid contributions.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, further to the answer of 20 November, *Official Report*, column *207*, if he will request the World bank to withdraw loan facility and IDA funds provided for the Government of Guyana for the upper Demerara forestry project.

Mrs. Chalker: The World bank project was completed in August 1990.

Refugees

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contribution his Department has made towards European Community aid for Croatian refugees who have fled to southern Hungary.

Mrs. Chalker: The European Community has committed 615,000 ecu for Yugoslav refugees to Hungary. The British Government's share of this is £77,000.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what funds have been given by his Department to help support refugees from Croatia who have fled to southern Hungary.

Mrs. Chalker: We have contributed through our share of EC action, but not bilaterally. We continue to monitor the situation of Yugoslav refugees in Hungary closely.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has

regarding the amounts in sterling given by each EC member country towards the support of Croatian refugees who have fled to southern Hungary.

Mrs. Chalker: We do not have information regarding other EC member states' bilateral contributions, but understand none has contributed to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees or the International Committee of the Red Cross programmes in Hungary.

Iraq

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he intends to allocate further funds to the Red Cross for further humanitarian aid workers in Iraq.

Mrs. Chalker: I announced on 17 October a Government contribution of £0·5 million to the British Red Cross Society for urgent medical supplies to be sent to Iraqi hospitals and clinics. This is part of the £44 million the Government have spent on aid for the Iraqi people since April. The British Red Cross Society has not requested further assistance, but we keep our aid policy to Iraq under review in close consultation with it.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Technological Innovations

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement listing the technological innovations which the United Kingdom telecommunications industry has been able to develop since the privatisation of British Telecom.

Mr. Redwood: A complete list of the many technological innovations that have been developed by the United Kingdom telecommunications industry since 1984 could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, there have been more than 10,000 type approvals for new products since privatisation and applications to the British Approvals Board for Telecommunications are now running at 1,300 a year.

The continuing enhancement of the communications infrastructure in a liberalised, dynamic and highly competitive market and the industry's commitment to innovation have resulted in the introduction of new products and services at a rate comparable with that in the United States of America and Japan. The United Kingdom's world lead in the development of personal communication networks following the success of cellular mobile telephony is but one example. The United Kingdom has also developed a large number of new value-added services, pagers, message devices, new styles of telephone and switches.

The Government recognise innovation and involvement in the development of standards as being vital to this process. They will continue to encourage and support United Kingdom industry participation in European and national collaborative research programmes such as RACE, where the United Kingdom currently participates in 84 per cent. of the projects, LINK and EUREKA, and in the European Telecommunications Standards Institute where United Kingdom companies and organisations have the highest membership.

EC Meetings

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the EC Ministerial Council meetings at which his Department has or will be represented during November and December.

Mr. Lilley: This table lists the EC ministerial meetings at which my Department has or will be represented during November and December.

EC Ministerial Meetings November—December 1991

	November	*December*
Secretary of State	Nil	Possible meeting of Foreign Affairs Council on GATT round. Date to be arranged.
Minister for Trade	Nil	Nil
Minister for Corporate Affairs	4 November 1991—Telecoms Council—Brussels	Provisional 16 December 1991 ECOFIN—Brussels/Luxembourg
	7 November 1991 Internal Market Council—Brussels	Provisional Telecoms—No date yet fixed—Brussels 19 December 1991 Internal Market Council—Brussels
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs	18 November 1991 Ministerial meeting on Regional Policy—The Hague	Provisional. Telecoms—No date yet fixed—Brussels
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Technology	18-20 November 1991 Ministerial meeting on European Space Agency—Munich	Nil

Self-regulating Bodies

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether there is any independent body to which complaints can be made about the conduct of the bodies recognised as RSBs under the Companies Act 1989.

Mr. Redwood: All of the recognised supervisory bodies have made arrangements for complaints against them to be considered by independent persons.

Car Alarms

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the recent 18-nation talks in Prague held to discuss radio frequencies for car alarms.

Mr. Redwood: My officials are not aware of any major international talks held recently in Prague to discuss car alarms.

There was a meeting of the CEPT—conference of European posts and telecommunications administrations—frequency management working group held in Prague on 21 to 25 October and, of the 32 CEPT member countries, 18 were present at this meeting. However, while the meeting discussed such items as harmonisation of radio frequencies for low-power devices and frequencies for an automotive radiolocation system, radio car alarms were not specifically covered.

NHS Procurement Directorate

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the NHS procurement directorate's regulations governing the NHS regional supply centres with respect to the marginal costings of their operations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: I am aware of the guidelines issued by the NHS management executive to health authorities on the carrying out of any resale activities outside the NHS. My Department, the Department of Health and the Office of Fair Trading have found no evidence of anti-competitive practices arising from this trade, but we continue to keep this market under review.

WALES

National Health Service (Expenditure)

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much spending on the NHS in Wales increased from 1974 to 1979 and from 1979 to the latest available date in cash and in real terms.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently announced that planned net provision for the NHS in Wales in 1992-93 will be £1,877 million; an 11·1 per cent. increase on comparable expenditure plans for the current year. Expenditure for earlier years is given in the table:

National Health Service—Wales
Gross Expenditure

	1974-75 (outturn)	*1979-80 (outturn)*	*1991-92 (planned provision)*
	£ million	*£ million*	*£ million*
Cash	210	481	1,769
1991-92 prices	1,024	1,118	1,769

National Health Service—Wales
Per capita Expenditure

	1974-75 (outturn)	*1979-80 (outturn)*	*1991-92 (planned provision)*
	£	*£*	*£*
Cash	75	171	614
1991-92 prices	368	398	614

Between 1974-75 and 1979-80 expenditure on the NHS in Wales increased by 9·2 per cent. in real terms. Since then expenditure has increased by almost 60 per cent. in real terms.

Training (Dwyfor)

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many training opportunities have been provided for young unemployed people in the Dwyfor area this year to date; how many young unemployed people have been registered during this period in Dwyfor; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Information about the number of training opportunities provided for young unemployed people in Dwyfor is not collected centrally. Between January and October this year, 700 people aged under 25 registered as unemployed in Dwyfor and 699 left the register.

Training and enterprise councils are under a contractual obligation to meet the Government's guarantees of training opportunities for the under-25s. I am satisfied that TARGED, the TEC for north-west Wales, has sufficient resources for this purpose.

Probate Registry, Cardiff

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the chairman of Cadw concerning the denudation of the probate registry, Cardiff road, Llandaf, Cardiff of its historic fixtures and their subsequent destination; and what assessment has been made of the chances of their recovery.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments is an executive agency within the Welsh Office and does not have a chairman. An inspection of the former Probate Registry in Llandaff by Cadw's professional staff and inquiries of Property Holdings reveal that works to the interior of the building were carried out some 20 years ago and before the building was listed.

General Practitioners

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the average income of general practitioners in Wales, including incentive payments, before and after the introduction of the new general practitioners contract.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: General medical practitioners' remuneration is primarily determined by the doctors and dentists review body which makes recommendations each year as to the level of income the average GP should receive after meeting the expenses of running his practice.

The latest year for which actual earnings of general practitioners is known is 1988-89, at £28,979. The average intended net income determined by the review body for subsequent years is as follows:

	£
1989-90	31,105
1990-91	[1]33,280
	[2]34,680
1991-92	[3]37,280
	[4]37,975

[1] (with effect 1 April 1990—implementation date of new contract)
[2] (with effect from 1 January 1991)
[3] (with effect from 1 April 1991)
[4] (with effect from 1 December 1991)

Separate Welsh figures are not maintained.

Treatment Contracts

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidance he issues to health authorities on the circumstances in which they can contract for treatment with private hospitals.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This is a matter for individual health authorities to determine in the light of their responsibilities to identify the health care needs of local residents, and then arrange for these needs to be met. Collaborative ventures between the NHS and private hospitals have always existed and advice has been issued on standard formats including health authority contracts with the private sector.

Oystermouth Development

Mr. Gareth Wardell: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will now announce the date of the public inquiry into the proposed development at Oystermouth, Swansea.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The applicant and the local planning authority have requested that the application should be held in abeyance to enable further discussions to be held. Arrangements for the public inquiry have therefore not yet been made.

Motorway Statistics

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many miles of motorway are *(a)* currently open, *(b)* currently under construction and *(c)* planned for future construction in Wales either (i) as completely new motorway or (ii) as existing motorway being widened; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Miles of motorway opened, under construction and planned are:

Open	*Under construction*	*Planned*	
		New motorway	*Widening*
74	3	[1]7·5	7·8

[1] Does not include the proposed M4 alternative motorway around Newport: a decision on the line of the route has yet to be made.

A total of £79 million has been spent on motorway improvements since 1979. Expenditure on schemes in progress or planned including the alternative motorway around Newport will exceed £600 million.

Live Television Feed

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the locations of the television sets in his Department which can receive the live television feed from the Chamber, and the total cost to his Department of this service.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department has five monitors located in Gwydyr house, Whitehall that can receive this service. Installation costs were £20,000, annual line rental is expected to be approximately £12,000 a year.

Secure Units

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether a secure unit in Wales will be provided in addition to the two new secure units announced by the Minister for Health.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The Welsh Office completed a review of secure care in Wales, the final report on which was published on 14 August 1991 and a copy of which was sent to the hon. Gentleman at that time.

One of the recommendations of the review is for a new secure unit to be provided in Wales.

The report was published for consultation with a closing date of 8 November 1991 and the many representations received are currently being considered.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the units providing secure accommodation for young people from Wales and show how many young people from Wales were in each of the secure units in each month of 1989, 1990 and the current year.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The form in which information is available is not readily extractable. The information will be assembled and I will write to the hon. Gentleman and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

Care Places

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many of the short-term care places for adults with learning difficulties it is his policy to provide in Wales *(a)* in the present financial year, *(b)* in the 1992-93 financial year and *(c)* by the year 2000.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Targets for the development of all aspects of care for people with mental handicaps are set out in annual county plans produced jointly by social services, health and education authorities, housing bodies and representatives of voluntary organisations, users and carers.

These plans indicate that by 31 March 1992 there should be 1,333 people receiving short-term care in the new patterns of service, compared with 34 in the year before the all-Wales mental handicap strategy was launched, as well as 377 in more traditional patterns of service. Targets for future years will be set by county teams in due course.

Appointments to Public Boards

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many members of public boards whom he has appointed serve as officers carrying out executive duties in the Conservative party in Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: Political affiliations are not a consideration in making public appointments. Such information is not, therefore, collected centrally.

Welsh Development Agency

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his parliamentary answer of 28 November, what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Welsh Development Agency concerning the number of companies visited in Australia in the course of his recent inward investment mission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I have frequent discussions with the chairman. I understand that during the visit to Australia meetings were held with seven individual companies.

EMPLOYMENT

Retraining

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what assessment he has made of the level of provision of retraining schemes for those in marketing who have lost their jobs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Figures are not available. Local management of Government-funded training is a matter for the training and enterprise councils which assess specific local needs and provide training to meet those needs.

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the progress by training and enterprise councils on the establishment of rural schemes for retraining those leaving farming; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Training and enterprise councils are implementing their plans to meet the training and enterprise needs of their local communities including the needs of rural areas where this is relevant. A number of TECs are now involved in specific rural initiatives and a consortium of around 20 TECs has been formed to share good practice and common goals in meeting the needs of rural areas.

Women's Earnings

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many women earned *(a)* less than £52 a week and *(b)* above £185 a week in the last year for which figures are available; and what is this figure as a percentage of *(a)* the female work force and *(b)* the total work force.

Mr. Forth: Estimates based on the April 1991 new earnings survey are given in the table.

Estimated	*Women Earning* *(a) less than £52 a week*	*(b) more than £185 a week*
Number of women employees in employment	1·2 million	3·8 million
Percentage of female employees in employment	11½	36½
Percentage of all employees in employment	5½	17½

Maternity Pay

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many women workers who earn more than £185 a week are covered by contractual maternity pay arrangements; and what is this figure as a percentage of *(a)* all women who earn more than £185 a week and *(b)* the total female work force.

Mr. Forth: We do not hold such information.

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many women workers are covered by contractual maternity pay arrangements; and what is this figure as a percentage of the total female work force.

Mr. Forth: We do not hold information on the total number of women workers covered by contractual maternity pay arrangements. However, the recent Policy Studies Institute report on maternity rights in Britain found that of the 2,514 women employees surveyed, 360 —14 per cent.—received contractual maternity pay.

Live Television Feed

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the locations of the television sets in his Department which can receive the live television feed from the Chamber, and the total cost to his Department of this service.

Mr. Forth: There are four television sets in the Department's headquarters at Caxton house capable of receiving the Chamber live television feed. There is one in the Secretary of State's private office, one in my office, one in the parliamentary unit and one in the press office. The annual cost is £12,700.

Bank of Credit and Commerce International

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what steps the Department of Employment redundancy payment office is taking to expedite payment of statutory redundancy payments to ex-BCCI staff;

(2) what response has been received from Touche Ross, the provisional liquidators of BCCI, in response to inquiries from his Department on form RP22 in respect of ex-staff members claiming statutory redundancy money; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The redundancy payments service has agreed with Touche Ross arrangements for processing RP22 forms relating to claims from ex-BCCI staff. I now expect claims to be paid shortly.

Youth Training Scheme

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many young people are waiting for a place on the YTS in the Wakefield area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The Department does not hold figures that would be sufficiently reliable for publication. However, Wakefield training and enterprise council and Wakefield careers service are co-operating to ensure that an adequate supply of places is available to meet likely demand.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has received from the Wakefield training and enterprise council on the difficulties in placing young people on the YTS; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Wakefield training and enterprise council is co-operating with the local careers service and has advised that it will be able to meet demand for YT places in its area.

Unemployed Young People

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many 16 and 17-year-olds are unemployed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: In October 1991 the number of 16 and 17-year-old unemployed claimants in the United Kingdom was 5,982.

TRANSPORT

Bus Services, London

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how he intends potential passengers to be able to obtain information about bus services in London after deregulation and privatisation.

Mr. Freeman: Clearly, it will be in bus operators best interests to publicise their services. Supplementing this, the London Bus Executive will have powers to provide information centrally, which it will exercise in co-operation with London Transport and British Rail.

Road Pricing

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the intention of road pricing in London would be to raise money or to restrict demand.

Mr. Chope: We have no plans to introduce road pricing. The research we are undertaking will assess the potential of road pricing to reduce congestion in London. Until the research is done we can make no estimate of the demand and revenue implications of seeking to meet this objective.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if effective parking controls, parking pricing and enforcement are included in the road pricing study for London.

Mr. Chope: Road pricing is one of a range of options for combating congestion in London. Parking policy forms part of a wider programme of research into urban traffic congestion.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what level of restraint on which roads or types of roads in London would be seen as a successful outcome to road pricing.

Mr. Chope: It is the role of the research to identify the different possible levels and structures of charges in London and to evaluate their effects. The final outcome of the research will not be prejudged.

Ashford International Station

Mr. Speed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he is yet able to authorise the construction of Ashford international passenger station.

Mr. Rifkind: The increase in British Rail's external finance limit for 1992-93 which I announced last month allowed for some £18 million of expenditure on an international passenger station at Ashford. I have asked the chairman of British Rail to give serious consideration to the possibility of building a simpler station at Ashford than the one proposed. I hope it can be in place in time for Ashford to be served by some international passenger trains once scheduled service through the channel tunnel commences.

Coastguards

Mr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he is now able to announce the outcome of the review of Her Majesty's coastguard's sector organisation.

Mr. McLoughlin: To ensure that Her Majesty's coastguard continues to provide the best possible search and rescue service in an efficient and cost-effective manner, a review of its present sector and auxiliary structure was undertaken. The review defined the coastguard's coastal commitments and reviewed the availability, readiness and training of coastguard personnel to met current requirements. During the course of the review there was extensive consultation with coastal local authorities, staff and the public.

The review concluded that present-day needs could be best met by establishing 68 additional auxiliary companies at new locations around the coast to improve the coastguard's intelligence-gathering and surveillance capability, while streamlining the size of companies so as to permit a reduction in the number of auxiliary coastguards and sector officers. The review also recommended improvements in the remuneration, equipment and training of the auxiliary coastguard service. In particular, the number of available pagers and portable radios should be doubled and extra uniform items made available to improve the public profile of the auxiliary coastguard.

The chief coastguard made a number of recommendations and I have accepted them all. The review also concluded that the need for fixed watchkeeping at lookout stations in the south-west should be re-examined. Elsewhere in the United Kingdom, such lookouts have since 1978 been replaced by mobile patrols.

I have agreed that fixed watchkeeping at Lizard should cease and be replaced by a mobile lookout undertaken by a coastguard response vehicle on a casualty watch basis. However, the present fixed lookout at St. Ives will continue for eight to 10 hours watchkeeping per day during the Easter to September period to cater for the special circumstances of that station.

I have not approved the closure of Gwennap Head, but because no operational case can be made for a 24-hour fixed lookout I have agreed to amend its watchkeeping to match that of St. Ives. The situation at Gwennap Head will be reviewed after the modified arrangements have been in force for a year.

I have further agreed to an extensive building programme to ensure that the coastguard is provided with modern bases from which to operate. New sector stations are planned to be built at Thurso, Buckie, Hartlepool, Port Pendennis and Burnham on Sea. In addition, suitable buildings will be leased or existing buildings rebuilt at 18 other locations.

New auxiliary stations will be provided in Orkney, Burnham on Crouch, Whitstable, St. Just, Penhale, Bridport and at Sutton Bridge.

This progressive programme is in addition to the six sector or auxiliary stations currently under construction and the three new large maritime co-ordination sub-centres under construction or at the planning stage at Bangor (Northern Ireland), Holyhead and Milford Haven.

The implementation of the review will be spread over four years.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Trotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether British Rail has yet advised him of the pattern of its proposals for passenger services to the north of London from the continent after the opening of the channel tunnel.

Mr. Freeman: I am aware that British Rail is having to consider some adjustments to its proposals, published in accordance with section 40 of the Channel Tunnel Act 1987, for channel tunnel passenger services north of London, but it is still discussing its plans with its continental railway partners and the manufacturers. I should expect BR to publish in due course any revisions to its "Section 40 plan".

Motorway Statistics

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many miles of motorway are currently *(a)* open, *(b)* under construction and *(c)* planned in England either (i) as completely new motorway, or (ii) as existing motorway being widened; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: There are 1,650 miles of existing motorway in England, and four miles are under construction. The trunk road programme includes proposals to provide a further 58 miles of new motorway. We have also announced our intention to upgrade about 180 miles of the A1 to motorway between the M25 and Tyneside.

Over 20 miles of existing motorway are currently being widened, and the programme includes proposals to widen a further 605 miles.

The emphasis of the national road programme is on relieving congestion on the broad routes followed by the present motorways which have by far the heaviest traffic flows and are the backbone of Britain's road system.

Trunk Roads

Mr. Mudd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list *(a)* trunk road new construction contracts placed by his Department since the start of this financial year giving the name of the company to which the contract was awarded and the value of the contract and *(b)* trunk road new construction and improvement contracts which his Department expects to award by the end of the financial year.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 2 December 1991]:* The following motorway and trunk road new construciton contracts have been awarded since 1 April 1991.

Scheme title	*Winning contractor*	*Award value (£ Million)*	*Month awarded*
A1 Gatenby Lane Junction Improvement	John Mowlem Construction Plc	2·66	April
A3 Liphook (Milford) Bypass	Constain Civil Engineering Ltd.	7·89	October
A5 Little Brickhill Bypass	Galliford (UK) Ltd.	5·84	June
A11 Red Lodge to Newmarket Bypass	Kier Construction Ltd.	4·08	November
A20 Court Wood to Dover Contract 3	Norwest Holst Construction Ltd.	21·68	May
A23 Warninglid Flyover—Sayers Com. Con 1	Costain Civil Engineering Ltd.	15·69	October
A30 Okehampton—Launceston	Tarmac Construction Ltd.	26·81	September
A39 Wadebridge Bypass	Balfour Beatty Ltd.	8·30	September
A40 Western Avenue Improvement, Hillingdon	Fairclough Civil Engineering Ltd.	17·19	April
A41 Kings Langley Bypass	AF Budge (Contractors) Ltd.	19·97	June
A47 East Dereham to North Tuddenham	Fitzpatrick Contractors Ltd.	6·90	June
A47 Narborough Bypass, Kings Lynn	May Gurney & Co. Ltd.	2·24	August
A421 Wendlebury to Bicester Dualling	Amey Construction Ltd.	3·90	September
A423 Southan Bypass	Midland Oak Construction Ltd.	2·22	June
A453 Ratcliffe on Soar power station access	Monk Construction Ltd.	1·16	August
A590 Dalton-in-Furness Bypass, Cumbria	Miller Construction Ltd.	7·91	November
A595 Egremont Bypass, Cumbria	Alfred McAlpine Construction Ltd.	6·67	July
A596 Wigton Bypass, Cumbria	Alfred McAlpine Construction Ltd.	4·05	July
M1–A1 Link Road Contract 2, West of Naseby	Tarmac Construction Ltd.	19·22	November
M1–A1 Link Road Contract 3, East of Naseby	Tarmac Construction Ltd.	18·29	November
M1–A1 Link Road Contract 5, North Kettering	Fitzpatrick Contractors Ltd.	3·75	November
M1-A1 Link Road Contract 8	Henry Boot Southern Ltd.	7·04	July
M1-A1 Link Road Contract 9	Tarmac Construction Ltd.	16·36	October
M5 Widening between junctions 6 and 8	John Laing Construction Ltd.	59·37	June
M6 Widening junctions 20/21A Advance bridgeworks	Edmund Nuttall Ltd.	1·81	April
M6/M61 cabling for CCTV	Birse Construction Ltd.	1·85	April
M20 Widening junctions 5 to 8 (Maidstone)	Balfour Beatty Ltd.	68·80	July
M25 Clackett Lane Service Area Slip Roads	Birse Construction Ltd.	3·89	November
M25 provision of signs mark 2	Birse Construction Ltd.	1·59	April
M42/M40 provision and installation of CCTV	CMR Electronics Ltd.	2·14	April
M42/M40 Warwicks, control area upgrading	Pirelli Construction Ltd.	2·03	April
M62 Widening between junctions 17 and 18	Balfour Beatty Ltd.	3·75	April

The following contracts are expected to be let before April 1992

Location	*Estimate £ million*
A11 Thetford Design and Build	3·70
A11 Four Wentways to Newmarket	16·25
A16 Ludborough Bypass	2·50
A16 Stickford Bypass	1·80
A20 Folkestone to Court Wood Contract 2	15·00
A27 Westhampnett Bypass	10·00
A27 Cross Bush, Arundel	3·35
A33 (M3 advance works) Hockley Junction	1·80
A41 Berkhamsted Bypass Contract 4B	25·80
A339 Basingstoke Northern Bypass Stage 3	9·90
A420 Kingston Bagpuize Bypass	5·60
A585 Fleetwood Dock Road Improvement	4·00
A638 North West of Doncaster	6·50

Street Works

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received in support of his proposal to use the provisions of section 94 of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 to prevent local authority direct labour organisations from being able to tender for utility work.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 2 December 1991]:* As the hon. Lady will recall, the vote in the House on 22 May 1991 produced 130 representations in favour, and only 38 against. Since then, I have received a small number of representations against the proposal.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when he intends to consult on his proposals for the use of section 94 of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 to prevent local authority direct labour organisations from being able to tender for utility work;

(2) for what reasons he has decided not to monitor the implementation of part III of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991, before considering whether to use his power under the provisions of section 94 to prevent local authority direct labour organisations from being able to tender for utility work;

(3) what evidence is available, to date, to enable him to assess the length of the transitional period after which the local authority direct labour organisations will be prevented by section 94 of the New Roads and Street Works Act from tendering for utility work.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 2 December 1991]:* No decision has yet been taken on the timing of consultations about section 94.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what opinions the utilities have expressed in relation to his proposal to use the provisions of section 94 of the New Roads and Street Works Act 1991 to prevent local authority direct labour organisations from being able to tender for utility work.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 2 December 1991]:* I have received a letter from the national joint utilities group expressing concern at the proposal, to which I have replied.

Blight Notices

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many dwellings he has acquired under blight notice provisions in connection with the widening of the M20 between junctions 3 and 5; at what total cost; and how many of those dwellings he intends to resell.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 2 December 1991]:* A total of 227 dwellings have been acquired to date under the blight provisions at a total cost of £21·9 million. On the basis of our current design proposals, we expect to resell all these properties although a small number will lose part of their gardens for environmental works. A further 59 are in the process of acquisition following acceptance of blight notices.

Disabled Staff

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many disabled people are currently employed in his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Of the Department's current staff of 15,837, a total of 191—1·2 per cent.—are registered as disabled. A further 188 staff, who have indicated that they have disabilities, have not registered their disability.

Smoke Hoods

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has received a reply from the Civil Aviation Authority to his request to it to review the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety submission querying the technical basis of their decision to reject the mandatory provision of smoke hoods in passenger aircraft.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Civil Aviation Authority, which has the statutory responsibility for the safety regulation of United Kingdom civil aviation, has advised me that it has completed the review of the material put forward by the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety—PACTS. The authority has carefully considered the PACTS submission, but it concluded that it should maintain its previous decision not to make mandatory the provision of smoke hoods in British aircraft. In accordance with my previous undertaking, I have written to my hon. Friend outlining more fully the reasons behind the Civil Aviation Authority's conclusion.

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what strategies are available for use in the next three years which will offer protection to aircraft passengers against toxic fumes in aviation fire.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am advised by the Civil Aviation Authority that the main strategies to protect passengers from the effects of toxic fumes associated with aviation fire are speedily to evacuate passengers from the source of the fire and to prevent the fire from spreading. The authority recognises that a smoke hood meeting an aviation specification and correctly worn may provide some protection to an individual unfortunate enough to be in an aircraft fire. However, the authority takes the view that the speed at which such fires spread means that rapid evacuation is of overriding importance and that any delay caused by the donning of smoke hoods by passengers unfamiliar with the equipment could jeopardise speedy evacuation and consequently place lives at risk.

Live Television Feed

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the locations of the television sets in his Department which can receive the live television feed from the Chamber, and the total cost to his Department of this service.

Mr. McLoughlin: Sets are located in the Department's headquarters at 2 Marsham street. The annual cost is £13,321.

HEALTH

Waiting Times

12. Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what will be the maximum time a patient will have to wait under the patients charter from seeing a general practitioner and being referred to a consultant, until they are seen by the consultant.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The charter makes it clear that individual health authorities are required to set and publicise clear local standards for waiting times for first out-patient appointments.

13. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the present waiting times for *(a)* out-patient consultation and *(b)* in-patient admission for cataract surgery in the northern region.

Mr. Dorrell: Information on waiting times for specific procedures is not available centrally. In the 12 months to March 1991 the number of patients waiting over one year for in-patient and day-case ophthalmology treatment in the northern region fell by 47 per cent.

Community Services

14. **Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give the latest figures for overall employment in the national health service of *(a)* community nurses, *(b)* community psychiatric nurses, *(c)* community midwives and *(d)* community occupational therapists; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There were, in whole-time equivalents, 3,600 community psychiatric nurses, 4,200 community midwives and 38,410 community nursing staff in post in England on 30 September 1990. The last figure includes both qualified and unqualified nursing staff.

Separate information relating to community occupational therapists is not collected centrally. At 30 September 1990, there were a total of 8,190 occupational therapists employed within the NHS, including occupational therapist helpers, and 1,260 employed in social services departments.

NHS Trusts

15. **Mr. Roger King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on national health trust hospitals.

Mr. Waldegrave: The 57 NHS trusts established on 1 April 1991 are delivering significant benefits to patients. A further 99 NHS trusts will become operational on 1 April 1992, and the number of hospitals and other units now established clearly indicates the enthusiasm and commitment that managers and clinicians have shown for improving the NHS.

18. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what reports he has received about the effectiveness of national health service hospital trusts.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Apart from regular financial and activity returns, I receive regular reports about the performance of NHS trusts, which indicate that they are treating more patients than ever before and introducing a wide variety of innovative benefits to patients.

Family Health Service Authorities

16. **Mr. Michael Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to review the functions and membership of the family health service authorities.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have no present plans to do so.

Hospital Auxiliary Services

17. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on the contracting out of hospital auxiliary services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) earlier today.

Cancer, Bolsover

19. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will meet a deputation from Bolsover to discuss the question of dioxin and links with cancer in the Bolsover area.

Mr. Dorrell: The registrar in public health for the North Derbyshire health authority has informed the hon. Member of his willingness to answer further questions on this topic and to meet for a discussion. I hope that the hon. Member will take up this offer, if he has not already done so.

Female GPs

20. **Mr. French:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the number of female general practitioners has changed since 1979.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The number of female general practitioners—unrestricted principals—has risen by some 90 per cent., from 3,261 in October 1979 to 6,187 in April 1991. The proportion of female general practitioners has nearly doubled from around one in seven in 1979 to one in four in 1991.

Northern RHA

21. **Mr. Amos:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the level of funding of the Northern regional health authority.

Mr. Dorrell: Between 1978-79 and 1990-91, Northern regional health authority's total revenue expenditure increased in real terms by 33·2 per cent. and their capital expenditure by 35·5 per cent. In 1991-92 Northern regional health authority's main revenue allocation increased by £91·5 million, or 10·24 per cent. cash, bringing the total allocation for their resident population to £985·3 million. Their main capital allocation rose by 19·1 per cent. cash to £77 million.

Waiting Lists, Leicestershire

22. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on waiting lists in Leicestershire.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Between March 1979 and March 1991 the number of patients waiting for in-patient admission has fallen by 15 per cent. from 10,834 to 9,236. Over the same period the number waiting over one year has fallen by 59 per cent. from 2,875 to 1,187.

Health Authorities

23. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to assure himself that all health authorities are providing services which meet all reasonable requirements.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: All national health service authorities are responsible for securing high-quality services to meet the health needs of their local populations.

They are accountable to the national health service management executive, which in turn reports to Ministers and the national health service policy board.

Personal Social Services

Mr. John P. Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to issue new guidance to local authorities concerning the charges they may levy for personal social services.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: From April 1993, local authorities will draw on the income support financial assessment rules when calculating how much to charge people needing residential care. Officials of the Department of Health and the Department of Social Security are discussing the details, including the guidance needed, with the local authority associations.

It is also our intention to produce guidance about the discretionary powers available to local authorities to make charges for domiciliary and day care services.

Private Medicine

26. **Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will now take steps to prohibit any NHS premises, or any staff employed by the NHS, from having any involvement with private practice medicine; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No.

Yorkshire Regional Health Authority

27. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the gross revenue expenditure in the area covered by the Yorkshire regional health authority in 1978-79; and what was the comparable figure for 1989-90.

Mr. Dorrell: The annual accounts of the health authorities comprising the Yorkshire region record total revenue expenditure of £313·5 million cash for 1978-79 and £971·6 million cash for 1989-90—an increase in real terms of 32·5 per cent.

Local Authority Social Services

28. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the provision of local authority social services under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) earlier today.

GP Remuneration

29. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about the remuneration of general practitioners; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A number of representations have been received about the question of the 1990-91 overpayment. I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Mr. Butler) on 7 November at columns *259-60*.

Central Manchester Hospital Trust

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he last met representatives of the Central Manchester hospital trust to discuss its financial situation.

Mr. Dorrell: The chairman and chief executive of the Central Manchester hospital NHS trust met the deputy chief executive and director of finance of the NHS management executive on 10 September 1991 to discuss the financial performance of the trust. Officials remain in close and continuous contact with trust representatives.

Disabled People

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he monitors the obligations of local authorities to provide a service to disabled people under section 2 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 in the absence of any diminution of need; if the provision of a service under that section to meet assessed need takes precedence over the ability of the client to meet any charges for the service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: We expect local authorities to be well aware of their legal responsibilities and to ensure that their policies and practices comply. We have powers to intervene in individual cases of alleged default. The social services inspectorate has responsibilities to monitor the quality of management and care provided by social services departments. We have made it clear that ability to pay does not and should not in any way influence decisions on the services to be provided. Assessment of financial means should follow assessment of need and decisions about service provision.

Fluoridation

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on the cost of fluoridating the public water supply in England and Wales; and if he will make an estimate expressing the cost per thousand of the population.

Mr. Dorrell: The cost of fluoridating water is for negotiation locally between district health authorities and water undertakers. Costs fluctuate from area to area. The best estimate is as shown in table:

Population served by the water treatment works	*Capital Cost (£000)*	*Recurrent cost (per 1,000 head of population) (£)*
50,000—100,000	150—200	320
100,000—250,000	160—220	220
250,000—450,000	200—250	160

Source: British Fluoridation Society.

Young Psychiatric Patients

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will issue formal guidance to health authorities regarding the admission of young people to psychiatric care following the report on young people entering psychiatric care published by the Children's Society.

Mr. Dorrell: The NHS management executive recently issued guidance on the welfare of children and young people in hospital—HSG(91)1—a copy of which is

available in the Library. This includes good practice on admissions and, in particular, commends the accommodation of children in designated children's units separate from adults, the involvement of parents and carers in the treatment of their children and recognition of the rights of children to information about their treatment. The guide explicitly states that these principles apply whenever a child is admitted to hospital. The code of practice issued under section 118 of the Mental Health Act 1983, a copy of which is also available in the Library, provides guidance on the application of that Act to patients under the age of 18, including admission procedures.

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will conduct an investigation into the reasons why health authorities are failing to keep accurate records of the number of young people admitted to psychiatric care.

Mr. Dorrell: It is for district health authorities to maintain the statistics they require for the proper management of the services for which they are responsible. The Department is currently reviewing its information strategies in order to establish central requirements for data and will be seeking to identify any significant gaps in current data collection.

Eritrean Refugees

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many refugee children from Eritrea are currently in the care of London local authorities.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally.

London Ambulance Service

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has any plans to improve the ambulance service in the London area; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The Government have worked closely with South West Thames regional health authority to establish a new management board and a new management structure, whose key aims are to make the best use of substantial new funds this year to bring into effect far more sophisticated and computerised emergency response procedures; improved training of emergency crews; purchase of new ambulances and increased management training within the service.

National Health Service Reforms

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response he intends to make to the report on NHS reforms and hospital costs by Professor Julian Le Grand and Dr. Will Bartlett from the school of advanced urban studies at Bristol university.

Mr. Dorrell: We understand that the report has not yet been published.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the population of the United Kingdom is of Indian, Pakistani, Turkish, Irish and Afro-Caribbean origin.

Mr. Dorrell: Comparable information for the whole of the United Kingdom is not available; but within Great Britain people describing themselves as being of Indian, Pakistani, African, and West Indian ethnic minority groups respectively formed 1·4, 0·8, 0·2 and 0·9 per cent. of the total. Estimates of persons of Turkish and Irish Republic ethnic origin are not made. However, the proportions themselves born in these two countries are estimated to be 0·03 and 1·1 per cent. respectively.

These proportions are estimates averaged over three years' labour force surveys—1987, 1988 and 1989—but are nevertheless still subject to sampling errors.

Live Television Feed

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the locations of the television sets in his Department which can receive the live television feed from the Chamber, and the total cost to his Department of this service.

Mr. Dorrell: There are five sets in the Department which can receive live broadcasts from the Chamber. They are situated in ministerial and press offices in Richmond house, Whitehall and cost approximately £6,000 a year.

Speech Therapy

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what obligations a district health authority has to provide speech therapists in their district;

(2) what ratio of speech therapists to children needing assistance is laid down by his Department;

(3) what means of redress are provided by his Department for parents where no provision for speech therapy for their children is available from a health authority;

(4) what provision is made for speech therapy to be provided on site in schools rather than the children having to attend special clinics out of educational time in school.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is the responsibility of health authorities to assess the health needs of their local population and to obtain appropriate services for them, including speech and language therapy services. We encourage the NHS to deploy qualified speech and language therapists as effectively and efficiently as possible and to make full use of speech therapists assistants. We expect those providing these services to schools to co-operate closely with local education authorities.

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about the provision of speech therapy in the Dewsbury district health authority area; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: None.

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are his Department's guidelines for the training of speech therapists; and how his Department promotes this as a career.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Validation of courses for speech therapists is the responsibility of the academic board of the College of Speech Therapists. Information on speech therapy as a career is outlined in leaflet HSC20 which is available from Health Service Careers, PO Box 204, London, SE5 7ES.

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many speech therapists are employed by the Yorkshire regional health authority; and what information he has on how these are allocated to districts.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information is given in the table:

NHS speech therapists in post Yorkshire region at 30 September 1990

		Whole-time equivalents[1]	
District health authorities	*Total*	*Qualified*	*Helpers*
Hull	11·5	11·5	[3]
East Yorkshire	9·8	9·8	[3]
Grimsby	7·4	7·4	[3]
Scunthorpe	10·2	10·2	[3]
Northallerton	6·8	6·8	[3]
York	14·2	14·2	[3]
Scarborough	11·0	10·6	0·4
Harrogate	9·2	9·2	[3]
Bradford	15·2	14·7	0·5
Airedale	16·0	16·0	[3]
Calderdale	12·0	12·0	[3]
Huddersfield	17·3	16·8	0·5
Dewsbury	11·8	11·8	[3]
Leeds Western	20·6	20·6	[3]
Leeds Eastern	19·4	19·4	[3]
Wakefield	7·9	7·9	[3]
Pontefract	7·9	7·9	[3]
Total[2]	208·1	206·7	1·4

Source: Department of Health (SM13C) Annual Census of NHS Non-medical Manpower.

Notes:

[1] Figures independently rounded to one decimal place.

[2] Total may not equal the sum of components, due to rounding.

[3] Nil or negligible.

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what specific guidance his Department gives to health authorities in respect of the replacement of specialist staff such as speech therapists.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The recruitment of health authority staff, including speech therapists, is a matter for those health authorities.

Mrs. Peacock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the total budget within his Department's expenditure programmes for the training of speech therapists; and how many are currently in training.

Mr. Dorrell: Funding of training courses for speech therapists is undertaken by the education sector which bears the full costs of mandatory awards and course provision. No budgets are held by the Department for these purposes. I understand that there are some 990 students currently training in England and Wales.

Mental Nursing

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received in favour of retaining the reference to mental nursing in the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Act 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have received representations on this point from the Psychiatric Nurses Association. Under the existing legislation, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State may constitute standing committees of the United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting to deal with specified matters, including in particular training, clinical nursing studies, mental nursing and occupational health nursing. Under the provisions of the Nurses, Midwives and Health Visitors Bill my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be able to constitute standing committees of the council to deal with any matter, if the council requests him to do so.

Secure Units

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the Government grants provided for the two new secure units due to open soon will cover both revenue and construction costs.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Grants to local authorities under section 82(2) of the Children Act 1989 to meet the costs of providing secure accommodation are limited to the capital costs of the project, associated professional fees, and a contribution towards commissioning costs.

Kidney Patients

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are currently receiving dialysis treatment in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Dorrell: According to the latest information provided by the European Dialysis and Transplant Association, the number of people receiving dialysis in the United Kingdom as at 31 December 1990 was 8,857.

Hospital Finances

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the financial position of NHS hospitals.

Mr. Dorrell: Government revenue spending on the hospital and community health service is set to rise in real terms by 6·7 per cent. this year and by a further 5 per cent. next year, taking the total annual spend to £20 billion. The financial position of NHS hospitals is better than ever before.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

House of Commons Commission

Sir Geoffrey Howe: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will make a statement about the meeting of the House of Commons Commission held on Monday 18 November.

Mr. Beith: At its meeting on Monday 18 November the House of Commons Commission considered the recommendation in the Ibbs report that it should make its decisions more widely known. The Commission agreed that it would in future arrange for decisions which needed to be communicated to the House to be announced by means of a written answer shortly after the relevant meeting. In response to the same recommendation, the Commission instructed the Board of Management to draw up draft proposals for the form and content of annual reports from each Department of the House which will in future be appended to the annual report of the Commission.

At the same meeting, the Commission authorised Mr. Speaker to sign on its behalf a memorandum of understanding with the authorities of the House of Lords concerning the appointment of the Director of Works, the funding of his office, and the allocation of costs to the votes of the two Houses for the different types of work to be included in the parliamentary works programme.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Live Feed

Mr. Allen: To ask the Lord President of the Council whether the office of the Leader of the Opposition receives a live feed from the Chamber; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor: No. As I indicated to the hon. Member in my reply of 22 October 1991, *Official Report*, column *582*, the only Members currently authorised to receive a clean feed from the Chamber in their offices within the House are Mr. Speaker and the Chairman of Ways and Means.

SCOTLAND

Fish Farming Advisory Committee

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will instruct the Crown estate to make the minutes of the fish farming advisory committee and the chairman's report publicly available.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The advisory committee is an independent body, is not under the direction of the Crown estate, and is free to decide its own procedures. Minutes of the committee's proceedings are circulated to the bodies represented on the committee and it is open to members of the committee to disseminate information regarding the committee hearings to interested parties. The Crown estate's decision as to whether to grant a site lease is made available to interested parties and others, on request.

However, I am drawing the hon. Member's suggestion to the attention of the chairman of the committee, who will write to him in due course.

Mr. Macdonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the location, type of development, reasons for referral and date of all applications that have been referred to the Crown estate's fish farming advisory committee; and if he will include the committee's recommendations and the Crown estate's decision in each case.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is as follows:

Applications considered by the Crown Estate's fish farm advisory committee

Date of application considered by Advisory Committee	*Location*	*Type of development*	*Reason for referral*	*Committee recommendation*	*Crown Estate decision*
24 August 1990	West Loch, Tarbert, Harris	Salmon farming	Visual amenity	Application be approved	Accepted Committee's recommendation
27 August 1991	Loch Melfort, by Oban	Salmon farming	Wildlife conservation	Application be approved	Accepted Committee's recommendation

Craigtoun Hospital

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he is yet in a position to make a statement about the future of Craigtoun hospital.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Secretary of State has today approved Fife health board's proposal to close Craigtoun hospital, St. Andrews. The health board has upgraded St. Andrew's memorial hospital at a cost of £0·1 million in order to provide patients from Craigtoun with a better quality of care, including a higher standard of therapeutic and other services. The closure will release revenue of around £¼ million which will allow the board to make service improvements including developing community support to care for the elderly in north-east Fife.

Local Government

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he expects to announce his proposals for the re-organisation of Scotland's local government; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 25 November 1991]*: My right hon. Friend's timetable for comments on the first consultation document, "The Structure of Local Government in Scotland", has been extended to 31 December 1991. Thereafter, further consultations will be undertaken to establish the details of the new structure and whether any organisational and management changes are necessary.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Data Protection

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effect of the EC directive on data protection on charitable giving.

Mrs. Rumbold: In discussion with their European Community partners, the Government are seeking to ensure that the directive makes proper allowance for the needs of charities and other data users.

Dangerous Dogs

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the further action he proposes to take to control dangerous dogs.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Bradford South (Mr. Cryer) on 14 November, at columns *629-30*.

Shops (Thefts)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether the Metropolitan police are authorised to co-operate with retailers when thefts allegedly occur from their businesses while those businesses are at the time trading illegally;

(2) how many police officers have been involved in dealing with theft from retail and wholesale premises which themselves are trading in contravention of the law;

(3) what guidelines his Department has issued to police forces regarding their response to businesses who report alleged thefts from their premises, when those businesses are themselves open in contravention of the law.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No guidelines have been issued. The investigation of alleged criminal offences and the decision whether to initiate proceedings in a particular case are operational matters for the chief officer of the police force concerned. The Home Secretary has no authority to intervene.

Information about the number of police officers dealing with such incidents is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

It is the policy of the Metropolitan police service to investigate any allegation of crime, regardless of the legal status of the victim.

Police Funding

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to provide central Government funds to meet the costs of police activity for events other than those of a routine local nature.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. Central Government already meet a large proportion of policing costs, either directly through specific grant or indirectly through the revenue support grant system. It would be neither practicable nor desirable to extend further central funding in the way suggested.

Police Helicopters

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police forces have helicopters; how much approximately this costs; what arrangements there are for police helicopters to share RAF and Army bases, facilities and training; and if he will consider organising a police-led civilian helicopter fleet to assist fire and ambulance services as well as the police.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Some 16 police forces in England and Wales use helicopters, which are expected to cost about £7·5 million this year. Police helicopter operations are governed by Civil Aviation Authority regulations and meet civil rather than military training requirements. Forces may, however, make local arrangements to have access to military bases and facilities.

A study of police needs for air support, which was commissioned by the Home Office, has recommended that air support should be available to all forces. It concluded that the most effective and economic way of providing the service was by collaboration between police forces and with other emergency services. Discussions are in progress with the Association of Chief Police Officers, the local authority associations and with other emergency services on how best to take matters forward.

Metropolitan Police (Racial Discrimination)

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many allegations of racial discrimination have been made against the Metropolitan police by serving or ex-police officers in each year since 1985; how many settlements or awards there were in respect of such allegations in each of those years; what the total amount of such settlements or awards were in each of those years; and whether the Commissioner intends to take disciplinary action against officers against whom any of these allegations were made.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand that one allegation was made in 1986, one in 1987, two in 1990 and two in 1991. There have been two awards made in respect of the allegations: £20,000 in 1991, and £1,000 in 1990—this award was for victimisation, the original discrimination claim having been dismissed. Disciplinary investigations have either taken place, or are under way in respect of all the allegations; one officer has been disciplined under regulation 9 of the discipline code as a consequence.

Category A Prisoners (Escape)

Mr. Leadbitter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a further statement on the circumstances leading to the escape of category A prisoners Gerrard McAuley and Nessan Quinlivan, on the inquiry made by Judge Tumin and any consequential matters arising from his findings.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I announced on 5 August my acceptance of the recommendations in the report of Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons on the escape from Brixton prison on 7 July. Since then the inquiry conducted by Mr. Ralph Shuffrey and Mr. John Richardson on the disciplinary aspects has been completed and the action taken and its conclusions have been announced. I have received and am considering the report of the security audit conducted by Mr. Ronald Hadfield and Mr. Gordon Lakes. The chief constable of Staffordshire has invited the deputy chief constable of Nottinghamshire to investigate allegations made in the recent television programme "Thames Reports".

Broadcasting (Ethnic Minorities)

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of air time on television and radio is devoted to broadcasting on subjects of particular interest to each of the Indian, Pakistani, Turkish, Irish and Afro-Caribbean communities in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information is not available in the form requested. However material for ethnic minorities is produced by the BBC's Asian and Afro-Caribbean units

and broadcast by BBC radio and television. Independent local radio stations in six areas cater specifically for ethnic minorities. Channel 4 includes programmes for minorities, and ITV companies must include material calculated to appeal specially to the tastes and outlook of persons they serve. Other broadcast material will be of particular interest to various groups, regardless of their ethnic origin.

Mrs. R. N. Ojimadu

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will give a definitive response to the letter dated 20 August in respect of Mrs. R. N. Ojimadu, sent to him by the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate and acknowledged under reference 19908/91.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My private secretary wrote to my hon. Friend on 24 September 1991. The decision in this case is a matter for the entry clearance officer in Lagos.

Young Offenders

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons under the age of 16 years are currently being held in young offender institutions; how many teenagers are being so held; and how many teenagers are being so held for non-violent offences.

Mrs. Rumbold *[holding answer 26 November 1991]:* The readily available information is given in the table.

Population[1] aged under 20 in young offender institutions in England and Wales on 30 June 1991 by age and offence

Number of prisoners

Offence group	Age 14 and 15	16 to 19	14 to 19
Violence against the person	2	333	335
Sexual offences	—	65	65
Robbery	1	375	376
Other offences	26	1,400	1,426
Not recorded	38	914	952
In default of payment of a fine	—	23	23
All offences	67	3,110	3,177

[1] Provisional figures.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Social Fund

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answers of 18 November, *Official Report*, column *81*, and 5 November, *Official Report*, column *92*, if he will make inquiries to ascertain the number of districts currently paying social fund loans only where there is considered to be serious risk to health and safety.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants applied for grants or loans under the social fund during the financial year 1990-91 in each of the benefit offices dealing with the Sheffield, Heeley constituency; how many were turned down and for what reason; what was the average size of the grant, crisis loan or budgetary loan in the year; and if he will provide comparable figures for the first three months of 1991-92.

Mr. Scott: The administration of the social fund is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Benefits

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing for each uprating date since 1970 (i) the supplementary benefit basic single non-householders scale rate, or income support, for an adult aged under 25 years, (ii) the percentage increase in (i) for each uprating date compared with the previous uprating date, (iii) the percentage increase in the average gross weekly earnings of all adult males between each uprating date and (iv) the actual movement in the retail prices index for all items between uprating dates.

Miss Widdecombe: The figures requested are in the table. The earnings and retail prices index—RPI—percentages quoted in columns D and E are for the period between upratings. However, the uprating percentage itself is based on different periods; for the percentage increase in earnings and RPI over these I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 3 June at columns *116-18*.

A Benefit uprating date	B Benefit rate	C Percent increase in 'B'	D Earnings percent increase	E RPI percent increase
2 November 1970	4·15	—	—	—
20 September 1971	4·60	10·8	7·5	8·0
2 October 1972	5·20	13·0	15·7	8·5
1 October 1973	5·70	9·6	11·6	9·9
22 July 1974	6·70	17·5	14·2	13·5
7 April 1975	7·65	14·2	20·2	17·7
17 November 1975	8·70	13·7	11·5	11·7
15 November 1976	10·15	16·7	12·5	15·0
14 November 1977	11·60	14·3	9·3	13·0
13 November 1978	12·45	7·3	14·9	8·1
12 November 1979	14·65	17·7	19·1	17·4
24 November 1980	17·05	16·4	18·4	15·3
23 November 1981	18·60	9·1	10·7	12·0
22 November 1982	20·55	10·5	7·4	6·3
21 November 1983	21·45	4·4	7·3	4·8
26 November 1984	22·45	4·7	8·7	4·9
25 November 1985	23·60	5·1	6·5	5·5
28 July 1986	23·85	1·1	5·7	1·7
6 April 1987	24·35	2·1	6·2	4·4
11 April 1988	26·05	7·0	9·7	3·9
10 April 1989	27·40	5·2	9·6	8·0
9 April 1990	28·80	5·1	9·7	9·4
8 April 1991	31·15	8·2	7·9	6·4

Notes:

Column B—shows the Supplementary Benefit basic single non-householder scale rate for the years 1970-87. From April 1988 the figures are the Income Support basic personal allowance for a single person aged 18-24. No additions which might have been payable within Supplementary Benefit or Income Support premiums for special needs have been included. Nor has the non-householder addition paid to Supplementary Benefit claimants.

Column C—shows the percentage increase from one uprating date to the next. This will not necessarily reflect the uprating index for that year because of rounding. Also in the earlier years uprating was calculated by forecasting likely

changes in the RPI and this sometimes meant that adjustments has to be made the following year.

Column D—gives the percentage increase in the average gross weekly earnings of all adult males from the New Earnings Survey.

Column E—shows the actual movement in the Retail Price Index for all items between uprating dates.

Income Support

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing for each uprating date since 1970 (i) the rate of supplementary benefit or income support for a householder couple each aged over 25 years with two children aged six and 11 years, (ii) the percentage increase in (i) between each uprating date, (iii) the percentage increase in the average gross weekly earnings of all adult males between each uprating date and (iv) the actual movement in the retail prices index for all items between uprating dates.

Miss Widdecombe: The figures requested are in the table. The percentages quoted in columns D and E refer to the period between upratings. However the uprating percentage itself is based on different periods; for the percentage increase in earnings and retail prices index over these I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 3 June at columns *116-18*.

A *Benefit uprating date*	*B* *Benefit rate*	*C* *Percent increase in 'B'*	*D* *Earnings percent increase*	*E* *RPI percent increase*
2 November 1970	12·50	—	—	—
20 September 1971	13·90	11·2	7·5	8·0
2 October 1972	15·65	12·6	15·7	8·5
1 October 1973	17·10	9·3	11·6	9·9
22 July 1974	20·10	17·5	14·2	13·5
7 April 1975	23·00	14·4	20·2	17·7
17 November 1975	26·10	13·5	11·5	11·7
15 November 1976	30·35	16·3	12·5	15·0
14 November 1977	34·60	14·0	9·3	13·0
13 November 1978	37·10	7·2	14·9	8·1
12 November 1979	43·65	17·7	19·1	17·4
24 November 1980	52·80	21·0	18·4	15·3
23 November 1981	57·55	9·0	10·7	12·0
22 November 1982	63·60	10·5	7·4	6·3
21 November 1983	66·35	4·3	7·3	4·8
26 November 1984	69·50	4·7	8·7	4·9
25 November 1985	73·05	5·1	6·5	5·5
28 July 1986	73·90	1·2	5·7	1·7
6 April 1987	75·35	2·0	6·2	4·4
11 April 1988	78·30	3·9	9·7	3·9
10 April 1989	83·90	7·2	9·6	8·0
9 April 1990	88·20	5·1	9·7	9·4
8 April 1991	95·35	8·1	7·9	6·4

Notes:

Column B—shows the Supplementary Benefit scale rate for a couple aged over 25 with two children aged 6 and 11, for the period from 1970 to 1987. From April 1988 the figures are the Income Support rates for the same family composition. No additions which might have been payable within Supplementary Benefit or Income Support premiums have been included (ie: the Income Support figures exclude Family Premium).

Column C—shows the percentage increase from one uprating date to the next. This will not necessarily reflect the uprating index for that year because of rounding. Also in the earlier years uprating was calculated by forecasting likely changes in the RPI and this sometimes meant that adjustments had to be made the following year.

Column D—gives the percentage increase in the average gross weekly earnings of all adult males from the New Earnings Survey.

Column E—shows the actual movement in the Retail Price Index for all items between uprating dates.

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his estimate of the full financial year cost of providing severe disability premium to claimants who are prevented from claiming benefit under the recent change to regulation 3 of the Income Support (General) Regulations 1987.

Miss Widdecombe: It is not possible to estimate the number of people who might have tried to establish a commercial relationship with close relatives with whom they are living, and thereby gained entitlement to the premium, had the recent change referred to not been made. The unplanned expenditure avoided by the restoration of the policy intention of the premium through the amendment regulation is not therefore known.

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners over 65 years claimed income support in *(a)* 1987 and *(b)* 1990.

Miss Widdecombe: It is estimated that in May 1987 there were 1·63 million pensioner claimants over 65 years in receipt of supplementary benefit and in May 1990 there were 1·41 million pensioner claimants over 65 in receipt of income support.

Source: Annual statistical inquiries May 1987 and May 1990.

Disabled People

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the purpose of attendance allowance; and what other help is provided towards the additional costs incurred by disabled people as a result of their disability.

Mr. Scott: The purpose of attendance allowance is to help meet the extra costs of care and supervision for severely disabled people. A wide range of further benefits is available to disabled people according to their circumstances, including mobility allowance which is intended to help meet the extra costs of disabled people with mobility problems. From April 1992 mobility allowance and, for those becoming entitled before age 65, attendance allowance, will be replaced and significantly extended by the introduction of disability living allowance. Attendance allowance will remain for the over-65s.

Mobility and Disability Allowances

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out tables indicating, for the last 12 months for which figures are available, for appeals involving each of mobility allowance and disability allowance *(a)* the number of adjudicating officials involved and their costs, *(b)* the number of consequent social security appeals tribunals held and their costs, *(c)* the number of medical practitioners retained by his Department and their total costs, *(d)* the total costs of the social security commissioners also engaged in these cases, *(e)* the total number of appeals heard, *(f)* the total number of appeals granted and *(g)* the total costs of the awards made.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is as follows:

(a) The Mobility Allowance (Mob. A) appeals unit has a staff of six who are involved in the preparation of appeals for both Medical and Social Security Appeal Tribunals.

For Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA) the information is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

(b) The information is in the following table.

(c) The Department retains a total of between 6,000-6,500 medical practitioners at any one time. Figures are not available to show the numbers who work solely on Mobility Allowance and Severe Disablement Allowance.

Information on the cost of using medical practitioners is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

(d) I understand from the Lord Chancellor's Department that the information requested is not available.

(e) The information is in the following table.

(f) The information is in the following table.

(g) The information requested is not available.

	Mobility Allowance	*Severe Disablement Allowance*
Medical Appeal Tribunals appeals heard 12 months ending 31 March 1991	7,242	1,468
Appeals granted	2,552	589
Social Security Appeal Tribunals appeals heard 12 months ending 31 March 1991	1,612	142
Appeals granted	45	65
Average cost per Medical Appeal Tribunals appeal	189	[1]£n/a
Average cost per Social Security Appeal Tribunals appeal	188	[1]£n/a

[1] This information is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Benefits (Administrative Costs)

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing administrative costs, including advertising, as percentages of benefit expenditure for in each of: child benefit, family credit, national insurance retirement pension; national insurance invalidity benefits; national insurance unemployment benefit and income support.

Mr. Jack: The latest available information is in table 31 of the departmental report "Social Security—The Government's Expenditure Plans 1991-92 to 1993-94"—Cm 1514—a copy of which is available in the Library.

Disability Benefits

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what arrangements have been made to make information about the disability living allowance and disability working allowance available to visually impaired people.

Mr. Scott: The Department is planning a carefully targeted and comprehensive publicity campaign for the two new benefits—disability living allowance and disability working allowance, with the help of disabled people and their organisations. Initial information about the new benefits has already been issued to organisations of and for disabled people, including those representing visually impaired people.

We are paying particular attention to the needs of visually impaired people in planning the information campaign. The leaflet "DS701 New Benefits for Disabled People" which was issued to disability organisations in November has already been transferred on to tape and we are also exploring the possibility of making both tape and braille versions available of the disability living allowance, attendance allowance and disability working allowance leaflets which will be issued next year to provide information about the qualifying conditions of the new benefits. We also intend that any broadcast material produced by the Department will provide full information aurally as well as visually.

The claim packs for the new benefits are being designed with visually impaired people in mind, featuring larger print sizes than normally used by the Department together with colours which enable people to read the text more clearly. In addition, the freephone benefit inquiry line for people with disabilities will provide versions of the claim forms in braille for blind people, and we are exploring with RNIB the possibility of producing an audio tape to assist partially sighted people with the completion of claim forms.

We shall continue to consult organisations representing visually impaired people to ensure that their information needs about the new benefits are met.

Resettlement Units

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will suspend the resettlement unit closure programme until regional review teams are reconstituted and the national advisory steering group is reconvened.

Miss Widdecombe: We have no plans to do so.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consultations he undertakes to assess what alternatives exist before approving the closure of a resettlement unit.

Miss Widdecombe: The resettlement unit disengagement programme has been built on advice from regional review teams which comprise of local people with an interest in, or experience of the problems of homelessness among single people without a settled way of life. They have identified facilities necessary to enable specific resettlement units to be replaced. Where units are closed the Government have to be satisfied that the proposed new hostels are suitable and that the number of replacement beds is at least the same as the number of beds in normal use in the resettlement unit.

Disability Appeal Tribunals

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what arrangements have been made to enable visually impaired people to participate fully as lay members of disability appeal tribunals.

Mr. Scott: The Disability Living Allowance and Disability Working Allowance Act 1991 requires that every disability appeal tribunal must include one person who is experienced in dealing with the needs of disabled people, either in a professional or voluntary capacity, or because they are themselves disabled. The Act also provides that in considering the appointments to the panels from which disability appeal tribunal members are drawn, the president of the independent tribunal service shall have regard to the desirability of appointing disabled persons.

Responsibility for the administrative arrangements for disability appeal tribunals lies with the president of the

independent tribunal service, His Honour Judge Holden, and the hon. Member may wish to contact his office direct to obtain further information.

Contaminated Blood

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to introduce special benefits for non-haemophiliacs who have received transfusions of blood contaminated with the HIV virus.

Mr. Scott: We have no such plans.

National Insurance

Sir Ian Gilmour: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing the upper and lower earnings levels for national insurance contributions in each year since 1978, *(a)* at current prices, *(b)* at constant 1991 prices and *(c)* as percentages of average earnings; and if he will estimate the proportion of wage and salary earners who have to pay national insurance contributions under this system.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is in the table. It is estimated that 85 per cent. of employees pay national insurance contributions.

Weekly Upper Earnings Level	*Current Prices*	*April 1991 Prices*[1]	*April 1991 Prices Average*[1,2]	*As a Percentage of Average Earnings*[3]
April 1978	120·00	323·79	312·67	134·7
April 1979	135·00	330·93	304·38	133·1
April 1980	165·00	332·20	319·20	133·3
April 1981	200·00	359·40	347·00	142·4
April 1982	220·00	361·33	356·30	142·4
April 1983	235·00	371·11	363·67	142·7
April 1984	250·00	375·38	368·29	139·8
April 1985	265·00	372·15	368·48	137·7
April 1986	285·00	388·39	384·08	137·4
April 1987	295·00	385·70	382·28	131·7
April 1988	305·00	383·70	373·01	124·1
April 1989	325·00	378·46	368·67	120·6
April 1990	350·00	372·38	361·94	118·4
April 1991	390·00	390·0	—	122·3
Weekly Lower Earnings Level				
April 1978	17·50	47·22	45·60	19·6
April 1979	19·50	47·80	43·97	19·2
April 1980	23·00	46·31	44·49	18·6
April 1981	27·00	48·52	46·84	19·2
April 1982	29·50	48·45	47·78	19·1
April 1983	32·50	51·32	50·29	19·7
April 1984	34·00	51·05	50·09	19·0
April 1985	35·50	49·85	49·36	18·5
April 1986	38·00	51·79	51·21	18·3
April 1987	39·00	50·99	50·54	17·4
April 1988	41·00	51·58	50·14	16·7
April 1989	43·00	50·07	48·78	16·0
April 1990	46·00	48·94	47·57	15·6
April 1991	52·00	52·00	—	16·3

[1] Using the general index of retail prices
[2] The average is calculated over the period for which the level is applicable
[3] Using average weekly estimates of all adult males derived from the Department of Employment's New Earnings Survey.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 4 December 1991

EMPLOYMENT

Labour Statistics

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what estimate has been made of the effect upon the unemployment and employment figures of the 1988 change in the definition of full-time work from 30 hours to 24 hours for benefit purposes.

Mr. Forth: It was estimated at the time that the net effect on the monthly claimant unemployment statistics would have been small. The definition of full-time work used in the employment series remains at 30 hours per week, as it has for the last 45 years and, therefore, the employment figures were unaffected.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what estimate he has made of the change there will be to the unemployment figures as a result of the redefinition of full-time work for income support purposes from 24 hours to 16 hours; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The effect on the monthly claimant unemployment statistics is likely to be small, as those affected would have to be working for between 16 and 24 hours a week while signing on at an unemployment benefit office. Moreover, it does not necessarily follow that these people will cease to appear in the figures.

English Teaching

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what sums are available and projected for the current financial year, and the next two financial years, for the training, enterprise and education directorate; when it is proposed to release finance to fund student course fees and expenses for the current term for English for speakers of other languages; how many ESOL students there are in England and Wales for the current year; what are his projections for the following two years; what were the sums available and expended in each of the last two years; and how many students were assisted.

Mr. Forth: Total planned expenditure in Great Britain on programmes administered by the Department's training, enterprise and education directorate is £2·9 billion in 1991-92, £2·8 billion in 1992-93 and £2·8 billion in 1993-94.

Support for English for speakers of other languages —ESOL—is provided as an integral part of the Department's training and enterprise programmes. The planning and delivery of these programmes is now the responsibility of training and enterprise councils and is determined by local needs and priorities. Information on expenditure and numbers trained is not separately identified.

Self-employment

Mr. Cabom: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are self-employed in *(a)* Sheffield and *(b)* the United Kingdom, giving figures from 1987 to date.

Mr. Forth: Self-employed figures are not available below standard region for the dates specified. Self-employed figures for the United Kingdom are as follows:

Self-employed in the United Kingdom

	Thousands
1987	
March	2,808
June	2,869
September	2,900
December	2,932
1988	
March	2,963
June	2,998
September	3,062
December	3,126
1989	
March	3,190
June	3,253
September	3,264
December	3,274
1990	
March	3,284
June	[1]3,298

[1]The figures for June 1990 are carried forward for later dates pending the results of the 1991 Labour Force Survey.

Enterprise Allowance

Mr. Cabom: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what types of business have been created by the enterprise allowance, broken down by standard industrial classification, or by manufacturing, construction, transport and distribution, retail, private services, and other, giving details for *(a)* Sheffield and *(b)* the United Kingdom.

Mr. Forth: Information on the numbers of new businesses started through the enterprise allowance scheme, broken down by the slightly modified standard industrial classification used for this scheme, is given in the following table.

The figures are for the year ending 31 March 1991 and cover Great Britain only. A similar scheme operates in Northern Ireland, but the Employment Department does not collect information on this. Separate information for the Sheffield area is not available.

Industrial classification of EAS businesses— 1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991—United Kingdom

Category	*Total*	*Percentage*
Agriculture, forest, fish	2,266	3·76
Manufacturing	8,259	13·69
Construction	7,608	12·62
Distribution and retail	9,387	15·57
Hotel and catering	1,592	2·64
Repair of goods	2,565	4·25
Transport	2,435	4·04
Business services	7,717	12·80
Other services	17,338	28·75
Not classified	1,140	1·88
Grand Totals	60,307	100·00

Mr. Cabom: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of business start-ups the

enterprise allowance constitutes for each year from 1987 to date, giving figures for *(a)* Sheffield and *(b)* the United Kingdom.

Mr. Forth: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people have been on the enterprise allowance scheme each year from 1987 to date, giving figures for *(a)* Sheffield and *(b)* the United Kingdom.

Mr. Forth: The numbers of people joining the enterprise allowance scheme are recorded in financial years, as shown in the following table. The figures cover Great Britain only: a similar scheme operates in Northern Ireland, but the Employment Department does not collect information on this.

Enterprise allowance scheme participants 1987 to 1991

Year	Sheffield	Great Britain
1987-88	1,712	106,305
1988-89	1,686	98,522
1989-90	1,206	77,886
1990-91	770	60,307
1991-92	[1]438	[2]27,195

[1] Up to 4 November 1991.
[2] Up to 30 September 1991, which is the latest date for which comprehensive Great Britain information is available.

Mr. Caborn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the success rates for businesses started on enterprise allowance for each year from 1987 to date, giving figures for *(a)* Sheffield and *(b)* the United Kingdom.

Mr. Forth: The table shows the proportion of enterprise allowance scheme businesses which completed a full year on the scheme. A 1988 survey of a sample of EAS businesses begun in March and April of 1987 showed that 76 per cent. of businesses in Great Britain were still trading six months after completing a full year on the scheme. Information specific to Sheffield is not available from this survey.

Enterprise allowance businesses completing a full year on the scheme

Year	[1]Great Britain percentage	[2]Sheffield/ Rotherham percentage
1987-88	83·44	n/a
1988-89	83·84	83·06
1989-90	82·63	83·53

[1] The figures given are for Great Britain only: a similar scheme operates in Northern Ireland but the Employment Department does not collect information on this.
[2] Sheffield and Rotherham were covered by the same field office at this time and the figures cannot be separated out to give information on Sheffield only.

Success rates for businesses started in 1990-91 will not be known until the end of the 1991-92 financial year.

Bank Holidays

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to abolish the bank holiday at the beginning of May and replace it with a bank holiday on St. George's day; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has no such plans.

Skills Training Agency

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he intends to offer any financial assistance to former civil servants who were transferred to TICC Ltd. on the privatisation of the Skills Training Agency, and were unable to obtain redundancy payments due to them when the company went into liquidation.

Mr. Howard: When TICC purchased, in May 1990, the four skillcentres at St. Helens, Accrington, Cumbria and Ipswich, it undertook to ensure that the staff transferred to it from my Department maintained an entitlement, through their new contracts of employment, to redundancy payments at civil service rates. TICC is contractually bound to do this and I have no legal responsibility of any kind towards the company's staff. I recognise, however, that the collapse of the company without the financial resources to meet its contractual obligations has left its staff who transferred from the civil service with no more than statutory redundancy payments. Under these special circumstances I have decided to offer an ex-gratia payment to these former civil servants. The payments will be made as soon as possible. They will be the equivalent of the amount each member of staff would have received had they been made redundant at the time of the sale to TICC rather than transferred to that company, less what each person has already received by way of statutory payment from the national insurance fund.

WALES

Salmon (River Taff)

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made in re-introducing salmon to the River Taff; and if we will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The National Rivers Authority has been carrying out a programme, started in 1985 by the Welsh water authority, to reinstate salmon to the River Taff. This work has included the control of pollution, the construction of fish passes on weirs, the transfer of adult salmon to suitable spawning grounds, controlling illegal fishing and improving fish habitat. In addition the river has been stocked with over 100,000 juvenile salmon. The success of the programme is demonstrated by the numbers of adult salmon returning to the Taff. In 1990, 195 salmon were reported caught from the Taff, whereas prior to 1983 very few salmon had been recorded in the river this century.

Cancer Treatment, North Wales

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what progress has been made on the implementation of the recommendations of the Deloitte, Haskins and Sells report on cancer treatment services in north Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I am currently considering the far-reaching implications of the Deloitte, Haskins and Sells report in the light of the responses to consultation. We hope to announce our decision on the further development of the service before too long.

Tranquillisers

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of drugs prescribed by the NHS in Wales were tranquillisers; what was the cost; and what proportion that was of the total cost of drugs in *(a)* 1974, *(b)* 1979 and *(c)* at the latest available date.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Information on drugs which are solely tranquillisers could be obtained only at disproportionate cost for years succeeding 1974. The available information is given in the table.

	1974	*1979*	*1989*
Proportion of Total Prescriptions			
Tranquillisers	7·3	n/a	n/a
Sedatives and tranquillisers	n/a	6·9	2·8
Anti-depressants and sedative/tranquilliser combinations	n/a	0·4	0·1
Cost (Net Ingredient—£ Thousands)			
Tranquillisers	630·3	n/a	n/a
Sedatives and tranquillisers	n/a	1,546	1,376
Anti-depressants and sedative/tranquilliser combinations	n/a	192·0	84·0
Proportion of Total Net Ingredient Cost			
Tranquillisers	4·7	n/a	n/a
Sedatives and tranquillisers	n/a	3·9	1·0
Anti-depressants and sedative/tranquilliser combinations	n/a	0·5	0·1

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he expects to respond to the request for the minutes to be made public of the meeting on 26 June 1991 at the Welsh Office, Cathyas Park building between his groundwater consultant and representatives of Cardiff Residents Against the Barrage.

Mr. David Hunt: I have already responded to the hon. Gentleman in my letter of 18 November indicating that no formal minutes of the meeting were kept for external circulation. That letter also offered a response on any specific query.

Mr. Gwylim Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are his latest estimates of the investment by the Exchequer and by the free enterprise sector that has already been made and will be made in the future into the Cardiff bay barrage and the regeneration of south Cardiff; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Government grant in aid to Cardiff Bay development corporation between April 1987 and March 1991 was £92·4 million, of which £43·8 million was for land acquisition. The subsequent sale of this land as fully serviced sites will realise far more than £43·8 million, thus reducing the total public sector input. A further £32·3 million is being made available this year. Total private sector investment under way or firmly committed between April 1987 and March 1991 was over £250 million.

The planning update and economic appraisal statement, prepared in January 1990, estimated that the total cost to the public sector of a development strategy including a barrage would be £335 million over a 15 or 20-year period. It also estimated that, over the same period, private sector investment would be nearly £1,600 million.

Water Rights (River Taff)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he anticipates concluding negotiations with the chairman of Cardiff Bay development corporation and Associated British Ports concerning a reassessment of Associated British Ports' abstraction rights to water from the River Taff at Blackweir; if he will place a copy of his correspondence thereon with the Wales division of the National Rivers Authority in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Any negotiations with Associated British Ports about its abstraction rights would be a commercial matter for Cardiff Bay development corporation. It would not be appropriate to publish any associated correspondence.

NHS Consultants

Mr. Gwylim Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the average income of consultants with the health service in Wales, at the latest available date and for each of the last five years.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The average income of consultants with the health service in Wales, exclusive of any income which they may derive from private practice, was as follows:

	£
1986-87	38,695
1987-88	41,729
1988-89	44,723
1989-90	46,962
1990-91[1]	50,945

[1] Provisional.

Source: Health Authority Annual Accounts
Annual Medical and Dental Census.

Note: Includes Consultant Distinction Awards and Locums.

Mr. Gwylim Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how merit awards for consultants with the health service in Wales are determined.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: In October 1990, the Department, together with the Department of Health, produced a leaflet explaining how the NHS distinction and meritorious service awards scheme works. The scheme was established in 1948 following a recommendation that specialists should be able to feel that more than ordinary ability would be rewarded giving them the opportunity to earn incomes comparable with the highest that could be earned in other professions.

Distinction awards are made on the recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Distinction Awards. The committee approaches its regional network of committees, the royal college and faculties, the Public Health Laboratory Service, the Medical Research Council and regional specialist advisers for nominations. The chairman of the committee then visits each regional committee between May and September to discuss their recommendations and all the nominations received from other sources in order to draw up a provisional list for the consideration and final decision of the advisory committee.

There are four levels of awards: C, B, A and A+. There is a regional C awards committee in each region which is responsible for drawing up nominations for C awards and in Wales this is chaired by the director of NHS Wales.

The system has been modified over the years and while there are no formal criteria for awards the committee looks for certain qualities including clinical excellence, research, improvement to the service and teaching and training when drawing its conclusions.

I have placed a copy of the explanatory leaflet in the Library of the House for my hon. Friend's attention.

Employment Action

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people in Wales are engaged in employment action, given by each county.

Mr. David Hunt: Information on employment action participation is not yet available centrally.

Roadside Trees and Hedges

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will institute a survey by his highways and transportation department of the A5 trunk road with a view to ensuring the safety of roadside trees and hedges in relation to caravan transporters and other wide vehicles; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will institute a survey by his highways and transportation department of the A483 road with a view to ensuring the safety of roadside trees and hedges in relation to caravan transporters and other wide vehicles; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will institute a survey by his highways and transportation department of the A470 road with a view to ensuring the safety of roadside trees and hedges in relation to caravan transporters and other wide vehicles; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: A study on the general condition of planting on these and other trunk roads in the Principality was put in hand earlier this year. The fieldwork has largely been completed, but the data collected have still to be fully analysed. The finished study will allow measures to be taken to ensure the future safety of roadside trees and hedges in relation to such vehicles.

Secure Unit

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether the new secure unit in Wales will attract full Government grant in respect of both capital and revenue costs.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The full capital cost of providing a new unit as recommended in the report on the review of secure care in Wales will be met by the Welsh Office.

The report recommends that costs should be met through charges incurred by placing agencies, including the Welsh Office, where young people given a custodial sentence are placed there.

Mental Handicap

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy that the all-Wales strategy for mental handicap shall be pursued through a 10-year strategy with annual targets for the provision of health, housing and the support services for each county in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: My right hon. Friend published, on 1 August 1991, for a period of public consultation, his proposals for the future of the all-Wales strategy. Copies are available in the Library of the House. These make it clear that the strategy will continue for as long as it is needed, with the Welsh Office continuing to agree annual targets for service development with each county joint planning team.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Shops (Thefts)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been arrested in each of the last four years for theft from shops which at the time were themselves trading illegally.

Mr. John Patten: Information on arrests and convictions is not held centrally for shoplifting offences in these circumstances.

Exotic Birds

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on thefts of exotic bird species in the United Kingdom over the last 10 years.

Mr. John Patten: There is no information available centrally.

Disabled Staff

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many disabled people are currently employed in his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The Home Office currently employs 183 registered disabled persons, which represents some 0·4 per cent. of the total number of staff. No record is kept of staff with disabilities who have chosen not to register. Specific targets have been set in the last two years to increase the number of staff with disabilities employed in the Department.

Sunday Trading

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make it his policy to accept the REST proposals as the basis for achieving consensus on rationalising Sunday trading legislation.

Mrs. Rumbold: As I said in my statement on 27 November at columns 919-927, it would not be sensible to settle policy on the merits of proposals to restrict trading in types of classes of goods until the compatibility of such measures with Community law has been determined. The REST proposals are in this category.

Police Station (Oakham)

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will make a statement on the progress of the building of the new police station at Oakham, Rutland.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Building work on the new police station at Oakham started in April this year at an approved cost of £1·125 million, and is scheduled to be completed and ready for occupation in November 1991.

Committal Proceedings

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the reasons committal proceedings involving alleged offences by police officers following miscarriages of justice are taken in Bow Street magistrates court when the alleged offences arise outside the Metropolitan area.

Mr. John Patten: Magistrates courts have jurisdiction to deal with committal proceedings for indictable offences wherever they are alleged to have occurred. In some instances, the case will be heard in London, for the convenience of all the parties. In those circumstances committal proceedings will usually take place at Bow Street magistrates court.

Brixton Prison

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether all postal packages for prisoners at Brixton prison are routinely checked by *(a)* X-ray detectors and *(b)* metal detectors.

Mrs. Rumbold: All postal packages are checked by X-ray and by metal detectors in appropriate cases. They are also opened and their contents are examined.

Domestic Rates

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many summonses, at 31 March and 30 September, in each year from 1984 to 1989 had been issued nationally for non-payment of domestic rates.

Mr. John Patten: The Home Office does not collect such information.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what have been the overtime budgets available to the Metropolitan police in the four quarters of 1990 and the first three quarters of 1991.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the Commissioner that the information is not available in the form requested, because overtime budgets are fixed on a financial year rather than a quarterly basis. However, the actual amounts of overtime incurred by the Metropolitan police for the periods in question are as follows:

	Police	*Civil staff*	*Traffic wardens*
	£	£	£
1990			
January—March	19,775,000	3,608,000	275,000
April—June	15,646,000	3,701,000	308,000
July—September	14,835,000	3,333,000	242,000
October—December	16,144,000	4,138,000	447,000
1991			
January—March	18,262,000	4,129,000	358,000
April—June[1]	17,241,000	4,077,000	393,000
July—September[1]	16,813,000	4,339,000	460,000

[1]Provisional out-turn.

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what were the numbers of persons *(a)* arrested and *(b)* charged by the Metropolitan police in 1989, 1990 and the first three quarters of 1991.

Mr. John Patten: The information available is for notifiable offences and is normally provided for 12-month periods only. It has been supplied by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis and is contained in the following table:

Number of persons arrested and charged in the Metropolitan Police District for notifiable offences

Period	*Arrested*	*Charged*
1989	111,420	85,323
1990	116,865	86,107
12 months to September 1991	115,788	84,974

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases in each police authority area were recharged by police following discharge by magistrates where the Crown prosecution service has been unable to provide sets of papers at the appropriate time.

Mr. John Patten: This information is not available.

Police Vehicle Accidents

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on the number of fatal accidents involving motor vehicles driven by police in the course of their duties which have occurred since 1 January 1991.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information for 1991 is not yet available centrally.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on disciplinary action taken against police officers involved in accidents caused by police vehicles in each of the last three years.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: This information is not available and could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Kevin Bardsley

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will refer the case involving the constituent of the hon. Member for Meriden, Mr. Kevin Bardsley, Home Office reference PDP B19156/8/1, previously of Frankland prison, to judicial review in view of concern about the accuracy of evidence and testimony.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 2 December 1991]:* My right hon. Friend has the power, under section 17 of the Criminal Appeal Act 1968, to refer a conviction to the Court of Appeal, but he would normally do so only if presented with new evidence or a consideration of substance which had not been before the courts and which appeared to cast doubt on the safety of the conviction. Representations about Mr. Bardsley's case have been considered on a number of occasions, but in the absence of anything new that appears to touch the safety of the conviction, so far we have not found any grounds to justify intervention.

ENERGY

Disabled Staff

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many disabled people are currently employed in his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: At 1 June 1991, a total of 13 members of my Department's staff—1·36 per cent. were registered disabled persons.

My Department's staff also included at this date other people with disabilities who had chosen not to register. No separate records are kept of unregistered disabled people.

IAEA Safeguards

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when Her Majesty's Government received a copy of the latest annual safeguards implementation report prepared by the International Atomic Energy Agency; and whether the full report is available for public scrutiny in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My officials received a copy of the IAEA's safeguards implementation report in June. The IAEA concluded that the nuclear material under their safeguards in 1990 remained in peaceful nuclear activities. The detailed report is confidential; however, a summary of it is contained in the IAEA's 1990 annual report. A copy of the annual report has been placed in the Library of the House.

United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what external financing limit has been set for the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority for 1992-93.

Mr. Wakeham: The United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority's external financing limit for 1992-93 will be £17·9 million.

Research Expenditure

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will give for each year from 1979-80 to 1992-93 inclusive the spending or proposed spending on research funded by his Department into *(a)* coal technology, *(b)* nuclear power, *(c)* energy efficiency and *(d)* renewables expressing these figures in (i) money terms, (ii) 1991-92 real terms and (iii) as a percentage of his Department's total research expenditure.

Mr. Wakeham *[holding answer 21 November 1991]:* Figures for the years up to and including 1991-92 are as follows. Figures for 1992-93 are not yet available but will be published in the Department of Energy's departmental report in February 1992.

(a) Coal technology

	Money terms	*£ million 1991-92 real terms*	*Percentage of total research and development expenditure*
1979-80	1·8	4·2	1·0
1980-81	2·7	5·3	1·2
1981-82	4·9	8·8	2·1
1982-83	3·4	5·7	1·4
1983-84	3·4	5·4	1·4
1984-85	0·9	1·4	0·4
1985-86	0·8	1·2	0·4
1986-87	1·9	2·7	1·0
1987-88	1·4	1·9	0·8
1988-89	0·9	1·1	0·5
1989-90	1·7	2·0	1·0
1990-91	11·4	12·2	6·9
1991-92	2·6	2·6	1·9

(b) Nuclear power

	Money terms	*£ million 1991-92 real terms*	*Percentage of total R and D expenditure*
1979-80	145·5	338·3	83·6
1980-81	188·0	369·2	84·7
1981-82	203·2	363·9	85·1
1982-83	212·4	355·1	86·9
1983-84	203·8	325·7	85·7
1984-85	196·2	298·6	84·6
1985-86	189·6	273·4	85·4
1986-87	159·7	222·9	83·0
1987-88	141·0	186·7	79·9
1988-89	159·3	196·9	83·8
1989-90	135·9	157·6	78·0
1990-91	132·8	142·1	71·1
1991-92	92·9	92·9	68·1

(c) Energy efficiency

	Money terms	*£ million 1991-92 real terms*	*Percentage of total R and D expenditure*
1979-80	1·4	3·3	0·8
1980-81	3·1	6·1	1·4
1981-82	2·5	4·5	1·0
1982-83	[1]4·5	7·5	1·8
1983-84	[1]7·0	11·2	2·9
1984-85	[1]6·2	9·4	2·7
1985-86	3·3	4·8	1·5
1986-87	3·8	5·3	2·0
1987-88	4·1	5·4	2·3
1988-89	2·9	3·6	1·5
1989-90	8·2	9·5	4·7
1990-91	11·0	11·8	5·9
1991-92	12·4	12·4	9·1

(d) Renewables

	Money terms	*£ million 1991-92 real terms*	*Percentage of total R and D expenditure*
1979-80	8·2	19·1	4·7
1980-81	11·3	22·2	5·1
1981-82	15·3	27·4	8·4
1982-83	12·7	21·2	5·2
1983-84	11·9	19·0	5·0
1984-85	14·9	22·7	6·4
1985-86	13·6	19·6	6·1
1986-87	12·5	17·4	6·5
1987-88	16·1	21·3	9·1
1988-89	16·3	20·1	8·6
1989-90	17·9	20·8	10·3
1990-91	20·8	22·2	11·2
1991-92	24·0	24·0	17·6

Notes:

1. 1979-80 and 1980-81 figures include some non-R & D expenditure.

2. 1981-82 to 1988-89 are taken from the "Annual Review of Government Funded R & D". These figures relate essentially to

Frascati R & D and take no account of technology transfer and dissemination expenditure (with the exception of asterisked energy efficiency figures).

3. 1989-90 and 1990-91 figures are final outturn and do include technology transfer and dissemination expenditure.

4. 1991-92 figures are taken from Main Supply Estimates and also include technology transfer and dissemination expenditure.

TRANSPORT

Waterways

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultation took place, before the Transport and Works Bill was presented to Parliament, with the Inland Waterways Association, Inland Waterways Amenities Advisory Council, and other waterways and canal users' organisations.

Mr. McLoughlin: No formal consultation has taken place, but we are ready to meet representatives of inland waterways' interest groups to discuss the Bill at any time. The main provisions are based on proposals set out in the Government's consultation document "Private Bills and New Procedures"—Cm. 1110—published in June last year.

Light Dues

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had about the compatibility of maintenance of shipping light dues levied on merchant ships with the United Kingdom's obligations under the treaty of Rome, articles 75(a) and 95; what conclusions he has reached; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: As a service charge light dues do not conflict with the treaty of Rome. My right hon. Friend has had no discussions on paragraph 1(a) of article 75 or on article 95 in relation to light dues, but the attention of the Transport Council and the Commission has been drawn to inconsistency in the application of the "user pays" principle within the Community. This principle is recognised and accepted in relation to civil aviation navigation systems, but is not yet generally applied to marine navigation systems.

Oil Tanker Spillage (The Minch)

Mr. Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if his Department has assessed the environmental consequences of an oil tanker spillage in the Minch; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: My Department's marine pollution control unit—MPCU—maintains a national contingency plan for dealing with marine pollution all round the United Kingdom coast. This plan reflects a continuously updated assessment of the economic and environmental consequences of oil spillages and other incidents and is supported by local authority plans, developed with help from the MPCU. The national contingency plan is exercised regularly and in 1990 the chosen area was the Minch.

In Scotland, the MPCU is advised by the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland on the effects of oil pollution incidents on wildlife and has arrangements to call it in when a spillage occurs which may affect wildlife. It is similarly advised on fisheries by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Scotland. To help with contingency planning, the MPCU commissioned the production of 77 maps identifying all sensitive wildlife areas—including the Minch and the western side of the Outer Hebrides—on the coast of Great Britain which are vulnerable to oil pollution.

I recently visited the Minch and I am very well aware of the economic and ecological importance of avoiding oil spillages there. The Minch is not heavily used by laden tankers. A deep-water route has been designated on the Atlantic side of the Hebrides and a notice to mariners asks that all laden tankers over 10,000 gross registered tonnes use it unless conditions make it unsafe to do so. The object of this arrangement is to keep large oil cargoes out of the Minch except when the environmental and safety risks of using the outer route are greater.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Knife amnesties

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Attorney-General what recent discussions he has had with the Crown prosecution service on the operation of knife amnesties; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: For good administrative reasons the nature of my discussions with the Director of Public Prosecutions is confidential.

Domicile Law

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Attorney-General when he intends to present a Bill on domicile following the recommendations of the Law Commission.

The Attorney-General: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North-East (Mr. Malins) on 17 October, *Official Report*, column *177*.

Probate Registry, Cardiff

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Attorney-General what representations he has had concerning the removal of historic fixtures and fittings from the probate registry, Cardiff road, Llandaff, Cardiff; what steps he proposes to take to prevent repetition of such removal; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: No representations have been received other than the comments made about the probate registry in the report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, "Upkeep of Historic Buildings on the Historic Estate" of November 1991. The Lord Chancellor's Department assumed responsibility for the upkeep of this building on 1 April 1991, from the Department of the Environment. It intends to follow the criteria for obtaining value for money in maintaining historic buildings set out in appendix 1 of the report. In particular, it will ensure that consultation procedures with the statutory conservation authorities are fully observed before the commencement of maintenance or improvement work of its historic buildings.

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Attorney-General whether he will list by crime category the number of cases in each of the last three years where cases have been discharged by magistrates courts as a result of the Crown prosecution service being unable to provide sets of papers at the appropriate time; and if he will give the total number of such cases in each year.

The Attorney-General: The monitoring of instances where inability to meet court deadlines results in discharge of the proceedings is a responsibility of local managers within the CPS. They liaise closely with the police service to ensure that such occurrences are kept to a minimum. Central records are not maintained. Implementation of the recommendations of the working group on pre-trial issues in accordance with my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster, North (Sir J. Wheeler) on 21 February 1991 should greatly improve the ability of the CPS to provide sets of papers at the appropriate time and reduce the incidence of cases being discharged by magistrates.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

The Gulf

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the medical and food stocks intended for the Gulf have since been distributed as humanitarian aid; what measures are taken to ensure that such aid reaches its intended recipients; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: We are supporting the UN, British and Iraqi relief agencies in providing humanitarian aid, including medical and food supplies, to vulnerable groups in Iraq. We have spent some £44 million since April this year. We maintain regular contact with all these agencies, which monitor distribution within Iraq.

Third World Debt

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to press the World bank and the International Monetary Fund to ensure that debt reduction schemes negotiated under the Brady plan produce increased debt relief for debtor countries.

Mrs. Chalker: We welcome the increasing use of deals negotiated under the Brady intiative, which allows the IMF and World bank to devote some of their lending programme to facilitate commercial debt reduction. The amount of assistance given is decided on a case-by-case basis. Progress in negotiations between debtors and bank creditors is closely monitored by the relevant financial institution.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made by his Department to the four main United Kingdom clearing banks concerning the implementation of the Brady plan.

Mrs. Chalker: Arrangements for dealing with commercial bank debt must be a matter for the banks and debtors to negotiate between themselves. Governments of creditor countries should not dictate to banks—not least because of the impact this could have on developing countries' prospects of future private sector financing, but we continue to urge comparability of treatment between official and commercial debt.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to press for the extension of the Toronto agreement on debt relief to cover very poor countries outside Africa.

Mrs. Chalker: Countries are considered for Toronto terms on a case-by-case basis. The criteria are poverty, degree of indebtedness and whether an IMF-approved economic reform programme is in place. An applicant's past track record on debt servicing is also taken into account. Geographical location is not considered and two countries outside Africa—Bolivia and Guyana—have already benefited from Toronto terms.

Brazil

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will supply *(a)* a list of the projects now approved under the memorandum on technical and scientific co-operation signed between Britain and Brazil in 1989, together with a list of project managers and institutes or consultancy organisations involved in each and *(b)* similar details for the projects currently under consideration by the British and Brazilian Governments, together with expected dates of approval.

Mrs. Chalker: The information requested is as follows:

Approved Projects	*Project Manager*	*Institution or Consultancy Organisations involved*
1. Anglo-Brazilian Climate Observation Study	Institute of Hydrology	*(a)* Instituto de Pesquisas Espaciais (Brazilian Space Research Institute) *(b)* Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas da Amazonia (Brazilian National Research Institute for Amazonia) *(c)* Centre for Nuclear Energy in Agriculture, Brazil.
2. Caxiuana Research Station	Museu Paraense Emilio Goeldi	Instituto Brasileiro do Meio Ambiente (Brazilian Environment and Natural Resources Institute)
3. Forestry Development of Aromatic Plants and Essential Oils	Natural Resources Institute	*(a)* Museu Paraense Emilio Goeldi *(b)* Faculdade de Ciencias Agrarais do Para (Faculty of Agriculture of the Federal University of Para) *(c)* Institute of Terrestrial Ecology.

Approved Projects	Project Manager	Institution or Consultancy Organisations involved
4. Recife Environmental Control Project	British Council	(a) Companhia Pernambucana de Control de Polucao Ambiental e de Administracao do Recursos Hidricos (Pernambuco State Agency for Pollution Control) (b) Universidade Federal de Pernambuco (Federal University of Pernambuco) (c) Instituto Techologico do Estado de Pernambuco (Pernambuco State Institute of Technology) (d) Environmental Resource Limited (e) Scott, Wilson Kirkpatrick.
5. Tocantins Forestry and Rural Development Project	Instituto de Desenvolvimento Economico e Social de Para (Para State Economic and Social Development Institute)	(a) Centro Agro-Ambiental do Tocantins (Tocantins Agro-Environmental Centre) (b) Nucleo de Altos Estudos Amazonicos (Nuclear of Higher Amazonian Studies, Federal University of Para) (c) Faculdade de Ciencias Agrarais do Para (Faculty of Agriculture of the Federal University of Para).
6. Demini Yanomami Health Care Project	Oxfam	Comissao Pela Criacao do Parque Yanomami (Commission for the Creation of a Yanomami Park).
7. Floodplain Forest Ecology and Management Project	Museu Paraense Emilio Goeldi	(a) Royal Botanic Gardens Kew. (b) University of St. Andrews.
Projects under consideration and expected date of approval		
1. Tapajos Forest Management Project January 1992	International Tropical Timber Organisation	Instituto Brasileiro do Meio Ambiente (Brazilian Environmental and Natural Resources Institute).
2. Forest Biomass and Nutrients Research Project February 1992	To be decided	(a) Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas da Amazonica (Brazilian National Research Institute for Amazonia). (b) Other participants to be decided.
3. Central Amazonia Flora and Vegetation Project January 1992	Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew	Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas da Amazonia (Brazilian National Research Institute of Amazonia).
4. Rainforest Silviculture Research Project March 1992	To be decided	(a) Centro de Pesquisas Agropecuario de Tropico Umido (Centre for Agricultural Research in the Humid Tropics). (b) Other participants to be decided.
5. Lake Mamiraua Ecological Station July 1992	Museu Paraense Emilio Goeldi	To be decided.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of the project budget on approved projects under the memorandum on technical and scientific co-operation between Britain and Brazil has been earmarked for consultancy fees to British-based institutions *(a)* in total and *(b)* for each project.

Mrs. Chalker: The information requested is as follows:

Proportion of project budget designated for consultancy fees

Project	Per cent.
1. Anglo-Brazilian Climate Observation Study	1·3
2. Caxiuana Research Station	1·9
3. Forestry Development of Aromatic Plants and Essential Oils	12·7
4. Recife Environmental Control Project	25·1
5. Tocantins Forestry and Rural Development Project	7·2
6. Demini Yanomami Health Care Project	Nil
7. Floodplain Forest Ecology and Management Project	9·0
Overall average	4·3

These figures are based on the fees for short-term consultancy inputs. The calculation does not include management charges, costs of long-term technical co-operation officers or travel and subsistence costs for consultants.

Aid and Trade Provision

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his estimate of the amount of aid and trade provision funds which are spent after allocation within the United Kingdom for every £1 allocated on British contracts under ATP.

Mrs. Chalker: Assuming that an ATP grant is associated with an export credit guaranteed by the Export Credits Guarantee Department in the ratio 35:65—the minimum level of concessionality allowed under international rules—each £1 of ATP expenditure would be associated with £2·85 worth of contracts for British exporters. This figure does not include any follow-up business.

Aid Programmes

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action is currently being undertaken by his Department to ensure that projects and adjustments supported by the World bank, the International Monetary Fund and aid programmes are beneficial to *(a)* the poorest people and *(b)* the environment.

Mrs. Chalker: I explained the Government's policy on "Aid and Poverty" in a speech under that title to the all-party group on overseas development on 15 May; a copy is in the Library of the House. The actions we have taken to ensure that our aid programme benefits the environment are set out in part II of the "The Common Inheritance: the First-year Report", Cm. 1655.

We support the World bank's strategy on poverty alleviation which is described in detail in its 1991 annual report—also in the Library. I am about to write to all right hon. and hon. Members about the bank's forest policy. We continue to encourage the International Monetary Fund to pay increasing attention to the needs of vulnerable groups and to environmental considerations when designing economic reform programmes.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the present figure for official aid, the amount that would meet the United Nations target and the compound rate of growth needed, assuming no economic growth, to reach the target in *(a)* five or *(b)* 10 years.

Mrs. Chalker: Performance against the United Nations target for net official development assistance as a proportion of GNP is measured by calendar year. The latest such United Kingdom figure is £1,485 million for 1990. To have met the United Nations target, £3,798 million would have been required in 1990. Assuming our GNP for 1990 were to remain constant in cash terms, a compound rate of growth of 20·7 per cent. would be necessary to reach the United Nations target within five years, or 9·8 per cent. if it were to be reached in 10 years.

Simple Truth Appeal

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has as to how the money raised from the "Simple Truth" appeal that was channelled through United Nations agencies has actually been spent; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave on 11 November to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes).

PRIME MINISTER

Live Television Feed

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the locations of the television sets in his Department which can receive the live television feed from the Chamber and the total cost to his Department of this service.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 3 December 1991]:* The cost of receiving live television feeds from the Chamber to 10 Downing street is £2,925.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Prime Minister if he will issue guidance to Ministers to ensure that any parliamentary question answered by an agency begins by quoting verbatim the parliamentary question asked.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 2 December 1991]:* My right hon. Friend the Lord President of the Council recently announced the Government's proposal that replies from agency chief executives to written parliamentary questions should be published and that he would be pursuing the proposal with the House authorities—*Official Report*, 27 November, column *558*. We hope that new arrangements can be implemented soon and at that point will issue guidance on the arrangements to Departments and agencies. In preparing such guidance, we shall certainly bear in mind the suggestion made by the hon. Member.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Benefit

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what would be *(a)* the first year and *(b)* the full-year costs of raising child benefit to £9·95 (i) in 1991-92 and (ii) 1992-93, including increases in linked, means-tested and national insurance benefits for Great Britain;

(2) what would be *(a)* the first year and *(b)* the full-year costs of raising child benefit to £10 (i) in 1991-92 and (ii) 1992-93, including increases in linked, means-tested and national insurance benefits for Great Britain.

Mr. Jack: The rates of child benefit from April 1991 were £8·25 for the eldest eligible child and £7·25 for each other child, and the rates increased to £9·25—£7·50 from October. On the basis of our latest estimates, the gross cost of increasing child benefit from those rates to £9·95 for each child throughout 1991-92 would be about £1,150 million. If the October rates had applied throughout 1991-92, the cost would reduce to around £940 million. The gross full-year cost in 1992-93 of paying £9·95 instead of the rates of £9·65—£7·80 which will be in payment from April 1992, would be about £720 million.

Raising child benefit on the same basis to £10 instead of £9·95 would increase the above costs by some £30 million to around £1,180 million, £970 million and £750 million respectively.

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the latest information on the number of people who pay national insurance contributions at the contracted-out rate in Great Britain; and of these how many earn above *(a)* £15,000, *(b)* £20,000, *(c)* £25,000, *(d)* £30,000 and *(e)* £40,000, respectively.

Mr. Jack: The information is not available in the precise form requested. However, during 1989-90, the latest year for which provisional information is available, those employed earners who paid national insurance contributions at the contracted-out standard rate and the numbers of those who earned above that year's upper earnings limit for national insurance purposes are in the table.

Great Britain

Millions

	Total	*With earnings above the UEL (£16,900)*
At the standard contracted out rate	8·3	1·1
A mixture of contracted out and not contracted out rates	1·6	0·1
Total with some contracted out contributions	9·8	1·2

Note: Figures do not sum due to rounding of component parts.

SERPS

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate *(a)* the first year and *(b)* the full-year total cost to the national insurance fund in (i) 1991-92 and (ii) 1992-93, of allowing people to contract out of the state earnings-related pension scheme into a money purchase personal pension scheme giving figures separately for (1) people contracting out of the state earnings-related pension scheme in 1991-92 and (2) all schemes.

Mr. Jack: The information is not available in precisely the form requested. However such information as is available is contained in appendices 6 and 7 of the report by the Government Actuary on the drafts of the Social Security Benefits Uprating Order and the Social Security (Contributions) Rerating Order which was laid before the House earlier today.

Maternity Allowance

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many women claimed maternity allowance in the last five years for which figures are available.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is in the table.

Year	*Number of claims*
1986-87	490,000
1987-88	147,000
1988-89	130,000
1989-90	120,000
1990-91	110,000

Notes:

1. Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) replaced Maternity Allowance for most pregnant women from 6 April 1987.
2. Figures for 1990-91 are provisional.

Poll Tax

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table to show, for each month of this year, the number of cases, at each DSS office, of poll tax deductions from income support, and the totals.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is not collected on a monthly basis. However, I understand from Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, that quarterly figures are placed in the Library and the Public Information Office, and those for the last quarter will be placed there shortly.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Disabled Staff

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many disabled people are currently employed in his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The Department currently employs 70 staff who are registered as disabled. There are other staff in the Department with disabilities who have chosen not to register and who are not included in this figure.

Secondary School Streaming

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assessment he has made of the effect of streaming in secondary schools on the motivation and achievement of pupils.

Mr. Eggar: It is for teachers to decide how best to cope with the challenge presented by the national curriculum to raise the levels of achievement of all pupils. I hope, however, that they will consider the advantages of teaching a subject to pupils in groups of similar, rather than very disparate, ability.

Anti-smoking Education

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action he proposes to take to discourage 11 to 15-year-olds from smoking regularly, by *(a)* use of the national curriculum and *(b)* other efforts in schools.

Mr. Atkins: The statutory order for national curriculum science requires that pupils should know that tobacco is a harmful substance, and that its avoidance contributes to good health. The order also requires that pupils should have opportunities to consider the effects of tobacco on the human body. The National Curriculum Council has issued guidance to all maintained schools in England, offering advice on how schools might incorporate topics about the dangers of smoking into their wider programmes of health education. In addition, my Department provides support, under the grants for education support and training programme, for local initiatives in preventive health education.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Disabled Staff

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many disabled people are currently employed in his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The FCO employs 48 registered disabled persons, 24 in the diplomatic wing and 24 in the ODA. Both wings employ other staff with disabilities who have chosen not to register.

Hong Kong

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in agreeing the court of final appeal for Hong

Kong; and whether its composition will comply fully with the provisions of the joint declaration and the basic law as regards the court's own flexibility to invite as many or as few judges for other common law jurisdictions to sit in each case as required.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Agreement was reached with the Chinese side on the composition of the court of final appeal at the 20th meeting of the Sino-British joint liaison group on 24 to 26 September 1991. We have already made clear that the next task will be to draw up legislation in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Legislative Council will be consulted on the draft bill in due course. We consider that the agreement reached on the joint liaison group is consistent with the provisions of the joint declaration and basic law.

Yugoslavia

Mr. Ian Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will recommend that European Community observers be stationed in those republics within Yugoslavia in which fighting has not taken place; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The monitors are currently stationed in those republics where there has been fighting and in Bosnia-Hercegovina where tension is particularly high. There are at present no plans to extend the operation.

Gibraltar

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he takes to monitor the law in Gibraltar to ensure that it complies with decisions of the European Court of Human Rights; and whether he will use his powers to ensure that those laws of Gibraltar which are in conflict with decisions of the court are amended.

Mr. Garel-Jones: Under the constitution of Gibraltar the assent of the governor of Gibraltar is required before any Bill passed by the legislature of Gibraltar can become law. The governor, who is responsible to, and appointed by, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, considers all such legislation carefully with advice from the Attorney-General of Gibraltar and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and other Government Departments as appropriate. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has the power to disallow any legislation to which the governor has given his assent. I am not aware that there are any laws in Gibraltar which conflict with decisions of the European Court.

HEALTH

Medway District Health Authority

Mr. Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a table showing comparable expenditure by the Medway district health authority on a year by year basis from 1975 to the current year.

Mr. Dorrell: Following is information derived from the annual accounts of the Medway health authority since its establishment on 1 April 1982.

Medway health authority—total revenue expenditure on hospital and community health services (HCHS)

	£000 (cash)	£000 (at 1991-92 prices)
1982-83	36,447	60,634
1983-84	39,775	63,248
1984-85	43,134	65,273
1985-86	45,252	64,939
1986-87	49,751	69,035
1987-88	53,776	70,763
1988-89	61,073	74,898
1989-90	66,983	77,227
1990-91[1]	75,357	80,632

[1]Provisional figure (as yet subject to audit).

Notes:

1. HCHS covers all services directly managed by the authority including hospital, community health, patient transport (i.e. ambulance) and other services.
2. The figures have been expressed at current (i.e. 1991-92) prices by the use of Gross Domestic Product deflators.
3. Prior to 1 April 1982 the authority's predecessor health district formed a part of a larger area health authority and in such cases figures on a district basis were not collected centrally.

Nebulisers

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to provide nebulisers free of charge except for prescription costs where they are prescribed by a medical practitioner.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Certain hand-held nebulisers may be prescribed by general practitioners under the drug tariff. Nebulisers may be provided free as part of the NHS treatment if prescribed by a hospital consultant in accordance with locally agreed policy.

Juvenile Macular Degeneration

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the latest available figures showing the total number of recorded cases of juvenile macular degeneration in England.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The causes of blindness and partial sight in children registered as blind or partially sighted with their local authorities between April 1987 and March 1990 were published in May 1991 in statistical bulletin 3(5)91, a copy of which is available in the Library. Juvenile macular degeneration is not separately identified.

Home Help Service

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the advice to local authorities in Department of Health and Social Security circular 53/71 concerning the disregard of attendance allowance when setting charges for the home help service is still his Department's policy.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The legislation on which this circular was based was replaced by section 17 of the Health and Social Services and Social Security Adjudications Act 1983. We propose to issue guidance to authorities about their discretionary powers under this section.

Hospitals, London

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will name the major hospital capital projects in Greater London, listing the date of ministerial approval, the cost in the initial announcement and the present estimate.

Mr. Dorrell: Major health building projects in Greater London which have ministerial approval are as follows:

	Date of approval	[1]*Current estimate £ million*
Westminster and Chelsea	December 1988	242
Goodmayes District General Hospital	December 1985	66
Guy's phase 3	August 1989	106
Great Ormond Street Redevelopment (Main Building)	July 1986	50
Regional Neurosciences Centre, Denmark Hill	April 1989	51

[1] The current estimated outturn costs include VAT, fees, equipment, local factors and inflation. These costs may be funded in part from sources other than capital allocation—for example, university grants, appeal funds, trustees.

No estimate of outturn cost was published for any of these projects at the time ministerial approval was announced.

Patients Charter

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost was of printing and distributing the patients charter for each of the district health authorities in Yorkshire.

Mr. Dorrell: The total cost of producing and distributing the patients charter and the summary of the charter was £1·6 million. It is not possible to break down these costs in the way the hon. Member requests.

Secure Accommodation

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list all the establishments in England and Wales currently providing secure accommodation for young people and against each to show *(a)* the number of secure places, *(b)* the percentage of secure places within the overall number of places in that establishment and *(c)* the weekly cost of a secure place in that establishment.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Shersby) on 14 June at columns *686-88*. Information about the overall number of places in each such establishment, and weekly costs of secure places, is not collected centrally.

Information about secure accommodation in Wales is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which Government Departments will provide grants and what percentage of *(a)* capital costs and *(b)* revenue costs each will contribute for the two new secure units due to open soon.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Grants to local authorities for the provision of secure accommodation are made available by the Department under powers in section 82(2) of the Children Act 1989. Such grants are limited to the capital costs of the project, associated professional fees, and a contribution towards commissioning costs. Revenue costs are a matter for the providing local authority. A 100 per cent. grant has been made available to meet the capital costs, and associated fees, of each of the two new secure units in Birmingham and Humberside. In addition, a grant has been provided to Humberside to meet 50 per cent. of the capital cost of providing a gymnasium, which will be shared with the open part of the home.

Smoking

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will meet the chairman of the Northern regional health authority to discuss progress towards meeting anti-smoking targets in Northumberland.

Mr. Dorrell: We regularly meet the chairmen of all the regional health authorities to discuss a wide variety of topics.

Health promotion is a major objective of the Northern regional health authority, as can be seen from the 1990 report by the regional director of public health, a copy of which will be placed in the Library. In its business plan for 1992-93 Northumberland health authority includes an initiative aimed at preventing the incidence of smoking in the children. My hon. Friend may wish to contact Mr. Richard Harbottle, chairman of the Northumberland health authority, for details.

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps he proposes to take to reduce the cost of smoking-related diseases to the national health service in the light of the evidence on cost to the national health service published in the Health Education Authority's report "The Smoking Epidemic";

(2) what is the estimated current cost of smoking-related diseases to the national health service each year;

(3) what assessment he has made of the evidence published in the Health Education Authority's report "The Smoking Epidemic" on the number of deaths a year caused by smoking, and what steps he proposes to take to reduce this toll of smoking-related death and disease.

Mr. Dorrell: We have studied the methodology of the Health Education Authority and concluded that its estimates are the best which are currently available. The costs to the national health service are estimated to be £437 million annually. This figure is for hospital costs only and does not include the costs of the care given by general practitioners or at health clinics or other care in the community.

The Government are currently considering the representations offered in response to the Green Paper "The Health of the Nation", which identified smoking as a key issue. It proposed targets for reducing the proportion of smokers to 22 per cent. in men and 21 per cent. in women by the year 2000. These targets were widely welcomed.

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he proposes to take to reduce the number of 11 to 15-year-olds who smoke regularly.

Mr. Dorrell: The Government have funded the Health Education Authority's teenage smoking programme

which costs £2 million a year over five years. This is the second full year of the programme. The last budget increased the price of tobacco above the rate of inflation. Price increases are known to have a particularly large impact on children's consumption. The Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) Act 1991, which tightens up the law on sales to children, received Royal Assent in June, and will be implemented shortly. The new voluntary agreement on tobacco advertising, concluded and published on 9 September, contains a range of further measures designed to protect children.

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of 11 to 15-year-olds smoke regularly.

Mr. Dorrell: "Smoking among secondary school children in 1990"—an inquiry carried out by the Social Survey Division of OPCS on behalf of the Health Departments, ISBN 0–11–691355–X, 1991—reported that 10 per cent. of 11 to 15-year-olds in England smoked regularly, defined as usually smoking one or more cigarettes a week. A copy of this report is available in the Library.

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he proposes to take about the number of working days lost each year due to smoking-induced diseases.

Mr. Dorrell: The Health Education Authority is actively promoting health in the workplace. To date more than 500 employers have signed the Look After Your Heart charter, undertaking to promote health, including discouraging smoking in the workplace. This scheme covers nearly 4 million employees and has the backing of both the TUC and CBI. In addition, many employers, encouraged by the Health and Safety Executive, are developing and implementing smoking policies to suit their particular workplace. More generally, the Government are currently considering the representations offered in response to the Green Paper "The Health of the Nation", which identified smoking as a key issue.

Quest Cancer Test

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on which dates his Department received letters from Quest Cancer Test requesting a reassessment of its application for funding following publication of the new test's methodology and its underlying chemistry.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Quest Cancer Test wrote on 1 February this year enclosing a copy of an article setting out details of the methodology of the test.

CIVIL SERVICE

Director of Public Prosecutions

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service how many applications he has received to date for the post of Director of Public Prosecutions.

Mr. Renton: It is not the practice of the Civil Service Commissioners to give details of a competition while it is in progress. Any relevant information is published in their annual report.

NATIONAL FINANCE

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) assuming a 10 per cent. interest rate, what would be the yield of introducing national insurance contributions on unearned income at a rate of 9 per cent. for individuals below retirement age, with an exemption of £3,000 in Great Britain for the full year 1991-92;

(2) assuming a 10 per cent. interest rate, what would be the yield of introducing national insurance contributions on unearned income at a rate of 9 per cent. for individuals below retirement age, with an exemption of £3,000 in Northern Ireland for the full year 1991-92.

Mr. Maude: The effect on revenue of a change in the average interest rate would depend on the resulting changes on other components of the income base. An analysis of these effects would require a full macro-economic simulation and could be carried out only at disproportionate cost.

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the 1991-92 full-year revenue gain if the inheritance tax seven-year rule were not in existence in *(a)* Great Britain and *(b)* Northern Ireland.

Mr. Maude: I regret that this information is not available.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the cost in a full year, in 1991-92, of an increase in the inheritance tax threshold from £140,000 to *(a)* £200,000, *(b)* £300,000 and *(c)* £500,000 in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Maude: The estimated costs in a full year at 1991-92 levels of an increase in the inheritance tax threshold are:

Threshold	*Revenue cost £ million*
£200,000	400
£300,000	700
£500,000	950

Separate estimates are not available for Great Britain and for Northern Ireland.

Income Tax

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of taxpayers who have taxable incomes below *(a)* £3,500 a year, *(b)* £4,000 a year, *(c)* £4,500 a year, *(d)* £5,000 a year and *(e)* £5,500 a year, giving figures separately for individuals and married couples, in (i) Great Britain and (ii) Northern Ireland.

Mr. Maude: The latest available information on a regional basis relates to 1988-89. The available estimates are shown in the table. The numbers shown for Great Britain include members of Her Majesty's forces, the Merchant Navy, civil servants serving overseas and a small number of other taxpayers without an indentifiable region of residence.

Number of taxpayers (thousands)

Taxable income (£)	*Great Britain*		*Northern Ireland*	
	Single people	*Married couples*	*Single people*	*Married couples*
Below 3,500	4,100	2,440	148	68
Below 4,000	4,590	2,800	[1]	[1]
Below 4,500	5,090	3,160	[1]	[1]
Below 5,000	5,540	3,530	[1]	[1]
Below 5,500	6,060	3,920	187	101

[1] The available sample of Northern Ireland residents is too small to support further subdivision of the numbers with taxable income below £5,500.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for each year since 1979 what is the number of people and percentage of all taxpayers in (i) Great Britain and *(ii)* Northern Ireland paying the top rate of income tax.

Mr. Maude: The table provides estimates of the number of taxpayers in the United Kingdom liable to income tax at a higher rate—that is, any rate above the basic rate. Prior to the introduction of independent taxation in 1990-91, married couples are counted as one unit. The available information does not enable the Northern Ireland component to be reliably distinguished for each of these years separately. However, for the years when Northern Ireland residents can be readily identified, 1980-81 to 1988-89, the number of higher rate taxpayers averaged about 20,000, about 4½ per cent. of taxpayers.

Taxpayers[1] liable at higher rate

Years	*Thousands*	*As percentage of all taxpayers*
1978-79	763	3·6
1979-80	674	3·1
1980-81	796	3·8
1981-82	1,090	5·2
1982-83	983	4·7
1983-84	860	4·2
1984-85	930	4·6
1985-86	950	4·7
1986-87	1,120	5·5
1987-88	1,190	5·7
1988-89	1,350	6·4
1989-90	1,500	7·0
1990-91[2]	1,660	6·5
1991-92[2]	1,620	6·5

[1] Single people and married couples for years up to and including 1989-90, individuals from 1990-91.
[2] Provisional estimates projected from the 1989-90 Survey of Personal Incomes.

Passenger Transport Executives

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the capital gains tax yield was from passenger transport executives for each year since 1985;

(2) what was the corporation tax yield from passenger transport executives for each year since 1985.

Mr. Maude: I regret that providing the figures requested would be a breach of taxpayers' confidentiality.

Estate Values

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for the latest year for which information is available what was the number of estates valued at *(a)* over £140,000, *(b)* £200,000, *(c)* over £300,000 and *(d)* over £500,000 in (i) Great Britain and (ii) Northern Ireland.

Mr. Maude: The numbers of estates passing on death in 1991-92 for which grants of representation will be sought are estimated to be:

Net estate value	*Number*
over £140,000	35,000
over £200,000	20,000
over £300,000	9,500
over £500,000	3,500

Of the 35,000 estates over £140,000, it is estimated that about 22,000 will pay inheritance tax. Separate estimates are not available for Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Environmental Protection

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consideration he has given to the proposals set out by Her Majesty's Government's Advisory Committee on Business and the Environment regarding the use of the tax system to enhance the protection of the environment.

Mr. Maude: My right hon. Friend will take the committee's proposals into account in framing his Budget next year.

VAT (Horses)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will review the requirement that VAT is paid on the sale and purchase of horses; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The VAT rate for horses in the United Kingdom is 17·5 per cent. Under the normal VAT rules it is not possible to remove the requirement that VAT is paid on the sale and purchase of horses. Under both current EC law and the agreement reached by the Council of Ministers of 24 June, member states are not able to introduce new zero rates.

However, in an effort to achieve a fair competitive climate within the Community and to prevent the potential distortion of competition which could arise because of a disparity in VAT rates on horses between the United Kingdom, Ireland and France, the Government have authorised discussions between officials and industry representatives about the possible introduction in the United Kingdom of an agricultural flat rate scheme as provided in the sixth VAT directive. This scheme could put farmers/breeders of horses on a more level playing field with their competitors in other member states where such schemes operate and include the breeding and rearing of horses.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make representations to the European Community Council of Ministers for VAT not to be payable on the sale and purchase of horses; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Apart from our inability under EC law to introduce zero rates, the Government do not see any justification for zero-rating the sale and purchase of horses. Zero rates are intended to be exceptional and to meet a social need: this would not apply in the case of supplies of horses.

Civil Service Relocation

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many civil service jobs have now been moved out of London; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 2 December 1991]:* Between March 1988 and June 1991 Government Departments, including executive agencies, reviewed the location of some 45,200—20 per cent.—of civil service posts in London and the south-east. As a result decisions have been taken to relocate or create 30,000 civil service jobs outside the south-east—around 80 per cent. of them to assisted and urban programme areas. Some 12,000 posts had already been moved since the beginning of 1988.

These posts are being located as follows:

Region	*Posts*
South West	5,090
West Midlands	2,150
East Midlands	4,520
North-West	5,710
Northern	2,700
Yorkshire and Humberside	3,870
East Anglia	130
Scotland	2,360
Wales	2,180
Northern Ireland	1,290
Total	30,000

Analysed by Department, the main moves away from London and the south-east are as follows:

Department	*No. of Posts*	*Main destination*
Inland Revenue	8,575	5,140 to Repayment offices; 1,600 to PAYE offices, both to various locations; 1,800 HQ posts to Nottingham.
Social Security	5,600	Including 2,500 to Child Support Agency offices in various locations and 650 Contributions Agency posts to Newcastle.
MOD	4,200	Various locations.
Home Office	2,085	Including 1,700 Prison service HQ posts to Derby.
Land Registry	1,900	Various locations
Customs and Excise	1,755	Liverpool and Manchester.
Employment Group	1,440	Including 615 to Runcorn and 635 to Sheffield.
DTI	1,200	Including 985 Patent Office posts to Newport.
Health	1,200	NHS Management Executive to Leeds.
MAFF	485	Including 395 to York.
Intervention Board	350	Newcastle.
OPCS	230	Southport.
Other Departments	980	Various locations.
Total	30,000	

Decisions have been taken not to move 15,200 posts. The remainder—24,000—are still under review.

This rapid progress on relocation has been achieved under the relocation guidelines announced by the then Paymaster General on 31 March 1988, at columns *610-11*. Under this approach, Departments and agencies are required to review the location of their work regularly and systematically with a view to finding sites offering better value for money and increased operating efficiency. These guidelines have recently been updated. They now cover for the first time non-departmental public bodies as well as Government Departments and agencies. I am placing a copy of the revised guidelines in the House of Commons Library.

Currency Transactions

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what fees or commissions are payable by the United Kingdom to the Deutsche Bundesbank when it buys the £ sterling at British request; and what arrangements exist for buying back the £ sterling.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 2 December 1991]:* As members of the exchange rate mechanism, the United Kingdom and Germany have access to the very short-term facility—VSTF—of the European monetary system, under which credit is automatically available, in unlimited amounts to finance obligatory intervention against any other currency in the system. The VSTF can also be made available for non-obligatory intervention, but not automatically. VSTF credits have to be repaid within a period of about three months. Operations under the VSTF attract interest, but no commission or fees are paid. The resulting credits and debits are held in accounts with the European Monetary Co-operation Fund. The interest rates are a weighted average of the representative domestic money market rates in those countries whose currencies make up the ecu basket.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Water Extraction

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his considerations as to whether to take steps for further printing of his Department's leaflet, "Good Irrigation—Make Every Drop Count", with particular reference to water extraction by companies from streams and rivers.

Mr. Curry: Discussions with the National Rivers Authority and other interests indicate that the early warning system and the good irrigation practice leaflet, which apply only to abstraction for spray irrigation, have been well received in East Anglia. We are now considering further printing of the leaflet.

Consumers Committee for Great Britain

Mr. Turner: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how often the Consumers Committee for Great Britain, set up under the Agricultural Marketing Act 1958, met in 1990 and 1991; when was its last meeting; and when it will next meet.

Mr. Curry: The committee met, concurrently with the Consumers Committee for England and Wales, seven times in 1990 and three times in 1991. The last meeting was on 11 September 1991: the next meeting is to be arranged early in the new year.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Biffen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the established and estimated amount of fraud in the application of the common agricultural policy for the latest available three years.

Mr. Curry: It is not possible to estimate the extent of fraud in the common agriculture policy since, by definition, undetected fraud cannot be measured. The following table gives details of the number of cases of EAGGF guarantee funded irregularity—the definition of which goes wider than fraud—which were reported by member states to the European Commission in the years 1988, 1989 and 1990.

	No. of cases	*Value (£m)*	*Percentage of CAP expenditure*
1988	386	103	0·53
1989	745	100	0·56
1990	819	98	0·49

Source: EAGGF Guarantee Report 1990

Exmoor

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the precise area that will be included in the Exmoor environmentally sensitive area; and whether he is consulting interested bodies on these boundaries.

Mr. Curry: The precise area to be included will be decided after detailed local study and consultations.

BNFL Springfields Works

Mr. Carr: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to ensure that the population groups most at risk from the BNFL Springfields works are correctly identified; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: We review regularly our assessment of the population groups exposed to the highest radiation doses from BNFL's Springfields works. These assessments show that houseboat dwellers on the Ribble are subject to the highest dose. Anglers who use river banks near Preston incur a somewhat lower dose. The exposure time of children playing on river banks and beds is much less than these two groups and the dose over a year is accordingly smaller. Even for the houseboat dwellers, the maximum predicted dose under the terms of the new authorisation for Springfields will be less than one fifth of the internationally recognised limit and a small proportion of the dose to the public from natural background radioactivity.

Set-aside Scheme

Mr. Burns: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he has taken to detect fraudulent applications for a five-year set-aside scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The administrative instructions on set-aside include procedures for checking at each stage of an application. In addition to the office checks, the aim is to carry out a field inspection at least once during the five-year commitment period. *The Sunday Times* on 1 December carried a report headed "Ministry is fooled by fictitious farm" which said that,

"the Ministry promised us annual payment of £248·64 or nearly £1,250 over five years".

The facts of the matter are as follows:

Dr. N. Rufford, who claimed to be engaged in agriculture and the owner of 1·2 hectares of agricultural land, applied for and was allocated an agricultural holding number. He was not the owner of the land and he gave a fictitious name for the alleged previous owner. The agricultural holding number does not confer any eligibility for payment of grant under the set-aside scheme.

On 6 September signed registration and application forms for the five-year set-aside scheme were received from Dr. Rufford. The application form had to be returned twice to Dr. Rufford before he answered the question confirming that he had been farming the greater part of the holding since 1 October 1990. The documents and associated map included what are clearly fictitious details of previous and current cropping. Dr. Rufford signed declarations that he had given correct answers. These were false.

Officials were suspicious of the application and decided that a physical inspection should be undertaken to verify the details. Dr. Rufford said that it was essential for him to accompany the inspector but could not find a convenient time. This was the position last Sunday when *The Sunday Times* article was published.

Dr. Rufford telephoned the Ministry's office at Ipswich on Wednesday 27 November claiming to be trying to arrange a date for the field inspection. He asked to be sent a copy of the approval document. He was told that an approval document had not been issued as his application had not been approved.

Later that afternoon, at a time that he had been told the officer dealing with his case would not be available, Dr. Rufford telephoned again. He claimed to have mislaid his acceptance letter. So that he could reconstruct his correspondence he asked a clerk to fax him a copy. An undated, unsigned draft letter on plain paper was faxed to him. That letter was reproduced in *The Sunday Times* report under a faked Ministry letterhead.

The Sunday Times story was, therefore, fabricated. The application from Dr. Rufford was not approved. The inspection of the land would have revealed that the application was fraudulent. Dr. Rufford gave false information on the ownership and cropping of the land. He obtained a draft letter by deceiving a junior officer. *The Sunday Times* then published that letter with a faked letterhead.

I want to commend the staff concerned who were put under pressure by the journalist and responded in a careful and sensible way. There was never any question of the false application being approved or a payment authorised.

I have written to the editor of *The Sunday Times* asking him to publish this reply in full together with a retraction of this misleading and inaccurate report.

SCOTLAND

Capital Expenditure

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the capital expenditure on further education in cash and constant prices in every year since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Capital expenditure by local authorities on further education is as follows:

Year	*Cash Prices* £ million	*Constant Prices* £ million
1978-79	3·189	8·085
1979-80	5·328	11·577
1980-81	3·408	6·258
1981-82	3·879	6·495
1982-83	5·781	9·037
1983-84	7·415	11·078
1984-85	5·709	8·122
1985-86	4·417	5·955
1986-87	4·372	5·707
1987-88	9·738	12·057
1988-89	11·124	12·850
1989-90	10·793	11·708
1990-91	7·015	7·015

Squirrels

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when was the most recent survey and map of the presence of red and grey squirrels carried out by the Forestry Commission on its land; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Forestry Commission carries out an annual survey of the distribution of squirrels and associated aspects. A copy of the most recent survey report, for 1990, which includes maps recording the presence of red and grey squirrels, has been placed in the Library.

Environmental Protection

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will introduce a citizens charter of environmental rights.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has no plans at present to do so, but is reviewing all his responsibilities to assess whether there might be areas where further charters might be appropriate.

Live Television Feed

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the locations of the television sets in his Department which can receive the live television feed from the Chamber and the total cost to his Department of this service.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 3 December 1991]:* Dover house, Whitehall is the only Scottish Office building which receives the live television feed. The total annual cost is £13,421·65 including VAT.

Motorway Statistics

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many miles of motorway are currently *(a)* open, *(b)* under construction and *(c)* planned in Scotland either (i) as completely new motorway or (ii) as existing motorway being widened; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 3 December 1991]:* In Scotland, 153 miles of trunk road motorway are currently open to traffic; nine miles are presently under construction and 67 miles of new motorway are planned. There are no motorway widening proposals in our trunk road programme at present.

Legal Aid

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration was given to the question of legal aid in the preparation of the justice charter for Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 3 December 1991]:* The Government are currently undertaking a comprehensive review of eligibility for legal aid and for this reason no specific reference was made to legal aid in either the citizens charter or the justice charter for Scotland. The Scottish Legal Aid Board, which administers legal aid, will be expected to meet the standards of service set out in the citizens charter.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what changes there have been to the entitlement to legal aid since 1979; and what effect these have had on the number or proportion of persons able to claim legal aid.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton *[holding answer 3 December 1991]:* Financial eligibility limits for entitlement to legal aid are regularly uprated to ensure that those most in need continue to receive free legal aid. Determination of applications for legal aid is subject to a number of criteria, including financial eligibility, and it is not possible accurately to estimate the numbers within the population who are likely to be eligible at any particular time.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many statutory instruments or regulations were debated on the floor of the House or in a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments in each year from 1980, and in the current year to the most recent practicable date; and what percentage this represented out of the total affirmative and negative instruments considered by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments and the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 26 November 1991]:* The figures for each Session from 1979-80 to 1990-91 are as follows:

A *Session*	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*
1979-80	131	126	1,330	19·3
1980-81	62	109	923	18·6
1981-82	80	99	842	21·3

A Session	B	C	D	E
1982-83	70	53	592	20·8
1983-84	96	147	1,127	21·6
1984-85	100	106	840	24·5
1985-86	97	83	1,019	17·7
1986-87	69	68	580	23·6
1987-88	156	99	1,486	17·2
1988-89	117	68	1,072	17·3
1989-90	114	56	1,129	15·1
1990-91	139	48	1,066	17·5

B. Statutory Instruments and Statutory Rules of Northern Ireland considered by Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.

C. Statutory Instruments and Statutory Rules of Northern Ireland debated on the floor of the House.

D. Statutory Instruments and Statutory Rules of Northern Ireland subject to proceedings considered by the Joint and Select Committees on Statutory Instruments.

E. *B* and *C* as a percentage of *D*.

ENVIRONMENT

Broadwater Farm Estate

14. **Mr. Bernie Grant:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to visit the Broadwater Farm housing estate to discuss housing renovations.

Sir George Young: I have accepted an invitation from the Broadwater Farm Council of Community Organisations to visit the estate.

Housing Improvements (North-east)

19. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assistance his Department is giving to improve housing in Stockton-on-Tees and Middlesbrough.

Sir George Young: In the past five years my Department has provided housing assistance of £37 million to Stockton-on-Tees and £45 million to Middlesbrough through funding from the housing investment programme, estate action, the urban programme and the Housing Corporation.

In addition, Middlesbrough was successful this year in the competition for city challenge funds. This will provide a further £35 million for the authority in the next five years, a substantial proportion of which will be spent on housing-related projects.

Stockton, although not successful this year, will be invited to bid in the city challenge competition for 1992-93.

Council Tax

20. **Mr. Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the projected costs of the collection of the council tax.

Mr. Portillo: English local authorities budgeted to spend almost £500 million on community charge collection this year. I would expect the council tax to cost no more than half as much to collect.

30. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received on the implementation by local authorities of the council tax; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Many of the 800 representations we received in response to the consultation paper "A New Tax for Local Government" refer to the implementation of the council tax. My Department is discussing detailed implementation issues with the local authority associations.

Local Government Finance

21. **Mr. Grocott:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to revise the present arrangements for capping local authorities' expenditure.

Mr. Portillo: The provisional capping criteria which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 26 November represent our firm intentions for 1992-93, but before taking our capping decisions we shall take account of all appropriate considerations.

Non-metropolitan District Councils (Housing)

22. **Mr. Colin Shepherd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he has now introduced to assist non-metropolitan district councils to fulfil their role as the facilitators of housing.

Mr. Heseltine: Local authorities should assess housing needs in their areas and work with housing associations and the private sector in their role as enablers to help ensure that those needs are met. They have powers, subject to the consent of the Secretary of State, to sell land below market value to provide low-cost housing for sale (including shared ownership sale) and for rent, commonly in return for nomination rights. They may also give grants to private landlords and they may sponsor housing association schemes which then receive grant from the Housing Corporation. We have also encouraged them to use their planning powers to encourage developers to include a proportion of low-cost housing in new developments.

Wild Birds

23. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the work of English Nature in respect of wild bird habitat.

Mr. Baldry: English Nature continue to make satisfactory progress in the conservation of wild bird habitat primarily through the notification of SSSIs and, where appropriate, through their subsequent management.

Housing Estates

24. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on Government policy towards outer-city housing estates.

Mr. Yeo: In common with other housing estates, those in outer city areas can benefit from the increased emphasis on performance and proposals in the allocation of housing investment programme resources and the major programmes we now have in place under estate action, housing action trusts and city challenge.

Carlisle Council Housing

25. **Mr. Martlew:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council houses were built by Carlisle city council in the financial year 1990-91.

Mr. Yeo: None. The building of new social housing is now mainly the responsibility of housing associations, and the role of the local authority should be to assess the housing needs of the area and work with housing associations and the private sector to ensure that these needs are met. Carlisle city council is well aware of its enabling role and has secured an increase in Housing Corporation funding for housing association schemes over the next three years.

Green Belt

26. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many acres within the former Greater London council area are designated as green belt; what was the figure in May 1979; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: The Metropolitan green belt has grown from just over 750,000 acres in 1979 to 1·2 million acres now. Figures for the former GLC area would need to be obtained from the individual local authorities.

Local Authorities (Privatisations)

27. **Mr. David Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the 10 local authorities who have made the greatest savings through privatisation of services over the last 10 years; and the bottom 10.

Mr. Key: My Department does not collect this information.

Water Regulation

28. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the regulatory regime for the water industry in delivering quality of service in the long term.

Mr. Baldry: Quality of service is a central concern of the Director General of Water Services, and the Competition and Service (Utilities) Bill will lead to a further strengthening of his powers.

The National Rivers Authority and the drinking water inspectorate are dealing effectively with, respectively, environmental quality and the quality of drinking water.

County Hall, London

29. **Ms. Hoey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to meet the chairman of the London residuary body to discuss county hall.

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. Friend has no immediate plans to meet Sir Godfrey Taylor. Ministers meet Sir Godfrey to discuss London residuary body business as and when the need arises.

Planning and Compensation Act 1991

31. **Mr. Allason:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans there are to implement the enforcement procedures contained in the Planning and Compensation Act 1991.

35. **Sir George Gardiner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps have been taken to implement the enforcement provisions contained in the Planning and Compensation Act 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen).

Poll Tax

32. **Mr. Douglas:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the level of poll tax payments outstanding since its introduction; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Up to 30 September 1991 local authorities in England had collected £9·7 billion in community charges for the financial year 1990-91 leaving £500 million of the income they budgeted to receive for 1990-91 yet to be collected. An additional £400 million of community charges bills have been issued against which authorities had already made provision for non-payment.

36. **Mr. Haynes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to abolish the poll tax 20 per cent. contribution rule for 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: I do not propose to make any change in the existing basis of liability or the benefit arrangements for the remaining period of the community charge.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will call for a report from each local authority as to the position on 31 March 1991 and 30 September 1991, as to how many liability orders for poll tax recovery have been passed to bailiffs; of these, how many liability orders were enforced by *(a)* payment agreements and *(b)* distraints exercised; and of these how many bailiff visits were unsuccessful because the poll tax non-payer had moved away.

Mr. Key: No.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will call for a report from each local authority, as at 31 March 1991 and 30 September 1991, as to how many attachment-of-earnings orders are in place to recover poll tax arrears.

Mr. Key: No.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will call for a report from each local authority to show how many summonses for poll tax non-payment for 1990-91 were issued at 31 March 1991 and 30 September 1991, and of those between 31 March 1991 and 30 September 1991, how many were also for 1991-92 non-payment.

Mr. Key: No. The Home Office collects statistics by individual magistrates court which are not analagous to local authority areas. These show that in 1990-91 the courts issued over 4·7 million summonses to authorities and so far in 1991-92 nearly 3·3 million have been issued. However, these figures relate to the date on which the summonses were granted and not to the year of the charge.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will call for a report from local authorities to show, at 31 March 1991 and 30 September 1991, what percentage of information requests sent to poll tax non-payers served with a liability order were returned.

Mr. Key: No.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidelines he issues for the use by local authorities of bailiffs for poll tax enforcement.

Mr. Key: My Department issued a practice note to all charging authorities advising them to check the reputation, qualifications and expertise of private firms of bailiffs and to issue guidelines to them on procedures. The Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation have incorporated and expanded this advice in a revised practice note.

River Quality

33. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on river water quality.

Mr. Trippier: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Carmarthen (Mr. Williams) earlier today.

Urban Protection

34. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to strengthen the powers available to local authorities and civic bodies in protecting the character and environment of urban areas.

Mr. Portillo: The Government have given local authorities substantially enhanced powers to protect the character and environment of their urban areas and do not see any need at the moment to add to those powers.

Incinerators

37. **Mr. Ted Garrett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will announce the date of the publication of the report of the public inquiry into the application to build two incinerators in Tyne and Tees areas.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend expects to receive the inspector's report on the three linked incinerator inquiries on Tyneside and Teesside before Christmas. The reports will be published, along with his decision on the applications, as soon as it is practicable to do so.

Homelessness

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans the Government have to assist homeless people in cities other than London over the Christmas holiday period.

Mr. Yeo: In 1991-92, the Government are providing just under £6 million in grants to voluntary organisations throughout the United Kingdom for practical projects to prevent and relieve homelessness. The concentrations of rough sleepers in individual local authority areas throughout the United Kingdom are comparatively small and in the event of severe weather this winter, I would expect individual local authorities to make emergency provision for people sleeping out in their areas.

EC (Visits)

Mr. Forman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for himself, and for each of the Ministers at his Department, details of *(a)* the number of visits made in the past month to destinations outside the United Kingdom but within the European Community on official business related to the European Community, *(b)* the number of visits made to Brussels within the past month on official business related to the European Community and *(c)* the number of nights spent over the past month away from the United Kingdom on official European Community business.

Mr. Heseltine: For the month ending 24 November the information is as follows:

(i) 51 visits
(ii) 40 visits
(iii) 77 nights.

London Residuary Body

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the level of capital receipts enjoyed by the London residuary body since its inception.

Mr. Key: Since its inception LRB has distributed more than £520 million in capital receipts among the London boroughs.

Global Warming

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the cost of the advertisement which appeared in *The Sunday Times* entitled "Global Warming —We Have Been Warned", on 10 November; in how many other newspapers it appeared; and what was the cost in each case.

Mr. Heseltine: All advertising rates obtained are commercial in confidence. The advertisement entitled "Global Warming—We Have Been Warned" appeared in *The Times, The Guardian, The Independent, The Daily Telegraph, The Observer, The Independent on Sunday* as well as *The Sunday Times*.

School Cleaning

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the standard of cleaning in schools since the contracting out of school cleaning services.

Mr. Key: The Department does not collect information on the standard of cleaning in schools following competition for cleaning work. The Local Government Act 1988 requires local authorities to prepare a detailed specification setting out the standards required, and further requires the in-house direct service organisation to comply with this specification in carrying out the work; a private contractor would be similarly so obliged under the terms of his contract with the authority. Under the Education Reform Act 1988, schools with delegated budgets may determine the standard of cleaning they require and their wishes must be reflected in the specification. Research commissioned by the Department from the Institute of Local Government Studies at the university of Birmingham indicates that one effect of competition has been that authorities have paid greater attention to the clear definition of service standards.

Uniform Business Rate

Mr. Enright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many of the responses he received to his consultation paper "A New Tax for Local Government", were in favour of retaining the uniform business rate; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: Although the consultation paper included no proposals for changes to the uniform business rate, we received representations from eight local authorities, and a number of other organisations and individuals, in favour of its retention.

Copies of all responses were placed in the Library on 14 October.

Air Pollution

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what meetings he, departmental Ministers or officials have had with representatives of *(a)* the foundries industry, *(b)* paintmakers *(c)* chipboard manufacturers and *(d)* the castings industry in regard to difficulties posed by the air pollution requirements imposed under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990; and what matters have (i) been resolved and (ii) remain to be resolved.

Mr. Baldry: Officials met representatives of the industries listed in working parties convened to assist the preparation of guidance notes on BATNEEC (best available techniques not entailing excessive cost) standards to be met by industrial operators becoming subject to local authority air pollution control under part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. The number of meetings were as follows:

foundries and castings industry—6 meetings on note no. PG2/4
chipboard manufactuers—10 meetings on noe no. PG6/4
paintmakers—10 meetings on note no. PG6/10 plus 30 meetings on other paint-related guidance notes. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met representatives of the Paintmakers Association in May.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already published process guidance on iron, steel and non-ferrous metal foundry processes (PG2/4) and on processes for the manufacture of particleboard and fibreboard (PG6/4). The remaining guidance on coating manufacture and sectors using coatings will be published early next year in advance of these processes coming into the new controls from 1 April 1992. Trade associations, together with a wide range of other bodies, have been given the opportunity to comment on the final drafts of guidance notes and these comments are considered when the guidance is finalised for publication.

Environmental Assessment

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has obtained for his departmental library a copy of the recent report, "Environmental Assessment: Experience to Date" produced by the Institute of Environmental Assessment.

Mr. Yeo: I have arranged for a copy of the papers for the conference on advances in environmental assessment held at the Royal Lancaster hotel, London, from 28 to 29 October 1991—in which this article by Dr. Tim Coles appeared—to be placed in my Department's library.

British Nuclear Fuels

Mr. Carr: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will make it his policy to require BNFL to publish its criteria for assessing best available technology not entailing excessive cost; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what criteria are used to assess best available techniques not entailing excessive cost with reference to the BNFL Springfields works; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: BATNEEC relates to a requirement placed upon operators of processes that fall under the regulation of part I of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Regulation of nuclear site operators falls under the Radioactive Substances Act 1960 which requires operators to use the best practicable means (BPM) to reduce radioactive discharges. An explanation of BPM and how it applies to discharges from BNFL's Springfield works is set out in an explanatory memorandum from the recent public consultation exercise concerning proposals to revise Springfield's liquid discharge authorisation. I have arranged for a copy of this document to be placed in the Library of the House. Information on BPM in BNFL's application for revision of the Springfield's liquid authorisation was classified commercially sensitive, and as such cannot be published under the Radioactive Substances Act 1960, as amended by part V of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Heveningham Hall

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his policy towards Heveningham hall.

Mr. Heseltine: My concern is to ensure that this outstanding house is fully restored and properly cared for. I will announce my decision on pre-emption very shortly.

Flood Damage (Calderdale)

Mr. Donald Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will be making payments of grant to Calderdale metropolitan borough council to compensate it for emergency work undertaken in the light of flood damage on 19 and 20 May 1989.

Mr. Key: Yes. In the light of information provided by the council in December 1990, my right hon. Friend is satisfied that special financial assistance would be justified in the case. Accordingly the Secretary of State has decided, with the consent of the Treasury, to establish a scheme of assistance under section 155 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 in respect of expenditure relating to damage caused by flash floods in Calderdale in 1989. Grants will be paid to reimburse local authorities in the area of the Metropolitan borough of Calderdale for 75 per cent. of eligible costs above a threshold.

Property Services Agency

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement on the progress towards implementing his policy of privatising Property Services Agency projects; which consultants are handling the negotiations; how many specific bids have been obtained; when they will be evaluated; and when he expects the matter to be concluded.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 3 December 1991]:* Preparations for the sale of Property Services Agency projects are continuing following the decision, announced in July, to offer the business for sale as early as possible next year, subject to progress and market sentiment. The sale process itself including evaluation of bids could take some six months. My financial advisers are Coopers and Lybrand Deloitte. Bids have not yet been invited.

Live Television Feed

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the locations of the television sets in his Department which can receive the live television feed from the Chamber, and the total cost to his Department of this service.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 3 December 1991]:* My Department has 12 television sets equipped to receive the live television feed from the Chamber, all of which are located within 2 Marsham street, London SW1P 3EB. The total cost to date of this service is £13,795·67.

Environmental Protection Regulations

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, further to his answer of 27 November, *Official Report*, column *503*, precisely where in the Environmental Protection (Prescribed Processes and Substances) Regulations 1991 the specific terms "same location" and "same person", appearing, respectively, in lines one and two of paragraph 2 of schedule 2 thereof, are unambiguously defined; and what is the Minister's intended meaning of those specific phrases.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 3 December 1991]:* These terms are not defined specifically in the regulations but have the normal meaning attributed to them. Their exact definition is a matter for interpretation by the courts.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

House of Fraser

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to fulfil the undertaking given by his predecessor to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry to report to the House on how all the regulations concerned with the takeover of the House of Fraser have carried out their duties.

Mr. Redwood: When further relevant information is provided by regulators.

Disabled Staff

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many disabled people are currently employed in his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: The Department employs 184 people who are known to be disabled. This figure includes both registered and unregistered disabled officers.

The Department has taken steps to try to increase the number of disabled recruits and aims to ensure that disabled staff receive equal treatment. It fully accepts the responsibilities laid down by the civil service code of practice on the employment of disabled people.

EC Funds

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he envisages a conclusion to the discussions with the European Commission on additionality in order to allow the unfreezing of EC regional development funds to the United Kingdom, in particular RECHAR and RENAVAL.

Mr. Leigh: I hope that the Commission will release the RECHAR grants, applied for in July 1990, without further delay. RENAVAL grants are not being affected by these discussions.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many visits have been carried out by Ministers of his Department to factories and businesses involved in the manufacturing sector during each of the last five years.

Mr. Lilley: Ministers of this Department have extensive contacts with the manufacturing sector, including frequent visits to companies. However, a record of the number of such visits is not kept.

RENAVAL Programme

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the implementation in the United Kingdom to date of the EC's RENAVAL programme.

Mr. Leigh: Programmes of RENAVAL grants are currently in operation in Tyne and Wear—which has received over £23 million of European regional development fund grant—Plymouth—over £11 million—and Middlesbrough and Langbaurgh—over £4 million. Programmes for Strathclyde, Fife, and the districts of Wirral and Sefton on Merseyside have been applied for and are expected to be approved by the Commission to start soon.

Telephone Service (Premium Rate)

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce further measures to prevent abuses of telephone premium rate services involving the offering of bogus prizes to lure telephone users into using the service.

Mr. Leigh: The independent committee for the supervision of standards of telephone information services —ICSTIS—the body responsible for regulating premium rate telephone services, is in the process of amending and strengthening the code of practice regulating premium rate services. The new code, which ICSTIS expects to have in place next month, contains further provisions specifically regulating competitions and similar services.

Telephone Statistics

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has on the percentage of households with telephones installed in *(a)* the constituency of Neath, *(b)* the constituency of Wokingham and *(c)* the United Kingdom.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 3 December 1991]:* There is no information available on the percentage of

households with the telephones installed for individual parliamentary constituencies. Around 88 per cent. of households in Great Britain had a telephone in 1990, compared to 72 per cent. in 1980.

DHL and Federal Express

Mr. Campbell-Savours: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what discussions have taken place with DHL and Federal Express about the privatisation of the post and parcel service;

(2) what discussions have taken place with DHL and Federal Express on breaking the Post Office's letter monopoly.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 3 December 1991]:* None.

Telecommunications

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the technological innovations developed by the United Kingdom telecommunications industry since 1984.

Mr. Redwood: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply of 3 December, *Official Report*, columns *97-98*.

The following is a list of some of the areas where there have been innovations by United Kingdom industry in products and services since the privatisation of British Telecom:

Multi-function telephones
Cellular and wireless telephony
Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN)
Packet switching
Slow-scan video
Wide area radiopaging
Electronic funds transfer at point of sale (EFTPOS)
Video-conferencing
Payphones on aircraft and trains
Electronic mail
Voice messaging
Centrex services

DEFENCE

Bowman Combat Net Radio

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the Bowman combat net radio programme.

Mr. Alan Clark: Project Bowman will provide the new combat radio system for the armed services to replace the current CLANSMAN family of radios. Bowman will link with computerised command and control systems and the Ptarmigan trunk communication network to provide a flexible battlefield communications system stretching from individual soldier to senior commander.

An invitation to tender for the competitive project Definition phase was issued on 31 October. Bowman is a major opportunity for the defence electronics industry and could be worth in excess of £1 billion.

NATO

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what implications there are for the structure of British forces as a result of the Rome declaration of the NATO countries.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The future structure of our armed forces was developed in the light of the work in NATO on new force structures. It is in line with the new strategic concept agreed in Rome last month and with the declaration issued following that meeting. Our plans are outlined in the 1991 Statement on the Defence Estimates and in the subsequent paper, "Britain's Army for the 90s".

Hercules II

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy towards the acquisition by the RAF of the Hercules II aircraft; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: It is our intention to procure off-the-shelf replacement aircraft for the RAF transport fleet around the turn of the century. The Hercules II aircraft would be a possible contender in the competition.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 5 December 1991

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Tottenham Three

Mr. Corbyn To ask the Attorney-General if he will state the cost to the Law Officers of prosecution and subsequent appeals of Winston Silcott, Mark Braithwaite and Engin Raghip.

The Attorney-General: The prosecuting authorities have incurred costs in connection with this case from the institution of proceedings in 1985. For that reason, information concerning the total costs of the prosecution is not readily available and will take some time to collate. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as the information is to hand.

ENVIRONMENT

Government Offices (Refurbishment)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what work of restoration and refurbishment is being done for Government offices in London; and if he will specify the sites and current proposed purposes.

Mr. Yeo: The property holdings directorate of the Department of the Environment is responsible for expenditure in central London on restoration and refurbishment currently being carried out in the following Government offices housed in listed buildings:—

1. Government offices Great George street SW1
Refurbishment of a section of the basement offices to permit more efficient use.
2. Government offices Great George street SW1
Refurbishment of a second section of the basement to bring into use vacant space to permit the surrender of leased property.
3. Old Admiralty building SW1
Programme of major internal and external works to restore a grade 1 listed building.
4. Somerset house WC2
Renewal of east wing roof to maintain the integrity of a grade 1 listed building.
5. 70-72 Whitehall SW1
External stone cleaning and redecoration to restore the exterior of a grade 1 listed building.

Expenditure on other projects involving restoration or refurbishment is the responsibility of the Department which occupies, or intends to occupy, the listed building.

English Heritage

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will seek an early meeting with the chairman of English Heritage to discuss the reasons it decided to replace the roof of 6-7 Grosvenor place with material imported from the United States rather than traditional Lakeland slate which is already in use.

Mr. Yeo: It would not be appropriate for my right hon. Friend to discuss this case with English Heritage given the possibility of a subsequent appeal against refusal of listed building consent. The Government's general policy is that alterations to listed buildings should be in character with the building, and that care should be taken to use appropriate materials, but choice of materials is a matter for the owners of a building, having regard to expert advice and to the terms of any listed building consent. I understand that no decision has yet been made in this case.

Developments (EC Directive)

Mr. Benton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action is being taken by Her Majesty's Government to implement EC directive 85/337 in situations where developments which do not require planning permission bring serious problems of dust, noise and traffic.

Mr. Yeo: I will write to the hon. Member shortly.

Red Squirrels

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology to publish the atlas of red squirrel distribution in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: I understand that the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology expects to publish its mammal atlas in late spring or early summer next year.

Disabled Staff

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many disabled people are currently employed in his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine: The Department employs 73 staff who are known to be registered disabled and a further 58 who are known to have a disability without being registered. This is some 2 per cent. of the total non-industrial work force.

Broadmead Estate, Redbridge

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he is in a position to announce the result of Redbridge borough council's application for estate action support for the Broadmead estate.

Mr. Yeo: I am please to announce that I have today appproved this estate action scheme.

Wild Birds

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will raise the subject of the trade in caught wild birds at the EC Environment Council on 9 December; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) on 1 November 1991, *Official Report*, column *391*. The EC Environment Council meeting has now been deferred until 12 and 13 December.

Hanover Square, Bradford

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what public financial assistance has been made available to date, for the restoration of Hanover square in Bradford; to whom assistance has been paid; and what assistance remains outstanding.

Mr. Yeo: In each of the three financial years 1983-84 to 1985-86 £28,000 was provided from Urban Programme funds for management of the project. In 1988-89 the Department provided the city of Bradford metropolitan council through the urban programme with a contribution of £9,000 towards the purchase and conversion of two of the Hanover Square properties for non-housing purposes. In 1989-90, £80,000, was provided towards the costs of a feasibility study for phase 1 of the restoration scheme; in 1990-91 a further £70,000 was provided for phase 2. In 1991-92 £120,000 was provided for environmental improvements to the square itself. English Heritage has provided grants of £365,000, including £2,000 for a feasibility study, to the British Historic Buildings Trust and £51,000 to various developers and private individuals. No grant offers remain to be paid.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much public financial assistance has been paid, in each of the last three years, to the British Historic Buildings Trust; and how much public financial assistance has been paid to the trust, to the latest available date, related to the restoration of Hanover square in Bradford.

Mr. Yeo: Total English Heritage Grants paid to the British Historic Buildings Trust over the past three financial years are:

	£
1989-90	41,356
1990-91	346,529
1991-92	302,394
of which, for Hanover square:	
1989-90	0
1990-91	218,000
1991-92	147,000

Of the total of £365,000, £363,000 was for restoration works and £2,000 for a feasibility study.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will arrange for an independent valuation of properties for sale in Hanover square, Bradford, which have received public financial assistance for renovation, including those being offered to former owners; and if he will arrange for an independent audit of the expenditure incurred, to date, on the restoration of houses in Hanover square.

Mr. Yeo: It would not be appropriate for my Department to intervene in the valuation of the properties being offered for sale in Hanover square, Bradford. It is open to the prospective purchasers to arrange for an independent valuation of the property they seek to purchase. Indeed, it is advice regularly given to prospective purchasers. Those public bodies that have provided financial support for the restoration of properties in Hanover square are subject to regular audit as is the charitable British Historic Buildings Trust. It is for these bodies to ensure that good value for money is achieved for the funds expended.

Parish Councils

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to give extra powers and resources to parish councils.

Mr. Key: We are considering the role of parish councils in the light of responses to our consultation paper "The Structure of Local Government in England".

Greater Manchester Councils (Capital Receipts)

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the capital receipts currently held by each district authority in Greater Manchester; and what are the amounts for which re-use is disallowed.

Mr. Key: The table shows the total capital receipts held by each district authority in Greater Manchester at 31 March 1991, together with the amount of those receipts which have been reserved for debt redemption.

	Total receipts held at 31 March 1991	*Reserved receipts held at 31 March 1991*
Bolton	15,206	11,784
Bury	6,161	5,361
Manchester	0	0
Oldham	[1]n/a	[1]n/a
Rochdale	7,487	5,997
Salford	19,122	19,122
Stockport	10,188	10,188
Tameside	13,377	11,668
Trafford	27,466	18,969
Wigan	17,324	13,564

[1] n/a. Not available as the authority has not returned the relevant form.

Source: Departmental returns.

The data are expressed in £'000s.

Government Grants

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what will be the total level of Government grant per head of adult population for 1992-93 for *(a)* Bradford, *(b)* Craven and *(c)* Harrogate.

Mr. Key: Under my right hon. Friend's proposals the total of revenue support grant and, in Bradford's case, area protection grant per head of adult population will be as follows:

	£
Bradford	736
Craven	300
Harrogate	295

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make available financial assistance to complete the restoration of Hanover square in Bradford; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: The restoration of the properties in Hanover square has attracted financial support primarily from

English Heritage and the City of Bradford metropolitan council. It is for those bodies to consider whether further support would be necessary or justified. My Department has not directly funded the scheme and it would be inappropriate for it to do so.

Housing Associations

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received concerning the performance of the housing associations active in rural areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: None.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Rost: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will issue guidance to local planning authorities about renewable energy; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young: A draft planning guidance note, with an accompanying draft annex on wind energy, is being issued for public consultation today. Copies have been placed in the Library.

The draft guidance describes the different forms of renewable energy and explains the part they might play in tackling greenhouse gas emissions; explains Government policy on renewable energy installations, including the non-fossil fuel obligation; outlines the relevant environmental protection legislation; shows how local planning authorities can include renewable energy policies in development plans and advises them to consider what contribution their area may make; sets out the considerations which should apply when renewable energy installations are proposed in designated areas; explains when environmental assessment may be required; and notes the environmental implications of such installations.

The draft annex gives authorities detailed information about the technology of wind energy and its planning implications. Information is also given on how to assess the environmental aspects of wind powered developments. Further annexes on other forms of renewable energy are in preparation and will be issued in due course.

This new draft guidance demonstrates the Government's commitment to renewable energy and to tackling global warming, whilst continuing to recognise the fundamental importance of its policies to protect the landscape and wildlife.

Poll Tax

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the average collection level of the poll tax at 30 September 1990, at 31 March 1991 and at 30 September 1991 for *(a)* shire districts, *(b)* metropolitan authorities, *(c)* outer-London boroughs, *(d)* inner-London boroughs, (i) excluding and (ii) including the provision in local authority budgets for non-collection; and what poll tax income was (1) collected and (2) uncollected at 30 September 1990, 31 March 1991 and 30 September 1991.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 4 December 1991]:* The available information is as follows:

Community charge receipts for 1990-91 as a percentage of budgeted income

	by 30 September 1990 Percentage	*by 31 March 1991 Percentage*	*by 30 September 1991 Percentage*
Shire districts	47	92	96
Metropolitan districts	44	87	93
Inner London boroughs	34	79	86
Outer London boroughs	44	89	94

Information on the community charge collection levels as a percentage of the debits raised by authorities in 1990-91 is not available.

Community charge receipts for 1991-92 by 30 September 1991 as a percentage of

	Budgeted income Percentage	*Estimated debit Percentage*
Shire districts	40	38
Metropolitan districts	38	37
Inner London boroughs	28	[1]32
Outer London boroughs	36	

[1] Information on debit is not sufficiently reliable for a breakdown between class of authority within London.

Community charge income

	Collected £ billion	*Uncollected £ billion*
At 30 September 1990	4·64	5·57
At 31 March 1991	9·19	1·03
At 30 September 1991		
1990-91 charges	9·71	0·51
1991-92 charges	2·47	3·93

ENERGY

Energy Labelling Scheme

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what proportion of fridge-freezer, fridge and freezer models have so far been rated under the Energy Efficiency Office energy labelling scheme; whether all major manufacturers are co-operating with the scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: All the major retailers, manufacturers and importers of refrigerators and freezers have been given details of the rating method which enables all models to be rated. The rating is obtained from the standard energy consumption information by a simple calculation explained in a technical leaflet which is freely available from my Energy Efficiency Office. A copy of the technical leaflet and the explanatory customer leaflet is available in the Library of the House. The regional electricity companies have themselves calculated ratings for about 300 models which they carry, and have labels showing those ratings on models on display in their shops which sell about 27 per cent. of all refrigerators and freezers in the United Kingdom.

All major manufacturers publish the standard energy consumption information required for the energy efficiency labels in brochures and technical leaflets provided with new appliances.

Sellafield

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy on how many occasions since the Windscale reprocessing works at Sellafield was opened for full safeguards inspection in 1986 have Euratom nuclear inspectors visited the B-205 Magnox reprocessing plant; what information they conveyed to his safeguards division following each inspection; and whether the details of the safeguards reports are available for public scrutiny.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Euratom inspectors have access to all civil nuclear material at Sellafield on a continuing basis. Typically, three Euratom officials are involved in inspection work at Sellafield at any one time. They divide their time between the various plants according to their assessment of the inspection needs. Detailed reports are prepared by these officials for the Euratom inspectorate and their findings are confidential to it. As appropriate, Euratom hold discussions with the safeguards office of my Department and with the operator: such discussions are confidential.

From time to time, Euratom publishes summaries of its inspection activities; the most recent is the "Report on the Operations of Euratom Safeguards" dated 19 March 1990, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

Semi-conductor Materials

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what work is sponsored by his Department's energy technology research unit on the use of semi-conductor growth technologies in solar cell development.

Mr. Moynihan: On 8 May I announced that the Government are to fund a £250,000 programme of research into the use of solar power for electricity production. We believe that photovoltaics is a renewable technology which has considerable potential, particularly when incorporated into the fabric of a building. It is towards this area, rather than fundamental research into cell development, that the Department's programme has been focused.

Opencast Mining

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how much coal has been produced from opencast operations in Great Britain in each of the last seven years.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Total opencast coal output from British Coal and the licensed sector in each of the last seven years was as follows:

	output (million tonnes)
1984-85	14·6
1985-86	15·3
1986-87	14·6
1987-88	16·3
1988-89	18·0
1989-90	18·6
1990-91	18·3

TRANSPORT

Bus Companies

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what studies his Department has made of bus companies franchising their routes.

Mr. Freeman: The Departmnt has not undertaken any studies of bus companies franchising their routes. However, bus route tendering in London has provided valuable experience for bus operators and the Department in preparation for the deregulation of the London bus market. We are now ready to bring the benefits of deregulation to London's bus passengers, and hope to deposit a Bill to that end at an early opportunity in the new Parliament.

Airports (Credit Approvals)

Sir Fergus Montgomery: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will now announce the 1992-93 supplementry credit approvals for public airport companies and local authority airports.

Mr. McLoughlin: Supplementary credit approvals totalling £72 million will be available for public airport companies and local authority airports for 1992-93. These credit approvals, together with other resources which public airport companies expect at this stage to invest, will assist the airports concerned to provide facilities which they estimate could cost some £122 million in 1992-93.

As announced today by my noble Friend in another place, we have agreed to supplementary credit approvals totalling £59 million at this stage. The major projects concerned include the continuation of work on phase 1 of terminal 2 at Manchester airport and joint venture projects with the private sector at Birmingham airport. Formal supplementary credit approvals for these and other projects will be issued to the local authorities shortly.

The £72 million total of credit approvals for 1992-93, following the £87 million for 1991-92, represents a substantial commitment to the development of regional airports. But, as I indicated in my answer to my hon. friend in connection with the 1991-92 settlement—*Official Report* 19 December 1990, column *169*—investment allocations will reduce in scale as phase 1 of terminal 2 at Manchester airport is completed and as the pressure on public sector spending continues. Local authority airports will have to look increasingly to the private sector to share in the successes and the risks associated with continued expansion.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what arrangements are being made to carry forward work on the Government's preferred route for the channel tunnel rail link.

Mr. Rifkind: I announced on 14 October the Government's preference for a route which terminates at King's Cross and which approaches from the east, via Stratford. I also invited British Rail to undertake such refinement of the route as is necessary to enable me to safeguard it.

Work on the route is now under way. British Rail should have created a new mapping base for the easterly

section of the route by the end of the year. Work on defining the line and engineering it in sufficient detail for publication, consultation and environmental assessment should then begin in the new year. Officials from my Department, the Department of the Environment and the Treasury are closely involved and are already discussing parameters for the work, such as the freight role of a new line. The consultants appointed by the Department of the Environment to undertake the study of the development potential of the east Thames corridor will be kept in close touch. Ove Arup, which originally conceived the easterly approach via Stratford, is being invited by British Rail to join its team of consultants.

It is the Government's intention that the rail link should be taken forward by the private sector. I shall therefore be appointing a merchant bank early in the new year to advise the Government both about private sector interests whilst the line is refined and on the best way in which to hand over the project to the private sector in due course. The merchant bank will act as my Department's point of contact for developers and other private sector interests with a potential interest in funding and developing the rail link.

It is still too early to say when public consultations can begin, but it is important that the local authorities are involved at an early stage. I am still considering how this might best be organised but again I would expect arrangements for a consultative forum to be in place early in the new year.

Parking

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to seek to require local authorities to establish additional designated parking areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: No. The designation of parking places on the highway under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 is a matter for the relevant highway authority. We do however plan to issue further guidance to London authorities under the Road Traffic Act 1991 on the designation of on-street parking spaces.

A10 Improvement

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will now take steps to acquire at a full market valuation properties in Cheshunt affected by the proposed A10 improvement;

(2) how many representations he has received concerning the effect on properties in Cheshunt of the proposed A10 improvement;

(3) when he expects to give a substantive reply to the letters from the hon. Member for Broxbourne dated 1 July, 29 August, 12 November and 13 November 1991 concerning the possible effect on properties of his Department's proposals to improve the A10 through Cheshunt;

(4) further to his answer to the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley), *Official Report*, column *235*, when guidelines for the new discretionary power to acquire property seriously affected by his Department's road schemes will be announced.

Mr. Chope: The Department has already purchased 36 properties under the statutory blight provisions in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, as amended. It is also committed to acquiring 49 others, while a further 37 are under consideration.

There have been a large number of enquiries about the road proposals and about property blight—both written and by telephone.

The specific correspondence which my hon. Friend mentions is concerned with the application of the new power given by the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 to acquire properties which in the opinion of the Secretary of State will be seriously affected by the road scheme. When the criteria by which this discretionary power will be exercised have been decided, I shall write further to my hon. Friend.

St. Pancras-Sheffield Railway

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met leaders of local authorities of areas with railway stations on the midland main line, to discuss electrification from St. Pancras to Sheffield.

Mr. Freeman: I met the midland main line consortium of local authorities on 4 November. I have written to my hon. Friend following that meeting.

CIVIL SERVICE

Opposition Parties (Consultation)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what current guidance exists for the conduct of those civil servants who may participate in the consultation with Opposition parties six months prior to an election; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Renton: The guidance was summarised in my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's reply to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) on 27 November, at columns *527-28*.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Economic Models

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many models of the economy are funded in whole or part by Government.

Mr. Maples: The Treasury and the Bank of England both maintain models of the United Kingdom economy. Research on the London business school and the National Institute of Economic and Social Research models of the United Kingdom economy and on their GEM model of the world economy is partly funded by the Economic and Social Research Council Macroeconomic modelling consortium. The consortium is also funding research on a model currently being developed at Strathclyde university.

Tobacco Tax

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will provide an estimate of the extra revenue if taxation on cigarettes were raised by the amount necessary to increase the retail price by 25 pence.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: This would raise £1·1 billion in 1992-93 and £1·25 billion in 1993-94.

Government Stocks

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money remains unclaimed upon Government stocks having matured in the six years to 1 April 1991.

Mr. Maples: An aggregate of £7·3 million of unclaimed moneys remains outstanding in respect of Government stocks maturing on the Bank of England's registers during the six years to 1 April 1991. This total is comprised of £1·4 million dividends and £5·9 million redemption monies and represents less than 0·02 per cent. of the total amount of these stocks issued to the public.

Tax Allowances and Reliefs

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be *(a)* the first year and *(b)* the full-year revenue effect, if all tax allowances and reliefs except the single person's allowance were restricted to the basic rate (i) in 1991-92, and (ii) in 1992-93, in (1) Great Britain, (2) Northern Ireland and (3) the United Kingdom.

Mr. Maude: It is estimated that, at 1991-92 levels of income, the yield in a full year from restricting all tax allowances and reliefs—except the personal allowance—to the basic rate of tax would be about £900 million. The corresponding figure for 1992-93 is £950 million.

The effect on receipts in the first year would depend on the administrative arrangements for such a change. I regret it is not possible to provide separate estimates for Northern Ireland.

Currency Matters

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he next expects to meet his EC counterparts to discuss currency matters.

Mr. Maples *[holding answer 28 November 1991]:* My right hon. Friend will be attending the European Council which meets in Maastricht on 9 December. There are no plans for this meeting to discuss current exchange rates.

VAT (Horses)

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much VAT was collected as a result of the sale and purchase of horses in each of the years 1983 to date; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 4 December 1991]:* I regret that information on VAT collected from the sale and purchase of horses is not available.

PRIME MINISTER

Dalai Lama

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Prime Minister what subjects were discussed at his meeting with the Dalai Lama; what was the outcome of the discussions; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace) on 3 December at column 141.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 5 December.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Maastricht Conference

Mr. Favell: To ask the Prime Minister what consideration he has given to his policies on the United Kingdom's position in the European Community in the event of the United Kingdom not signing any treaty agreed upon at Maastricht by other European Community member states.

The Prime Minister: The Government's objective is to reach an agreement at Maastricht on terms that I can commend to the House. Amendment of the treaty of Rome requires the approval of all the member states and all Twelve would have to consider the implications if no agreement were reached at Maastricht.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on extending the level of involvement of Parliament in the decision-making process running up to Maastricht.

The Prime Minister: Parliament has been kept fully informed of the progress in the intergovernmental conferences. A statement is made following every ministerial session. Parliament has also had the fullest possible opportunity to debate all the issues for discussion at Maastricht. Any agreement reached at Maastricht will be put to the House for approval.

Civil Servants

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister, (1) if he will include in the definition of civil servants he is prepared to authorise to meet Opposition parties, six months prior to an election, the chief executives and senior officers of the agencies;

(2) if he will list the grades of civil servant which he will agree to authorise to consult Opposition parties on policy matters six months prior to an election.

The Prime Minister: I do not intend to specify grades or positions.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister, further to his reply of 27 November, *Official Report*, column *527*, on Opposition parties consulting civil servants on organisational changes resulting from Opposition policies, if he is now prepared to supply information on the current organisation of Departments.

The Prime Minister: Such information is already in the public domain.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister on what basis Her Majesty's Government's Cabinet Secretary met the shadow Cabinet last week; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The meeting was held in confidence and with my authority to provide a briefing on civil service matters.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister what are the conventions and guidance whereby civil service departments brief and induct Ministers on their first day in office.

The Prime Minister: There are no specific conventions or guidance.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if, pursuant to his answer of 27 November, *Official Report*, column *527-28*, to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), he will give the dates prior to the 1983 and 1987 general elections when Opposition parties were authorised to have contacts with senior civil servants; when the convention on Opposition parties consulting the civil service six months prior to an election was last used; and if he will make a statement on the procedure.

The Prime Minister: As these elections were called more than six months before the five-year term of Parliament would have expired, no question of authorisation before the election period arose. A statement on the procedure was made to the House by the then Prime Minister on 21 April 1970. The statement referred to meetings in July 1964. The convention has been operated only in or immediately before subsequent election periods.

Operation Scotcheck

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on Operation Scotcheck on 13 November; and if he will give details of the involvement of each of the Scottish police forces, the Health and Safety Executive, Her Majesty's Custom and Excise, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department of Transport and the Department of Social Security.

The Prime Minister: Operation Scotcheck was a joint police and Health and Safety Executive initiative mirroring similar operations previously held in England. The purpose was to check that vehicles carrying hazardous substances were doing so in accordance with the relevant regulations. All eight police forces in Scotland took part in the operation. In addition a number of Government Departments were invited by the police to take part in the exercise for their particular interests and to be present at the various checkpoints. This is a cost-effective way of checking compliance with the law in a range of different areas.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Prime Minister how many joint initiatives have been mounted by the Department of Employment and the Benefits Agency on benefit fraud protection under the terms of the liaison agreement; and if he will make a statement concerning the exchange of any information between Departments obtained from such initiatives.

The Prime Minister: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mr. Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

WALES

Disabled Staff

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many disabled people are currently employed in his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: My Department employs 36 people who are registered disabled and acts as host organisation for a further five on the sheltered placement scheme. Initiatives in the last year have produced a 20 per cent. increase.

In addition, the Department employs a number of other staff who are disabled but not registered.

Valleys Programmes

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the cost of the valleys programme from its inception to the latest available date.

Mr. David Hunt: A total of £421·94 million was spent on a range of central Government programmes in the valleys between June 1988 and June 1991.

Consultants

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he is taking to examine and validate the waiting lists of consultants in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: All health authorities in Wales are required to ensure that waiting lists are validated. This is being undertaken at hospital, specialty and individual consultant level as appropriate. The importance of validating lists as part of good management practice has been stressed to the health authorities. I am asking for a report of what procedures each has in place.

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what action he is taking to publicise the lengths of consultants' waiting lists in Wales and to assist patients to choose the shortest waiting times for their operations.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The patients charter requires that from 1 April 1992, all district health authorities in Wales should publish waiting times for out-patient, day care and in-patient treatment by hospital, specialty and individual consultant.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the total expenditure to date by central and local government agencies on administration and collection of the poll tax; and how this sum is broken down into its component parts.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Administration and collection of the community charge is a local government responsibility. The available information on local authority expenditure is given in the table:

Local authority current expenditure on community charge preparation, collection and benefit administration[1]

	1989-90 £ million	*1990-91*[2] *£ million*	*1991-92*[3] *£ million*
Community charge preparation	[4]10·7	—	—
Community charge collection	—	22·1	24·5
Community charge benefit administration	—	7·9	8·7
TOTAL	10·7	30·0	33·2

[1] Expenditure on employees and running expenses, less sales, fees, charges, internal recharges and other non-grant income, but gross of specific government grants and certain interest receipts. Excludes net expenditure by local authorities on community charge benefit.
[2] Provisional.
[3] Local authority budgets.
[4] Additionally, gross capital expenditure of £3·9 million was recorded by local authorities.

Mr. Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the cumulative amount and the amount for last year of poll tax arrears in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones) on 17 October 1991.

Supported Homes

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the target date by which he intends that the proportion of adults with learning difficulties who need a supported home of their own and who actually have such a home shall exceed 50 per cent.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Targets are proposed annually by county joint planning teams and agreed annually by the Welsh Office. Provisional targets for 1991-92 indicate that there should be 1,194 places for adults living in ordinary housing outside the family home by 31 March 1992, compared to 166 places in the year before the all-Wales mental handicap strategy was launched.

Children (Secure Accommodation)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many children from each county in Wales were held in secure accommodation in each month in 1989, 1990 and the current year.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The number of admissions from each county in Wales to Welsh secure units in each month is shown in table 1. Fewer individual children were involved, since some were admitted for short periods on several occasions.

Table 2 gives the available annual figures for children placed by Welsh authorities in English secure units; monthly figures are not available.

In addition, on behalf of the Home Office, the Welsh Office place children found guilty of "grave crimes", in secure accommodation, currently all in England. Two such placements were made in 1989, seven in 1990, and 10 this year to date. Table 3 shows the county of origin.

Table 1: Admissions to Welsh secure accommodation

Clwyd

	1 April 1988 to 31 March 1989	1 April 1989 to 31 March 1990	1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991
April	—	—	—
May	—	—	—
June	—	—	—
July	—	—	—
August	—	—	—
September	—	—	—
October	—	—	—
November	—	—	—
December	—	—	—
January	—	—	—
February	—	—	—
March	—	—	—
Annual total	0	0	0

Dyfed

	1 April 1988 to 31 March 1989	1 April 1989 to 31 March 1990	1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991
April	—	—	—
May	—	—	—
June	—	—	1
July	—	—	—
August	—	1	—
September	—	—	—
October	—	—	—
November	—	—	—
December	—	—	—
January	—	—	—
February	—	—	—
March	—	—	—
Annual total	0	1	1

Gwent

	1 April 1988 to 31 March 1989	1 April 1989 to 31 March 1990	1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991
April	3	4	12
May	4	8	6
June	2	3	4
July	6	6	9
August	4	1	4
September	2	3	1
October	2	1	7
November	6	3	6
December	4	3	1
January	5	4	1
February	6	2	2
March	3	1	4
Annual total	47	39	57

Gwynedd

	1 April 1988 to 31 March 1989	1 April 1989 to 31 March 1990	1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991
April	—	—	—
May	—	—	—
June	—	—	—
July	—	—	—
August	—	—	—
September	—	—	—
October	—	—	—
November	—	—	—
December	—	—	—
January	—	—	—
February	—	—	—
March	—	—	—
Annual total	0	0	0

Mid Glamorgan

	1 April 1988 to 31 March 1989	1 April 1989 to 31 March 1990	1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991
April	4	2	—
May	—	1	2
June	—	3	2
July	1	4	5
August	3	4	11
September	1	5	2
October	3	2	10
November	—	3	7
December	—	2	—
January	5	1	3
February	1	—	4
March	3	2	3

	1 April 1988 to 31 March 1989	1 April 1989 to 31 March 1990	1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991
Annual total	21	29	49

Powys

	1 April 1988 to 31 March 1989	1 April 1989 to 31 March 1990	1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991
April	—	—	—
May	—	—	—
June	—	—	—
July	—	—	—
August	—	—	—
September	—	—	—
October	—	—	—
November	—	—	—
December	—	—	—
January	—	—	—
February	—	—	—
March	—	—	2
Annual total	0	0	2

South Glamorgan

	1 April 1988 to 31 March 1989	1 April 1989 to 31 March 1990	1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991
April	—	2	—
May	—	—	—
June	—	—	—
July	2	—	—
August	—	—	3
September	—	—	1
October	—	—	1
November	—	—	—
December	—	1	1
January	—	—	—
February	—	—	—
March	—	—	—
Annual total	2	3	6

West Glamorgan

	1 April 1988 to 31 March 1989	1 April 1989 to 31 March 1990	1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991
April	6	5	7
May	6	3	3
June	1	2	4
July	—	7	9
August	4	8	7
September	7	6	6
October	1	7	6
November	6	10	4
December	4	7	7
January	4	6	2
February	7	—	4
March	1	20	7
Annual total	47	81	66

Table 2: Admissions to English secure accommodation

	1988-89	1989-90
Clwyd	4	5
Dyfed	—	—
Gwent	—	—
Gwynedd	—	1
Mid Glamorgan	1	5
Powys	—	—
South Glamorgan	3	1
West Glamorgan	—	1

Table 3: Admissions under section 53(2) 1933 Children and Young Person's Act

	1989	1990	1991
Clwyd	1	1	2
Dyfed	—	1	—
Gwent	—	1	—
Gwynedd	—	1	—
Mid Glamorgan	1	3	3
Powys	—	—	—
South Glamorgan	—	—	4
West Glamorgan	—	—	1

Hospital Patients (Travelling)

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the estimated cost per annum arising from Welsh patients travelling to England for treatment.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: For those services that are now subject to cross-charging arrangements, the cost of treating Welsh patients in England is, on the basis of Welsh health authorities' own estimates, anticipated to be in the region of £46 million in the current financial year.

The Welsh Office does not have information on the further cost of services provided in England to Welsh patients which are not subject to the new cross-charging arrangements, notably those in respect of supra-regional services and those provided by special health authorities and which are still funded by the Department of Health.

Llay Junior School

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will visit Llay junior CP school, Clwyd, and meet *(a)* the parent-teachers association, *(b)* the governors and *(c)* the staff.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Neither my right hon. Friend nor I have any plans at present to do so.

Trunk Roads

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give a breakdown of the planned expenditure on *(a)* new construction and improvement, *(b)* structural maintenance and *(c)* current maintenance on trunk roads by his Department for the years 1992-93, 1993-94 and 1994-95, respectively.

Sir Wyn Roberts *[holding answer 21 November 1991]:* Planned net expenditure in 1992-93 on the roads and transport programme in Wales is about £195 million; this includes £135 million for new construction and improvements, £36 million for structural renewals and £21 million for current maintenance. The comparable figures for 1993-94 and 1994-95 will be announced in due course.

HEALTH

Kidney Transplants

Mr. Barron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many kidney transplant operations have taken place in the Northern general hospital in Sheffield in the years 1988-89, 1989-90 and 1990-91, respectively; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Renal transplant services, provided initially at the Royal Hallamshire hospital, Sheffield, were transferred to the Northern general hospital, Sheffield in 1990.

According to information supplied by the United Kingdom Support Service Authority, the number of cadaveric kidney transplants performed in those hospitals for the years requested is as follows:

	Number
1988	24
1989	51
1990	28
1991	[1]29

[1] This figure is provisional and is for the period 1 January to 28 November.

Availability of donor organs is the key factor in the number of transplant operations performed.

Children Act 1989

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the current cost of implementing the Children Act 1989.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Central Government do not specify in detail how local authorities should allocate the overall resources available to them but rather indicate their view of appropriate spending through standard spending control totals. For the first full year of the Children Act in 1992-93, standard spending for children in England will be £1,654 million—over 27 per cent. higher than in 1990-91 or up nearly 14 per cent. in real terms. This includes the full revenue consequences of the £5·7 million new guardian ad litem specific grant for 1992-93.

Disabled Staff

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many disabled people are currently employed in his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: As at 1 June 1991, 34·5 whole-time equivalent members of staff were registered disabled. A survey earlier this year identified 61 additional members of staff with a disability who were not registered as disabled. The Department of Health is an equal opportunity employer and observes the code of practice issued by the Cabinet Office for the employment of people with a disability. All job advertisements carry the recognised disability symbol which signifies that posts are open to suitably qualified disabled applicants.

Cold Weather

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government have to publicise the dangers of hypothermia in the winter months; and what plans the Government have to publicise the "Winter Warmth" line which gives advice to older people about keeping warm in winter.

Mr. Dorrell: The Government's fifth annual "Keep Warm, Keep Well" campaign was launched on 16 October. The purpose of the campaign, which is run jointly with Help the Aged, Neighbourhood Energy Action and Age Concern, is to advise vulnerable people of the steps they can take to minimise the risks from cold weather and to inform them of the help that is available. The campaign is publicised widely through radio and television. A free booklet in English and nine ethnic languages is also available from amongst others doctors, dentists, libraries and citizens advice bureaux. The winter warmth line is one component part of the "Keep Warm, Keep Well" campaign and is given wide publicity by the participating agencies.

Regional Health Authorities (Revenue Allocation)

Mr. Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will announce regional health authorities' revenue allocations for 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waldegrave: In 1992-93 regional health authorities' allocations for resident population will increase in real terms by an average of 4·8 per cent. All get substantial real terms increases. The variations are based on the size, age and health of the resident population. No region will get less than 3·5 per cent. extra in real terms and the four Thames regions will get a minimum of 4 per cent. to enable those regions to ensure stability during the period of Sir Bernard Tomlinson's study on London health services.

In addition, there will be increased support for initiatives such as AIDS services and prevention, Project 2000 training for nurses and measures to reduce the hours worked by junior doctors.

The table shows the revenue allocations for each regional health authority.

Region	*1992-93 allocations for resident population £ million*	*Percentage cash increase* per cent.	*Real terms percentage increase* per cent.
Northern	1,106·7	9·7	5·0
Yorkshire	1,276·4	11·3	6·5
Trent	1,593·6	10·3	5·6
East Anglian	669·2	10·4	5·6
North West Thames	1,260·0	8·7	4·0
North East Thames	1,448·2	8·7	4·0
South East Thames	1,383·1	9·0	4·3
South West Thames	1,078·2	8·7	4·0
Wessex	980·9	9·7	5·0
Oxford	758·2	9·8	5·0

Region	1992-93 allocations for resident population £ million	Percentage cash increase per cent.	Real terms percentage increase per cent.
South Western	1,128·0	10·4	5·7
West Midlands	1,766·6	10·3	5·5
Mersey	856·7	8·2	3·5
North Western	1,439·6	8·2	3·5
ALL REGIONS	16,745·4	9·5	4·8

Notes:
1. Regional cash limits will differ from the sums shown as they exclude allocations for items such as the Service Increment for Teaching and Research and Joint Finance, etc.
2. Figures may not sum due to roundings.

Dentists (Overpayment)

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about any outstanding overpayment to dentists.

Mr. Waldegrave: In 1988-89, net payments to general dental practitioners averaged some £4,874 per dentist in excess of the intended level. I have considered carefully the various factors which led to this overpayment in the light of the concerns expressed by the profession about the size and circumstances of the overpayment.

The principal reasons for the overpayment were that the calculation of the 1988 dental fee scale was based on forecasts which over-estimated dentists' practice expenses and underestimated the volume of treatment to be undertaken by dentists. Some degree of forecasting error in both these areas is inevitable and is corrected under the normal balancing arrangements. In fact, an initial instalment of £598 was recovered in respect of the 1988-89 overpayment in the normal manner in the 1991-92 fee settlement.

A third factor was a large-scale increase in 1988-89 in the rate of processing at the Dental Practice Board which processes dentists' claims for payment. I have decided that this special factor, which was exceptional and once and for all, should be excluded from the sum to be recovered.

I have therefore decided to waive £1,529 of the 1988-89 overpayment per dentist because of this exceptional factor —a sum equivalent to £23 million for Great Britain. The normal conventions of the balancing mechanism will be applied to the balance.

I believe that this represents a constructive and substantial response to the profession's concerns. We shall be reviewing procedures with a view to avoiding such large scale variations in processing rates in the future and to insulate the dentists' pay system from these. I am also inviting the profession to discuss with us the remuneration system more generally in the light of the Government's policy on performance pay set out in the citizens charter.

Medway Hospital

Dame Peggy Fenner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to make budgetary provision for the Medway hospital phase IIIC.

Mr. Dorrell: The Government have just announced the biggest-ever level of capital investment for the NHS in 1992-93. The share of that for South East Thames regional health authority, along with all regional health authorities, will be announced shortly. Provision for Medway hospital phase IIIC is a matter for the region, which will shortly complete its review of priorities for investment over the next decade. These will be made public at its next meeting.

Incontinence Pads

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, further to his answer of 14 November, *Official Report*, column 657, what statutory provisions allow local health authorities to charge for incontinence pads to those who are not in-patients, neither in course of treatment nor in nursing homes.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 19 November 1991]:* Health authorities have no powers to charge people for incontinence pads they provide as part of any national health service in-patient or community health services.

Guy's Hospital

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff were employed in each category at Guy's hospital in each quarter of the financial year 1990-91 and the first two quarters of the financial year 1991-92.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 21 November 1991]:* Prior to 1 April 1991, reliable staffing information District level was not centrally available. The provisional information held centrally, since that date, for Guy's and Lewisham Trust is given in the table.

Guy's and Lewisham hospitals NHS Trust
Directly employed staff in post—1991

	Whole-time equivalents as at: 30 June	30 September
Medical staff	450	450
Non-medical staff	5,150	5,120

Source: Department of Health (SMI4) QM06 return.
Note: All figures are independently rounded to the nearest ten (10) whole-time equivalent.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are waiting for *(a)* in-patient care and *(b)* out-patient appointments in each specialty at Guy's hospital for each quarter for the financial year 1990-91 and for the first two quarters of the financial year 1991-92.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 21 November 1991]:* Information was not collected centrally on waiting lists at Guy's and Lewisham hospitals before 1 April 1991. Provisional data reported by the trust shows that the number of patients, including day cases, waiting for admission in the current year was as follows:

	Numbers
June 1991	8,500
September 1991	8,000

I understand that Guy's and Lewisham Hospital NHS Trust estimate that its waiting list for in-patients and day-case treatment fell by 14·8 per cent. over the 12 months to September 1991.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were *(a)* seen as outpatients or *(b)* treated as in-patients by each specialty at Guy's hospital in each quarter of the financial year 1990-91 and the first two quarters of the financial year 1991-92.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 21 November 1991]:* Information was not collected centrally on activity at Guy's and Lewisham hospitals before 1 April 1991. However, I understand that Guy's and Lewisham Hospitals NHS Trust estimate that activity in the six months April 1991 to September 1991 was greater than in the corresponding period in 1990 and that the trust expects full-year increases in activity of at least 9 per cent.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the current financial situation for both capital and revenue at Guy's hospital.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 21 November 1991]:* For the period 1 April to 30 September 1991 the Guy's and Lewisham Trust reported a deficit of £1·3 million—1·5 per cent. of total turnover. The trust has plans to eliminate this by the year end. Capital expenditure is controlled by the trust's external financing limit. The trust has operated within its limit for the first half of the year and plans to remain within it for the remainder of the year.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many times, and on each occasion for what length of time *(a)* elective and *(b)* emergency admissions have been (i) reduced and (ii) stopped at Guy's hospital in each quarter of the financial year 1990-91 and the first two quarters of the financial year 1991-92.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 21 November 1991]:* This information is not held centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Sir Phillip Harris, chairman of the Guy's and Lewisham Hospitals NHS Trust, for details.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the average, maximum and minimum numbers of beds *(a)* available and *(b)* occupied for each specialty at Guy's hospital in each quarter of the financial year 1990-91 and the first two quarters of the financial year 1991-92.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 21 November 1991]:* Up to 1990-91 data on available beds were collected at hospital site level by type of ward rather than specialty. Data for 1990-91 will be published early in 1992 in "Summary of Bed Availability, England, Financial year 1990-91". From 1991-92 data on available beds will be collected at directly managed unit and trust level. The 1991-92 statistics will be published by early 1993.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* elective operations, *(b)* scheduled operating sessions and *(c)* non-scheduled operating sessions were cancelled in each specialty at Guy's hospital in each quarter of the financial year 1990-91 and the first two quarters of the financial year 1991-91.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 21 November 1991]:* Statistics on operating theatre sessions are collected annually, after the end of the financial year. Data for 1991-92 in respect of the Guy's and Lewisham NHS Hospitals Trust will be published early in 1993. Data about operating theatre sessions in 1990-91 in hospitals managed by Lewisham and North Southwark DHA will be published early in 1992, in "NHS Operating Theatres Availability and Use, England, Financial year 1990-91".

Dental Service

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement after the meeting of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Baroness Hooper, with dentists from Dorset, about the suspension of the national health service dental service for children;

(2) what steps he intends to take to ensure the continuation of national health service dental services for children in Dorset.

Mr. Waldegrave *[pursuant to his reply, 22 November 1991, c. 333]:* I regret there was an error in the information provided. The answer stated that Dorset has the second highest level of children registered with a dentist in England; the correct level is the fifth highest.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Arab States (Trade Balance)

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the balance of trade between the United Kingdom and the Arab states taken as a whole; and what is that balance between the European Community and the Arab states.

Mr. Lilley: In 1990 the United Kingdom's balance of trade in visible goods with the Arab states was in surplus by £2·4 billion. The European Community had a deficit of £2·6 billion.

Consultants

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what legislation or regulation controls or supervises the use of the term insurance consultant or financial consultant; and what agency is responsible for conducting this supervision.

Mr. Redwood: There is no legislation governing use of these terms. Rules made by the self-regulatory organisations under the Financial Services Act and by the Association of British Insurers code of practice for non-registered general insurance intermediaries require those who use such terms to make their status clear.

Telephone Standardisation

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from industries and commercial companies about the additional costs arising from the 1994 telephone standardisation programme.

Mr. Redwood: The Director General of Telecommunications is responsible for numbering. Over the past two years he has undertaken extensive research and consultation on a new numbering plan. Users who responded to the consultation exercise gave overwhelming support to a 10-digit scheme of the kind that has now been approved by the director general.

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will extend the proposed period for the completion of the 1994 telephone standardisation programme.

Mr. Redwood: The new national numbering plan is the responsibility of the Director General of Telecommunications. He consulted widely on its proposed completion date. The plan is expected to be implemented over the Easter weekend of 1994, which should give telecommunications users adequate time to prepare for the change.

ECGD Insurance Services Group

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his best estimate of the net receipts to Her Majesty's Government from the sale of the Insurance Services Group of the Export Credits Guarantee Department to NCM of Amsterdam; and what arrangements he has made concerning the commutation of pension entitlement for civil servants transferred to NCM.

Mr. Lilley: The gross cost to NCM is £70 million made up as follows:

£50 million to capitalise the company, relieving the Exchequer of the equivalent responsibility;
£20 million for goodwill.

Net of Government's current estimate of costs this leaves net receipts to Government of £12 million of which £5 million—indexed to maintain its present value—is payable by NCM in 1996 subject to the outturn in the first two years of the company's operation in the private sector. NCM (UK) Holding is providing a pension scheme for established ECGD staff transferring from the principal civil service pension scheme—PCSPS—which is closely similar to the PCSPS. These transferees will be able to take across to the new scheme, on a year-for-year basis, their accrued benefits in the PCSPS. They will have three months to decide on this.

Cumbria Action Team

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the cost to his Department of setting up and administering the Cumbria action team.

Mr. Leigh: The Cumbria action team was set up as part of the Special measures for Cumbria announced by the Secretary of State in June. A special fund of up to £1 million was allocated to the team in order to support local initiatives in the area. The special fund is solely for programme expenditure. All administrative costs are included in the overall running costs of the DTI's north-west regional office. Three officials are currently working full-time on Cumbria issues, with support from others in the regional office.

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the projects in Copeland which have received financial assistance from the Cumbria action team.

Mr. Leigh: The £1 million special fund will complement the £15 million English Estates building programme, which is due to commence in January.

The Cumbria action team has been working with Copeland local authority, the West Cumbria development agency and other bodies locally, to identify suitable projects for support under the special fund.

A number of projects are now under active consideration and I hope to announce a number of approvals shortly.

Consumer Credit

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has for improving standards in the marketing of consumer credit; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: The Government are today sending out a consultative document about its proposals for legislation on credit marketing.

The proposals in the December 1990 consultative document have been revised to take account of the views expressed by consultees. The main aim continues to be to alert consumers more effectively to the costs and risks involved in credit agreements before they commit themselves to enter into agreements or make greater use of existing facilities. However, the proposals have been modified to ensure that the new requirements do not inconvenience the majority of consumers who use credit responsibly nor add unnecessarily to the burdens of business.

While most of the proposals are substantially the same as those on which consultation has already been completed, there are many changes of detail. The main purpose of a second consultation is to obtain views on the detail and in particular on the draft implementing legislation. However, views on any aspect of the proposals will, of course, be considered.

Most of the proposals can be implemented by regulation made under the Consumer Credit Act 1974 and it is intended to make these regulations early in 1992. The main changes to be made by regulations are that health warnings and additional information be included in credit advertisements, quotations and agreements; stopping inertia selling in connection with credit; and banning unsolicited increases in credit limits other than to adjust for inflation.

The proposals to extend cancellation rights and to limit the defences available for breaching the prohibition on sending credit circulars to minors will require primary legislation to amend the Act. As soon as legislative time is available the Government intend to introduce a Bill to make these amendments as well as making the deregulatory changes announced in the 1988 White Paper "Releasing Enterprise".

Copies of the consultative document have been placed in the Library, and copies will be available from the Vote Office.

Timeshare

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce a compulsory cooling-off period for all prospective purchasers of timeshare accommodation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 28 November 1991]*: My hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) has tabled a Bill which would introduce a compulsory cooling-off period for prospective purchasers of timeshare accommodation. This Bill has my full support.

Live Television Feed

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the locations of the television sets in his Department which can receive the live television feed from the Chamber, and the total cost to his Department of this service.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 3 December 1991]*: There are an estimated 18 television sets capable of receiving the live feed. These are installed in each of the five Minister's offices and offices of the permanent secretary and three deputy secretaries. In addition sets in the press office, parliamentary branch and two other offices can also receive the link.

The cost of installation was about £14,000 and the rental for the current year is estimated also about £14,000.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Suckler Cow Premium

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many applications for payment of the annual suckler cow premium have been lodged with the Carlisle office of his Department; what proportion of those applicants have received their payment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: A total of 1,239 applications for 1991 suckler cow premium have been received at Carlisle divisional office. Of these, 947 have been processed for payment. Payments of premium to producers commenced on 25 November following the coming into force of the Suckler Cow Premium Regulations 1991 on 22 November.

Bovine Somatotropin

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to press for an indefinite European Commission moratorium on the use of the artificial milk-boosting hormone bovine somatotropin; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: If BST were shown fully to meet the criteria of safety, quality and efficacy—which is not our current scientific advice—farmers should be free to decide, in the light of their vets' advice and their customers' requirements, whether or not they wish to use it, as for other products meeting the licensing criteria. This would not be possible if there were an indefinite moratorium.

Pets (Carcases)

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will take measures to ensure that carcases of domestic pets are not reprocessed to manufacture fertiliser or animal feeding stuff.

Mr. Maclean: I have been assured by representatives of the rendering industry that steps have been taken to ensure that such carcases are not used for the production of meat and bone meal or tallow.

Fallen Livestock

Mr. Harris: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will outline the Government's response to the fourth report of the Agriculture Committee of 1990-91, House of Commons Paper No. 493, on the disposal of fallen livestock.

Mr. Gummer: The response, which is published today, acknowledges that the Committee and the Government are in agreement about the market forces which have led to the changed economic circumstances facing the livestock industry in disposing of carcase waste.

However, the Government do not agree that the traditional methods of disposal of fallen livestock have collapsed. Although there may be some problems in certain areas, knackers and hunt kennels continue generally to provide a service in disposing of large numbers of fallen stock.

The Government have taken action in a number of ways to help the industry, including the provision of advice to farmers on alternative and safe methods of disposal, measures to make it easier for those wishing to install incineration facilities, supporting research and assisting in the search for alternative uses for some rendered products and identifying the recycling of animal by-products as a priority area for European Community grants.

Although this range of assistance is being provided, the Government believe that it is fundamentally for the livestock sector, as with other industries, to find ways of properly handling its own waste. They do not, therefore, agree with the Committee's recommendation that subsidies should be given to renderers so that they can take knackers' waste free of charge. Subsidies of this sort would distort the economics of a whole range of disposal systems that are presently being used or are being explored, and the Government believe that the industry is in fact already successfully making the readjustments that are necessary to cope with the changed economic circumstances.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Semi-conducting Materials

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what research is currently sponsored by *(a)* his Department or *(b)* research councils, on the basic science of semi-conducting materials for (i) telecommunications, (ii) energy systems transfers.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Department of Education and Science does not sponsor such research directly.

The Science and Engineering Research Council supports a number of research programmes in basic semi-conducting materials science.

Much of this research has potential application for telecommunications and a number of projects are specifically aimed at developments in this field. These include high-frequency devices for satellite and portable communications and the development of new semiconductor lasers for use with optical fibre systems.

Projects involving potential applications in the energy industry include research into solar cells, new power devices and drive systems, power conversion and power supply systems.

Open University

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will inaugurate discussions with the Open university on the possibilities presented by recent developments in east and central Europe for the use of its particular skills and experience in the field of distance learning; if he will consider providing seedcorn funding to the university to investigate such possibilities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Open university has been quick to seize the opportunities presented by recent developments in east and central Europe. Since 1989 the university's open business school has been working with a Hungarian consortium to bring its management training courses, in translation, to managers in Hungary. The Government welcomed this initiative which I was pleased to have an opportunity to observe at first hand last year and provided financial support from the British Council and the know-how fund. A similar scheme is under way in Czechoslovakia, also with support from the know-how fund. This year, 20 Russian students began to study the university's "The Effective Manager" course in Moscow. I do from time to time discuss these matters with the Open university.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what progress there has been in the development of environmental education programmes by the Open university; and what part his Department has played in carrying matters forward.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Open university has offered courses on environmental subjects since 1972 with 33 of its courses, ranging from management to environmental chemistry, including environmental themes. More than 12,000 Open university undergraduates are currently enrolled on such courses. In 1991 a new interdisciplinary course called "Environment" was introduced into the undergraduate programme.

The Government do not provide a specific element of funding for environmental education, but support all undergraduate courses through recurrent grant. I was pleased to announce in June that the university would be enabled to recruit an additional 3,000 undergraduate students in 1992.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he received the report on the review of the Open university; what the main conclusions of the review were; and if he will place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I received the report of the review of the Open university in March and copies were placed in the Library in July. The main conclusions of the review were that the Open university is the major United Kingdom provider of part-time degree level study at a distance, and that it is providing highly valued opportunities in higher education for substantial and increasing numbers of people. In recognition of this the Government have funded 3,000 additional undergraduate places at the university in 1992.

Schools Inspectorate

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many people are employed in Her Majesty's inspectorate for schools in England; and what increase or decrease is being proposed.

Mr. Eggar: There are currently around 470 HMI. That number will be reduced over time to up to 175 to fulfill the functions set out in the Education (Schools) Bill.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Belfast International Airport

Mr. Stott: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much public money has gone into the development of Belfast international airport during the past 10 years.

Mr. Needham: During the 10-year period ending 31 March 1991 Belfast international airport received revenue and capital grants from Government totalling £5·5 million and £5·6 million respectively.

Contractors

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether Northern Ireland Government Departments seek confirmation of the financial security of main contractors prior to awarding contracts.

Dr. Mawhinney: Procedures for checking a contractor's financial and economic standing as part of an approved list system or, in the absence of approved lists, prior to the award of contracts are followed by all NI Departments. The extent of such checks is dependent on the value of the contract, the risks associated with it and the Department's prior knowledge of the contractor, but may include, for example, an examination of bankers' statements, balance sheets, statements of overall turnover and on construction works for three previous years, and proof of enrolment in a professional or trade register.

Under EC works directive 89/440 Departments are required to treat all tenderers in a fair and equal manner using objective criteria in selecting participants and awarding contracts.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many scientific procedures establishments there were in Northern Ireland in 1990.

Mr. Hanley: Sixteen.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many personal licences were granted under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 in 1990 in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: Eighty-six.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many procedures on living vertebrate animals were started in Northern Ireland in 1990.

Mr. Hanley: A total of 14,684.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many holders of project licences under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 reported scientific procedures in Northern Ireland in 1990.

Mr. Hanley: Eighty-one.

Deer Farming

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the legislation covering deer farming in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: The following legislation applies:

Agricultural Act (Northern Ireland) 1949
Agricultural Development Operational Programme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1991
Farm and Conservation Grant Scheme (Northern Ireland) 1989
Farm and Conservation Grant Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1991
Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1972
Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985.

Clenbuterol

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many persons have been convicted in Northern Ireland for *(a)* using and *(b)* being in possession of clenbuterol; and what penalties have been imposed up to the latest available date.

Mr. Hanley: To date three people have been convicted for the illegal administration of clenbuterol hydrochloride. One fine of £2,250 with £290 costs and two fines of £250 with £144 costs were imposed.

Two people have been convicted for the illegal importation of clenbuterol hydrochloride. Fines of £800 with £5 costs and £500 with £183 costs were imposed.

Terrorists (Compensation Claims)

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if it is Northern Ireland Office practice to settle out-of-court those claims for compensation made by terrorists or their families; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Northern Ireland Office considers all claims for compensation on their merits, bearing in mind the facts of the case, any relevant statutory provisions and, if appropriate, legal advice.

RUC Recruits

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what additional expenditure has been made available to the Northern Ireland Exchequer in order that the Police Authority can pay for the 441 new RUC recuits.

Dr. Mawhinney: Total public expenditure in Northern Ireland will increase by £576 million in 1992-93 compared to 1991-92; £44 million of this increase is being allocated to the police authority to meet a number of requirements including the resources needed to begin recruitment of the extra 441 officers.

Housing Executive

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the budgetary allocation to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive will be in 1992-93 financial year; what it was in the previous five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: The allocations of public expenditure resources to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in 1992-93 and the five previous financial years are shown in the table:

Year	*£ million*
1987-88	332
1988-89	298
1989-90	222
1990-91	215
1991-92	225
1992-93	216

The figures from 1987-88 to 1989-90 are affected by the write-off of some of the executive's loans and by other technical reductions in the loan charges payable by the executive. When loan charges are excluded and account is taken of the executive's capital receipts and rental income, the executive has had the following sums available:

Year	*£ million*
1987-88	310
1988-89	308
1989-90	306
1990-91	298
1991-92	[1]293
1992-93	[1]296

[1] Estimated.

Airports

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what operating profits have been made by Northern Ireland Airports Ltd. for each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: Northern Ireland Airports Ltd. has made an operating profit in each of the last 10 years as follows:

	£'000
1981-82	764
1982-83	1,194
1983-84	1,131
1984-85	1,099
1985-86	1,886
1986-87	3,422
1987-88	4,667
1988-89	4,676
1989-90	4,046
1990-91	3,316

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recommendations were made to him by Hambros Bank Ltd. regarding the privatisation of Northern Ireland Airports Ltd.; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: Hambros Bank Ltd. was appointed to advise the Government on the feasibility of privatising Northern Ireland Airports Ltd. Its principal conclusion was that the airport company is a viable and valuable business which could be sold. It also recommended that the most appropriate method of privatisation would be by a trade sale. The Government propose to act on this advice.

Missing Weapons and Explosives

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) on how many occasions members of *(a)* the police, *(b)* the Ulster Defence Regiment or *(c)* other security personnel were (i) questioned and (ii) charged by the Royal Ulster Constabulary in relation to the theft or loss of weapons, ammunition or explosives in each year since 1989;

(2) on how many occasions the Royal Ulster Constabulary has investigated the theft of weapons, explosives or ammunition from security installations in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 28 November 1991]:* There has been no theft or loss of explosives from security force bases in Northern Ireland since 1989. Information relating to the investigation of the theft or loss of weapons and ammunition could be obtained only by a manual search of individual records and would incur disproportionate cost.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Crime Initiatives

11. **Dr. Kumar:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what new initiatives he is planning to prevent rises in crime.

Mr. John Patten: We shall continue to take vigorous action to combat crime and protect the public, by providing the police with the people and money they need; making sure they and the courts have the necessary powers to deal effectively with offenders; and by enhancing our substantial programme of crime prevention measures. But reducing crime is not only the responsibility of the Government, police and courts, families, schools, churches and many others have a role to play. We are exploring what more might be done to influence individuals, particularly the young, to respect each other, each other's property and the law of the land.

22. **Mr. Nicholls:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he proposes to take to tackle the roots of crime.

Mr. John Patten: We shall continue to pursue our wide-ranging policies to combat crime and protect the public. We are exploring what more could be done to influence people—particularly the young—to have consideration for others and respect for the law. We hope soon to be able to make known our proposals for taking this forward.

Police Civilianisation

12. **Mr. Batiste:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the number of police officers returned to operational duties by the policy of civilianisation.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Over the last eight years, some 5,300 police officers have been redeployed through civilianisation of posts which do not require the powers or skills of a police officer.

Police Manpower

13. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current number of police in England; and what was the comparable position in 1987.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: At the end of September 1991 there were 118,748 police officers in England, compared to 115,592 in September 1987, an increase of 3,156. There were 44,646 civilian support staff in September 1991 in England, compared to 39,484 in September 1987, an increase of 5,162.

Prisoners (HIV Infection)

14. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further steps he proposes to take to combat the spread of HIV infection in prisons; and if he will make a statement.

25. **Mr. Strang:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice he has issued to prison governors with respect to the spread of HIV in Her Majesty's prisons; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: Prevention is one of the main aims of prisons HIV/AIDS policy. This was reaffirmed in fresh guidelines recently issued to prison governors. Among the preventive measures advocated are careful screening of prisoners on first reception, clinical investigation including the offer of a blood test in appropriate circumstances, and education and counselling, including preventive counselling for prisoners who are known to be infected or have been at risk. A valuable recent addition to our education programme is a booklet for prisoners produced by the Terrence Higgins Trust. This is being issued to all prisoners currently in custody and to new prisoners.

Prison Security

15. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the Director of the Prison Service to discuss prison security.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend meets the director general frequently to discuss prison security and other matters. His last meeting with him to discuss prison security was on 21 November.

Concessionary TV Licences

16. **Mr. Robert Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any plans to modify the criteria governing eligibility for the concessionary television licence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The concessionary TV licence scheme was thoroughly reviewed prior to the introduction of new regulations in 1988 which defined more closely the type of accommodation which could qualify. The "communal facility" requirement was dropped from consolidating regulations issued earlier this year since the term was not precise and the scheme could be properly controlled by relying on the other conditions, which remain in force. We have no plans to make any further changes to the scheme.

Bail Offenders

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the number of offences committed by people while on bail.

Mr. John Patten: We are examining carefully the evidence from recent studies by the police and others of the extent of offending on bail and will announce our conclusions soon.

Football Arrests

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the arrest and ejection rate at Football League matches in England and Wales for the season 1990-91; and what was the arrest rate for society over the same period.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There were 22 arrests and 27 ejections per 100,000 of the people attending football league matches in England and Wales last season. In the period from August 1990 to May 1991, the number of arrests made by forces excluding the Metropolitan police district were 2,965 per 100,000 of the population. Arrests for notifiable offences in the Metropolitan police district were 1,350 per 100,000 of the population.

Franchise

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on plans to extend the franchise in the United Kingdom to all EC citizens.

Mrs. Rumbold: Proposals to grant EC nationals the right to vote, and to stand for election, at local and European parliamentary elections in their member state of residence form part of the chapter on citizenship in the draft treaty on political union. These proposals will be considered as part of the treaty as a whole at the Maastricht European Council meeting this month.

Burglaries

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of the proportion of domestic burglaries which do not involve forced entry.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In 1990 about 25 per cent. of domestic burglaries in the Metropolitan police district involved no forced entry. Comparable figures for the whole of England and Wales are not available, but 18 per cent. of burglary victims interviewed for the 1988 British crime survey said that their homes had not been left secure when they went out.

Community Service Orders

21. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the use being made of community service orders.

Mr. John Patten: The courts are making good use of the community service order. In 1990, following the introduction of national standards, the number of orders rose by 10 per cent., from 34,040 in 1989 to 37,490 in 1990.

Primates (Laboratory Research)

23. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will be making a formal response to the report prepared by Advocates for Animals on the use of primates in laboratory research.

Mrs. Rumbold: We shall reply to Advocates for Animals when the report has been fully considered.

Prison Service (Expenditure)

24. **Mr. Moate:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current annual expenditure on the prison service; and what it was in 1979 in current prices.

Mrs. Rumbold: Total expenditure on the prison service in 1990-91 was £1,342 million compared with £665 million in 1979-80 in 1990-91 prices. This represents an increase of nearly 102 per cent.

Shops Act 1950

26. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the progress of his discussions about reforming the Shops Act 1950.

Mrs. Rumbold: I hope to have concluded my current programme of separate discussions with the wide range of interest groups on their proposals or positions on reform of the Shops Act 1950 early next year.

Asylum Bill

27. **Mr. Canavan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has now received about the Asylum Bill.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Since July we have received approximately 200 letters from hon. Members forwarding correspondence from their constituents and about 820 letters from members of the public.

Auto Crime

28. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress in preventing and pursuing thefts of and from private cars.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. Friend introduced the Aggravated Vehicle-Taking Bill in the House last week. That Bill proposes tough measures against those who take cars and drive them dangerously, or cause injury or damage.

My right hon. Friend is also engaged in a series of meetings with leading car manufacturers to consider what measures they can take to improve car security. The next meeting will take place on 11 December. Car crime prevention features prominently in the Government's crime prevention publicity; we intend to intensify our activity on this front in the months ahead.

Local chief officers of police are responsible for the investigation and detection of car crime. I am confident that they give this matter the priority it deserves in their respective areas. The police have the Government's full support in acting against car crime.

Paint Ball Guns

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what regulations govern the sites at which paint ball guns are used.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Under the Firearms Acts 1968 to 1988 there are no such regulations. As to the effect of any planning laws, this is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many personal licences were granted under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 in 1990 in Great Britain.

Mrs. Rumbold: Our records show that some 3,600 personal licences were issued in Great Britain in 1990.

Young Offenders

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his estimate of savings to the prison service that will result from the proposed provision of secure units for young people in England and Wales.

Mrs. Rumbold: We estimate that the realisable savings to the prison service of keeping juveniles on remand in secure units would be in the region of £100,000 per year.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has any plans to alter policy with regard to young offenders being given custodial sentences as a result of the psychological research in this area.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 2 December 1991]:* In her reply on 26 November at columns 445-46 to a Question from the hon. Member about the psychological effect of custody on young offenders, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold), mentioned three research studies. The detention centre order, which was the subject of the first study, was abolished by the Criminal Justice Act 1988. We have no plans to change courts' custodial sentencing powers in the light of the other two reports, but are considering what lessons they may hold for our regimes and working practices.

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many young offenders were transferred from Hewell Grange to the young offenders institution at Holesley bay colony during September 1991.

Mrs. Rumbold: Twenty.

Mr. Gordon Warren

Mr. Forman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a further report from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis on the case of Mr. Gordon Warren; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In September this year, with my right hon. Friend's approval as police authority, the Metropolitan police made Mr. Warren a further and final offer of an ex-gratia payment of £70,000. I understand from the Commissioner that Mr. Warren rejected the offer.

Bail Hostels

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department has carried out any research into the impact of bail hostels on local communities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The Home Office knows of no such research and there are currently no plans for any to be carried out.

Correspondence

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date he received the letter dated 4 July 1991 from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington, concerning Mr. A. P. Faulkner; on what date he sent a substantive reply; and what factors determined the length of time it took to provide the substantive reply.

Mrs. Rumbold: The hon. Member's letter was received on 5 July and a reply was sent on 28 November. I very much regret the delay in replying. This arose from several factors including the need to involve three prison service headquarters units based in London and Birmingham, and a backlog of casework in the prison service's medical directorate. It also proved difficult to obtain a medical report on Mr. Faulkner because it was necessary to transfer him, and his medical records, three times during this period.

North Tyneside

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will detail ministerial visits from his Department to North Tyneside in *(a)* 1990 and *(b)* 1991; and give details of meetings with representatives of the local authority which occurred during these visits.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: In June 1990 my predecessor visited magistrates at Tynemouth and the victim support scheme in North Shields. I visited North Tyneside on 1 November this year when I went to North Shields police station and a local probation hostel and toured the Meadow Well estate during which I met representatives of the Northumbria police authority and of the local probation committee.

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what have been the percentage changes in police staffing levels for North Tyneside local authority area between 1977 and 1990.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It is for the chief constable to decide how available manpower should be deployed around the force area, within the total police establishment authorised by the Home Secretary. I understand from the chief constable that in December 1977 there were 305 police officers in the North Tyneside division. By December 1990 this had increased to 436 officers, an increase of 43 per cent. or 131 officers. Separate figures for North Tyneside metropolitan district are not available.

Electoral Register

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many electoral registration officers in England and Wales are scrutinising the electoral register for foreign sounding names and thereafter asking each voter so identified to sign a declaration that they are British subjects; and if this is being done on his advice.

Mrs. Rumbold: We are not aware of any electoral registration officer in England or Wales who has adopted such a procedure; we have not issued any advice to that effect.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what have been the year-on-year changes since 1977 of recorded crime and juvenile crime in *(a)* north Tyneside, *(b)* the Meadow Well estate, *(c)* the northern region and *(d)* the United Kingdom.

Mr. John Patten: The available information for the Northumbria police force area is published annually in "Criminal Statistics, England and Wales". Chapter 2 gives information on recorded crime and chapter 5 on juvenile offending. Corresponding figures for the northern region and the United Kingdom are published annually in *Regional Trends*. Commentary on crime in North Tyneside and Blyth police division is contained in the annual reports of the chief constable of the Northumbria police force. Copies of these publications are in the Library.

Police Records

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the indexes held by SO5, the miscellaneous force indexes branch of the Metropolitan police.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the Commissioner that the miscellaneous force indexes branch holds the juvenile index, the missing persons index and the central index of prostitutes and adult cautions.

Football Matches

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the powers of the police to determine the day and time football matches are to take place.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. The scheduling and kick-off time of football matches are a matter for the football authorities, which very sensibly will wish to respect the advice of the police and the other emergency services.

Prisons (Private Sector)

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for further private sector involvement in the prison system.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: On 11 July 1990, my right hon. Friend the then Home Secretary announced that preparations to reorganise arrangements for court escorts, custody and security were to proceed. Subsequently, the Criminal Justice Act 1991 made provision for these services to be contracted out to the private sector. A recent detailed study commissioned by the Home Office recommended that England and Wales should be divided into 10 areas for the court escort and custody service and I have now decided that the first of these to be contracted out should be Humberside and the east midlands. All movements of prisoners to and from courts in the area, except high security prisoners, will be carried out under the contract. Invitations to tender are expected to be issued next year and it is hoped that the service will be under private sector management from early in 1993, subject to the receipt of satisfactory tenders. Consideration is also being given to a phased programme of contracting out to cover other areas.

The present complex and overlapping arrangements, whereby both police and prison officers are responsible for escorting prisoners, inevitably leads to duplication of effort and consequently inefficiency. The contracting out of this work to private sector personnel, who will of course be required to be properly trained and security vetted, will free police and prison officers for tasks which make more use of their skills and training.

I have also decided to seek the agreement of Parliament to the contracting out of the management of another prison, Blakenhurst, currently being constructed near Redditch in Hereford and Worcester. I hope to be able to lay an order before the House in the spring. This follows the success of the recent tendering exercise for Wolds remand prison which demonstrated that the private sector has much to offer. A number of tenderers showed that they were capable of undertaking the task of operating a prison establishment securely, efficiently and humanely.

I believe that it is right to extend contracting out to another type of prison: both the prison service and the private sector will be able to learn from this experience. Blakenhurst will be a local prison and will therefore hold remand prisoners, like Wolds, but also some convicted prisoners. The capacity of the prison, due to open early in 1993, will be 649. It is not designed to hold high security prisoners.

I hope that the two projects will maintain the momentum of the contracting-out initiative in the prison system.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Telephone Services

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Lord President of the Council (1) what has been the total cost of calls to telephone premium rate services in the House of Commons for each month since 1986;

(2) what has been the total number of premium rate services telephone units recorded on House of Commons telephones in each month since 1986.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 25 November 1991]:* I regret that this information is not available.

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Lord President of the Council when the call barring of telephone premium rate services on the House of Commons telephone system took effect.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 25 November 1991]:* The barring of premium rate services took effect on 1 August 1991.

SOCIAL SECURITY

National Insurance Fund

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proportion of total receipts to the national insurance fund came from central Government in each year since 1961.

Mr. Jack: The table shows the relevant percentages for Treasury supplements as a proportion of contribution receipts:

Period (1 April 31 March)	Per cent.
1961-62	20·4
1962-63	19·9
1963-64	19·2
1964-65	18·3
1965-66	19·1
1966-67	18·9
1967-68	18·1
1968-69	18·6
1969-70	18·1
1970-71	17·8
1971-72	19·5
1972-73	18·5
1973-74	16·7
1974-75	16·9
1975-81	18·0
1981-82	14·5
1982-84	13·0
1984-85	11·0
1985-87	9·0
1987-88	7·0
1988-89	5·0
1989-90	nil

In 1990-91, reimbursement to the national insurance fund for non-contributory statutory sick and maternity payments recovered by employers represented 4·1 per cent. of total receipts.

Claim Forms

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will give the number of pages and questions on each claim form referred to in the answer on 7 February 1991, *Official Report*, column *246-47*.

Miss Widdecombe: The composition of claim forms is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Disability

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many disabled people are currently employed in his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: As at 1 June 1991, the Department of Social Security employed 1,465 people who were registered as disabled. There is no information on staff with disabilities who choose not to register.

Pensions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of pensioners who are wholly dependent upon the state pension have been eligible for income support in each of the last 10 years.

Miss Widdecombe: This information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the substituuion for the state pension of income support.

Miss Widdecombe: Income support provides flexible, comprehensive and effective help for people on low incomes who are not in remunerative work. It can be a supplement to, but not a substitute for retirement pension.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many state pensioners are entitled to income support but do not claim; and what steps his Department is currently taking to ensure that those eligible do claim.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is not currently available. Estimates for the take-up of income support will be provided when the next statistics on the take-up of income-related benefits are published. The Department makes every effort to ensure that people are able to make informed choices on whether to claim benefit.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on trends in the percentage of pensioners wholly dependent on the state pension who are eligible for income support.

Miss Widdecombe: Information on those trends is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost, but poorer pensioners generally have gained under this Government. The real net equivalent incomes of the poorest 20 per cent. have gone up on average by 15 per cent. from 1979 to 1988. The proportion of pensioners in the lowest 20 per cent. of income ranges has fallen from 38 per cent. in 1979 to 28 per cent. in 1986.

EC Social Directives

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list all directives from the European Community issued in the last 10 years which are *(a)* now active in the field of British social security and *(b)* under consideration.

Mr. Jack: The following directives issued in the last 10 years are currently active in the field of social security.

1. Council directive 79/7/EEC of 19 December 1978 on the progressive implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women in matters of social security; and

2. Council directive 86/378/EEC of 24 July 1986 on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women in occupational social security schemes.

The necessary legislation has already been enacted.

The DSS, although not the lead Department, is currently involved in negotiations concerning proposed directives on the protection of pregnant women; on atypical work; on the protection of young people at work; and on pension funds.

EC (Visits)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the visits he, his Ministers and senior officials have made to European Community countries in the last year giving the main subject for discussion and the person involved in each case.

Mr. Jack: Since 1 January this year I have visited Ireland, the Netherlands, France and Portugal to meet my opposite number in each country and to discuss common social security issues, in particular with regard to the European Community. I also attended an international seminar in Spain to discuss the future of social security in

the European Community, where I met Ministers and officials from several European Community member states. In addition I attended three Social Affairs Council meetings. The following senior officials—grade 6 and above—have also made visits to other member states—excluding Ireland for which separate figures are not recorded.

Mr. N. Glass (Grade 6)
Attended a social security director generals' meeting in Brussels and twice went to Germany to discuss areas of mutual interest with senior German officials and a Eurostat meeting in Luxembourg.

Mrs. Maunsell (Grade 3)
Made three visits for two Social Affairs Council meetings and a Social Questions Working Group to discuss the draft Pregnant Women's Directive.

Miss A. V. Windsor (Solicitor)
Made four visits to the European Court of Justice.

Mr. Fiegehen (Grade 5)
Attended two meetings in France and Brussels in connection with the "Barber Case".

Mr. J. White (Grade 5)
Made eight visits to other Community member states. For four of these he accompanied me on my visits to the Netherlands, Paris, Lisbon and Madrid. The other visits included a conference on "Convergence", a social security director generals' meeting and visits to Germany and the Netherlands to discuss areas of mutual interest.

Mrs. R. Butler (Grade 5)
Attended an EC conference on poverty in the Netherlands.

Mr. D. Ramprakash (Grade 5)
Attended three Eurostat meetings and two European Commission meetings concerned with statistical research in social security.

Mrs. C. Souter (Grade 5)
Made five visits to Brussels. Two meetings were held to discuss the implications of the "Barber Case". Mrs. Souter also had a meeting with UKREP, senior Dutch officials and attended a social security director generals' meeting.

Mr. A. Stott (Grade 5)
Attended a social security director generals' meeting in Brussels and a Social Affairs Council.

Miss P. Barrett (Grade 6)
Visited the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg.

Mr. C. Blake (Solicitor)
Visited the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg.

Miss E. Saxon (Solicitor)
Made two visits to the European Court of Justice and attended an EC/EFTA seminar in the Netherlands.

As the Minister responsible for internationl social security issues, I made all the ministerial visits but one within the Community. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State discussed matters both on social security and health during a visit to Germany, in his capacity as Minister with responsibility for disabled people.

Operation Scotcheck

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many operations similar to Operation Scotcheck carried out on 13 November in Scotland have taken place in England and Wales; and if he has any plans to carry out operations similar to Operation Scotcheck in England and Wales;

(2) if he will make a statement on Operation Scotcheck carried out in Scotland on 13 November; if he will list the number of officers involved from each Department of Social Security district office in Scotland; what part was played in the operation by the Department of Social Security fraud section; what information was supplied by drivers stopped during the operation; how many of the drivers were interviewed by Department of Social Security staff on *(a)* 13 November and *(b)* subsequently; and what use was made of information supplied by the drivers.

Mr. Jack: The investigation of social security fraud is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member shortly and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Social Fund

Mr. Terry Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many social fund inspectors were employed on 31 August 1991;

(2) how many applications for review by a social fund inspector were outstanding for more than one month on 31 August 1991.

Mr. Scott: I am informed by the social fund commissioner that on 31 August 1991 there were 57 social fund inspectors employed and 2,401 review applications outstanding for more than one month.

Local Office, Market Harborough

Sir John Farr: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will establish a caller office in Market Harborough, to serve Market Harborough and the surrounding rural area.

Miss Widdecombe: The provision of caller offices is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to my hon. Friend and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many staff were involved in fraud investigation, inspection and enforcement in each section and each region for each kind of post during each month since September 1990; and what are the proposed changes to such staffing levels in each section and in each region for each type of post.

Mr. Jack: The number of staff employed investigating social security fraud is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. Mr. Bichard will write to the hon. Member shortly and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office. His reply will include information provided by the chief executive of the Contributions Agency.

EMPLOYMENT

North Tyneside

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what has been the year-on-year rise in unemployment between 1979 and November 1991 in *(a)* North Tyneside, *(b)* the Meadowell estate, *(c)* the northern region and *(d)* the United Kingdom;

(2) what has been the year-on-year rise in unemployment amongst young people between 1979 and November 1991 in *(a)* North Tyneside, *(b)* the Meadowell estate, *(c)* the northern region and *(d)* the United Kingdom.

Mr. Forth: The information requested can be obtained from the NOMIS database in the Library. Information for North Tyneside and the Meadowell estate is available from June 1983, on the unadjusted basis only.

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will detail ministerial visits from his Department to North Tyneside in *(a)* 1990 and *(b)* 1991; and give details of meetings with representatives of the local authority which occurred during these visits.

Mr. Forth: Ministers of the Department of Employment have visited the North Tyneside area on 10 occasions during 1990 and 1991, as follows:

Date	Minister
23 January 1990	The right hon. Michael Howard QC MP
14 January 1990	Mr. Tim Eggar MP
25 October 1990	Mr. Robert Jackson MP
27 February 1991	Mr. Robert Jackson MP
9 May 1991	Mr. Eric Forth MP
14 May 1991	The Viscount Ullswater
23 May 1991	Mr. Robert Jackson MP
25 September 1991	The right hon. Michael Howard QC MP
14 November 1991	Mr. Robert Jackson MP

Those visits have been for a variety of purposes and have included meetings with a wide range of people connected with the North Tyneside area. The visit on 14 November 1991 involved a meeting with the Meadowell steering group, which includes among its members two representatives of North Tyneside metropolitan borough council.

Labour and Social Affairs Council

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the outcome of the meeting of the Labour and Social Affairs Council held in Brussels on 3 December; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: The Council held its first discussion of the draft working time directive. The United Kingdom recorded its concern at the damage which the Commission proposal would cause, not only to British industry and workers, but to the competitiveness of Community business in the world market. Most other member states registered difficulties with the proposal. After considering a number of detailed aspects of the draft directive, the Council concluded that a decision could not be taken on the current text. The proposal has been remitted for further consideration at official level.

A number of other proposals were agreed. The Council reached political agreement on a directive on safety signs in the workplace. Amending regulations on social security for migrant workers were approved, as was a recommendation on child care. A declaration on sexual harassment was endorsed subject to United Kingdom parliamentary reserve. A Commission report on poverty was noted.

The draft directive on European works councils and a recommendation on minimum resources for social protection schemes were both discussed, and they were referred back for further work by officials after several member states expressed disagreement with a number of the provisions.

This meeting again demonstrated that the existing treaty enables sensible progress to be made. Out of the 32 proposals put forward by the Commission under the social action programme, 18 have already been agreed by the Council or, where appropriate, the Commission.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Trade and Technology Transfer

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what forum exists for dialogue between the European Community and the Arab states on issues of trade and technology transfer.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The European Community's co-operation agreements with the Mashraq, Maghreb—except Libya—and the Gulf Co-operation Council provide a framework for trade and technology transfer. These and other matters related to the agreements are discussed at co-operation councils, which meet regularly at ministerial level.

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions are ongoing between the European Community and the Gulf Co-operation Council on the subject of trade and technology transfer.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The 1988 co-operation agreement between the EC and the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) provides a framework for trade and technology transfer and commits both sides to opening negotiations for a free trade agreement (FTA). EC and GCC Ministers discussed these issues in May. Since it came into force in 1990, the co-operation agreement's main focus has been on an FTA. A negotiating mandate was agreed by the Foreign Affairs Council in December 1989 and subsequently amended on 1 October 1991. Negotiations are expected to resume in January 1992.

European Community Environment Directives

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has regarding the number, type and range of complaints and petitions made by United Kingdom citizens to the European Commission since 1979 on the implementation, or failure of implementation, of EC directives and regulations on environmental matters by Her Majesty's Government; and what procedures exist for the communication by the Commission to EC member state Governments of the details of such complaints or petitions.

Mr. Garel-Jones: No procedure exists for communicating this information routinely to member states. To the extent, however, that the Commission takes up a

complaint under the infractions procedure in article 169 of the treaty of Rome, details of it—though not its source—will be communicated to the member state concerned.

Maastricht Conference

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the opportunities which have been given to Parliament and its committees to consider the decisions to be taken on the Luxembourg text, the Dutch text or other items relating to the intergovernmental conference at Maastricht.

Mr. Garel-Jones: There have been two full debates covering the negotiations in the intergovernmental conferences on economic and monetary and political union, on 26 June and on 20-21 November. The House of Lords also held a debate on the negotiations on 25 November. The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs gave oral evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee in advance of the Luxembourg and Maastricht European Councils on 12 June and 19 November. Ministers have been in regular contact with the Scrutiny Committees of both Houses.

Wilton Park

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which British hon. Members have participated in Wilton Park conferences in the last two years.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd *[pursuant to his reply, 12 November 1991, c. 481]:* My right hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Mrs. Chalker) should be added to the list of conference participants for 1991.

DEFENCE

Housing

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to delay the discharge of members of the armed forces until he is satisfied that sufficient housing exists for them in civilian life.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Individual service personnel selected for redundancy will receive adequate notice of discharge. We expect that the majority of those affected will be able to make suitable alternative civilian housing arrangements.

Service Pensions

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will establish a minimum level of service pension for each rank and period of service.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No. The rank held, the length of reckonable service given, and the circumstances under which service is terminated are all factors which are taken into account in determining retired pay and pensions. Once in issue retired pay or pensions are protected against the effects of inflation through index-linking arrangements.

Direct Fire Weapons Effects Simulator

Mr. Stern: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress towards ordering further research into, or production of, the direct fire weapons effects simulator.

Mr. Alan Clark: I expect to be able to make an announcement on the award of a supply and support contract early in the new year.

Redundant Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has any plans to offer United Kingdom expertise to the Government of the Union of Sovereign States, the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, on the physical protection and dismantlement of redundant nuclear weapons, along the lines of the aid plan put to the United States Congress by Senators Nunn and Lugar.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Government continue to keep under review possible areas of assistance and advice to the Soviet Union.

Terrorists (Compensation Claims)

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if it is Ministry of Defence practice to settle out-of-court those claims for compensation made by terrorists or their families; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Any claim for compensation made against the Ministry of Defence is considered on the facts of each case and settled in accordance, where appropriate, with legal advice.

Daniel Doherty

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what award of compensation has been made to the widow of Daniel Doherty who was shot dead by the security services at Gransha hospital in Londonderry on 6 December 1984; what is the amount which has been awarded; how the award was made; and by whom the award is to be paid.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The claim for compensation made by the widow of Daniel Doherty has been concluded on terms endorsed between the claimant and the Ministry of Defence. The terms require that the agreement is confidential to both parties.

Training Areas

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the requirement for additional Army training land in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom as a whole, following the re-alignment and redeployment of forces as outlined in "Britain's Army for the 90s."

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Work is currently under way to examine future training needs in the United Kingdom that will result from the restructuring of the Army and drawdown from Germany.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes have been made to the areas, ownership or rights status and types of authorised training in the Galloway and Kinlochleven training areas over the past three years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the acreage, dates of acquisition and types of training operations conducted for each of the training areas in Scotland.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Apart from bombing ranges all training areas are used as small arms ranges and/or for dry training. Details are as follows:

Location	*Region*	*Date of first acquisition*	*Current acreage*
Arbroath	Tayside	May 1940	509
Auchallater	Grampian	November 1976	13,442
Barry Buddan	Tayside	June 1892	2,910
Blackdog	Grampian	April 1963	160
Cambusbarron	Central	October 1953	32
Cape Wrath	Highland	May 1924	9,216
Castlelaw/Dreghorn	Lothian	November 1913	2,099
Dundonald	Strathclyde	March 1943	600
Fort George	Highland	August 1767	1,378
Galloway	Dumfries and Galloway/ Strathclyde	August 1985	167,014
Garelochhead	Strathclyde	August 1943	8,240
Kinlochleven	Highland	January 1987	28,847
Kirknewton	Lothian	August 1942	269
Rannoch Forest	Tayside	January 1976	3
Rosehearty	Grampian	March 1981	1
South Uist	Western Isles	April 1960	2,460
St. Kilda	Western Isles	February 1982	12
Tain	Highland	July 1937	2,574
Tighnablair	Tayside	April 1974	5,024

Note: The acreage shown includes freehold land and foreshore and areas leased or subject to rights where these are covered by agreements of three or more years duration. Details of short term holdings/rights are not held centrally.

Gibraltar

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to rationalise defence activities in Gibraltar; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Final decisions on the scale of the future MOD involvement in Gibraltar have yet to be taken. It is, however, the intention to make savings of the order of 30 per cent. of manpower and expenditure during the next five years while at the same time reducing the landholding to 50 per cent. of that held in 1990. The main thrust of this will affect the Royal Air Force and it is the intention to have completed the contractorisation of many of the functions currently carried out by the RAF—including the running of the airfield—before the spring of 1995. There will also be some restructuring of the Royal Navy. In the light of the recent reorganisation of the land forces and the resultant expansion of the Gibraltar Regiment it is not planned to make any further major changes to its organisation, although some of its functions will be adjusted to mirror the changes in the other two services and the civilian work force.

SCOTLAND

Health Budgets

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give the level of expenditure in Scotland on *(a)* the national health service, *(b)* the hospital and community health services current budget and *(c)* the family health services current budget adjusted for changes in input unit costs, in each year since 1970-71.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information in the format requested is not fully available. Details of gross expenditure in Scotland on the national health service, hospital and community health services (current) and family health services from 1974-75 to 1991-92, in cash terms and adjusted by the gross domestic product deflator, are given in the following tables.

(a) Total National Health Service Expenditure

Year	*£ million cash*	*Adjusted by the GDP deflator to 1991-92 prices*
1974-75	458	2,222
1975-76	603	2,341
1976-77	685	2,342
1977-78	777	2,337
1978-79	893	2,422
1979-80	1,064	2,474
1980-81	1,343	2,639
1981-82	1,531	2,743
1982-83	1,660	2,777
1983-84	1,773	2,834
1984-85	1,901	2,894
1985-86	2,014	2,906
1986-87	2,143	2,993
1987-88	2,328	3,084
1988-89	2,591	3,203
1989-90	2,820	3,273
1990-91	3,069	3,284
[1]1991-92	3,422	3,422

[1] Provisional outturn.

(b) Hospital and Community Health Services: Current Expenditure

Year	*£ million cash*	*Adjusted by the GDP deflator to 1991-92 prices*
1974-75	323	1,574
1975-76	421	1,634
1976-77	479	1,638
1977-78	549	1,651
1978-79	627	1,701
1979-80	749	1,741
1980-81	964	1,894
1981-82	1,083	1,940
1982-83	1,156	1,934

Year	£ million cash	Adjusted by the GDP deflator to 1991-92 prices
1983-84	1,227	1,961
1984-85	1,306	1,988
1985-86	1,381	1,992
1986-87	1,465	2,046
1987-88	1,598	2,117
1988-89	1,776	2,195
1989-90	1,906	2,212
1990-91	2,043	2,186
[1]1991-92	2,279	2,279

[1]Provisional outturn.

(c) Family Health Services

Year	£ million cash	Adjusted by the GDP deflator to 1991-92 prices
1974-75	80	390
1975-76	109	423
1976-77	129	441
1977-78	145	436
1978-79	167	453
1979-80	197	458
1980-81	246	483
1981-82	281	503
1982-83	322	539
1983-84	349	558
1984-85	382	582
1985-86	402	580
1986-87	440	615
1987-88	485	642
1988-89	545	674
1989-90	583	677
[1]1990-91	666	713
[2][3]1991-92	721	721

[1] Includes £1 million for capital expenditure.
[2] Includes £2 million for capital expenditure.
[3] Provisional outturn.

SCOTLAND

Electoral Register

Mr. Robert Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many electoral registration officers in Scotland are scrutinising the electoral register for foreign sounding names and thereafter asking each voter so identified to sign a declaration that they are British subjects; and if this is being done on his advice.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Electoral registration officers have a responsibility, under the Representation of the People (Scotland) Regulations 1986, to satisfy themselves that the electoral register properly contains the names of those entitled to be registered. It is for electoral registration officers themselves to decide how they should fulfil this requirement.

Strathclyde Buses Ltd.

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if a date has been determined for the privatisation of Strathclyde Buses Ltd.; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The sale of Strathclyde Buses Ltd. is a matter for Strathclyde regional council in the first instance. I understand that negotiations for a sale are currently under way between the council and the management employee buy-out team at the company. The Secretary of State's consent will be required for the sale.

Youth Training

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what number of *(a)* Easter and *(b)* summer school-leavers in 1991 in (i) the parliamentary constituency of Greenock and Port Glasgow and (ii) Strathclyde have been waiting more than (1) four weeks and (2) three months to commence placements on courses under the youth training guarantee scheme.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The information requested is not collected by the careers service in Strathclyde. I have no power to instruct it to do so and, in any case, understand that it would involve it in disproportionate cost.

Operation Scotcheck

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will make a statement about Operation Scotcheck carried out in Scotland on 13 November; what was the role of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Health and Safety Executive; and whether any information obtained from the drivers has been passed to the fraud sections of the Department of Employment;

(2) if he will make a statement about his Department's involvement in operation Scotcheck carried out in Scotland on 13 November;

(3) what approval was given by his office to Operation Scotcheck on 13 November; if he will call for a report from the chief constable of the Central region police on Operation Scotcheck; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Operation Scotcheck was a joint police and Health and Safety Executive initiative and my Department was not involved in this exercise. HSE inspectors were present at all the locations where this operation was mounted. The inspectors were checking compliance with the requirements of regulations concerning the transport of hazardous substances or goods by road. The police, as is customary in these operations, invited other Government Departments with particular interests to be present at the various checkpoints. It is not my intention to ask for a report from the police, nor will any information obtained from drivers during the exercise be passed to the Scottish Office.

Written Answer to Questions

Friday 6th December 1991

TRANSPORT

Rail Services

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much grant he proposes to pay local authorities in west Yorkshire in the coming year for supporting rail services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Assistance to local authority programmes is given through revenue support grant paid by the Department of the Environment. For 1992-93, £105 million has been set aside within the All Other Services block for distribution to the six English metropolitan county areas in view of their responsibility for supporting local rail services. The amount for west Yorkshire is £18,917,910.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will ensure that any costs arising from leasing required by him for rolling stock for use in the west Yorkshire rail electrification scheme are fully covered by grant paid by him to local authorities in west Yorkshire.

Mr. Freeman: The costs of operating leases for this rolling-stock will be one of the factors taken into account in future years in calculating the standard spending assessments of the west Yorkshire metropolitan district councils in respect of local rail services.

Docklands Light Railway

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will now set up a full public inquiry into the problems associated with the docklands light railway.

Mr. Freeman: No.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much the London Docklands development corporation will pay for the acquisition of the docklands light railway and its assets.

Mr. Freeman: The transfer would be arranged for a nominal amount.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if it is his intention that the London Regional Transport Act 1984 should continue to apply to the docklands light railway once its transference to the London Docklands development corporation is completed.

Mr. Freeman: No. The Act applies in respect of railway services provided by London Regional Transport, or by a subsidiary company of theirs, or by another person in pursuance of an agreement with London Regional Transport under section 3 of the Act.

Thameslink

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what requests he has received from British Rail for permission to deposit a Bill to expand the Thameslink services; what response he has made; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: British Rail sought consent recently to deposit a Bill for works in south London to enhance Thameslink. Although the scheme has a number of very attractive features, the Government concluded that the Bill was premature. My right hon. Friend has told the chairman that the best way forward is to consider the project alongside other priorities in the context of British Rail's next corporate plan.

ENVIRONMENT

Revenue Support Grant, Sunderland

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the value of revenue support grant for the borough of Sunderland at current prices for each year from 1979.

Mr. Key: The information is as follows:

1991-92 prices

	£ million
Rate support grant	
1979-80	152·6
1980-18	[1]151·5
1981-82	[2]114·3
1982-83	108·3
1983-84	104·4
1984-85	99·9
1985-86	[3]96·8
1986-87	99·7
1987-88	103·5
1988-89	108·0
1989-90	100·6
Revenue support grant	
1990-91	[4,5]88·8
1991-92	73·6

Note: The information given is not available on a comparable basis for all years, i.e.:

[1] In 1979-80 and 1980-81 no rate support grant (RSG) payments were made to metropolitan county councils and Sunderland's rate support grant was correspondingly higher in those years.

[2] In 1981-82 to 1985-86 inclusive, rate support grant payments were made to metropolitan counties (and other upper tier authorities) and Sunderland's rate support grant was correspondingly lower.

[3] In April 1986, the metropolitan county councils were abolished and arrangements for paying grant changed accordingly.

[4] In April 1990, the new local authority finance system was introduced and revenue support grant replaced rate support grant as the main central Government grant to local authorities. They are not directly comparable. The 1990-91 figure includes £11·25 million (at 1991-92 prices) which Sunderland received under the area safety net.

[5] Under the local government finance system introduced in 1990 the level of revenue support grant is affected, inter alia, by the amount of non-domestic rates distributed from the national pool. In 1990-91 Sunderland's receipts (at 1991-92 prices) from the pool were £62·7 million and in 1991-92 they will be £75·8 million. For comparison, in 1989-90 the authority's non-domestic rate income was £38·0 million (again at 1991-92 prices).

Council House Sales

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the capital receipts for the sale of council houses by Wandsworth council, received by the council since the introduction of the right to buy.

Mr. Yeo: The total discounted values of all sales of houses and flats for each year from 1980-81, as reported by the London borough of Wandsworth, are listed in the table. Actual cash receipts in any year will depend on the extent to which the sales were financed by loans from the authority.

Wandsworth
Discounted value of all sales (£000)

Year	*Value*
80-81	10,903
81-82	24,023
82-83	19,073
83-84	21,647
84-85	30,703
85-86	37,411
86-87	32,494
87-88	49,354
88-89	67,616
89-90	72,806
90-91	n/a

Council Tax

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many representations he has had about the proposed council tax.

Mr. Key: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend, the Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities on Wednesday 4 December 1991 to my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) at column *252*.

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will deposit in the Library an analysis of the estimated distributional impact using the Treasury's inter-departmental group on tax-benefit modelling's tax-benefit model of the proposed council tax in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* Wales using the illustrative bills published by the responsible Departments, which is, as far as possible, comparable with appendix 7 of HC 289 of Session 1990-91 and the answer of 22 May 1991, *Official Report*, column *471*;

(2) if he will publish a list of those parliamentary answers on the impact of *(a)* the council tax and *(b)* other local government tax options which have been based, in part or in whole, upon evidence derived from the Treasury's interdepartmental group on tax-benefit modelling's tax-benefit model.

Mr. Key: Information to indicate the distribution of households with one, two, and three or more adults by region has been provided. No answers have been given on the impact of the council tax using this model.

Since 1988 the Department of the Environment has made extensive use of the inter-departmental group on tax-benefit modelling's tax-benefit model to illustrate the distributional impact of the community charge, and the effect of the transitional relief and community charge reduction schemes. A large number of parliamentary answers have been provided which are reliant to some degree on information from the model. We do not however, intend to publish any analysis of the impact of the council tax derived from the model.

Environmental Protection Agency

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the organisations with which he has consulted regarding the establishment of an environmental protection agency.

Mr. Baldry: Copies of the consultation paper on the Environment Agency have been sent to the chief executives of all local authorities in England and Wales, and to some 800 other organisations and individuals. A list of these has been placed in the Library. Requests for the paper are still being received.

Non-domestic Ratepayers

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will state the total to date of tribunal awards to non-domestic ratepayers in respect of rates they deem overpaid and over which range of years they relate; what authorities are being debited such sums in excess of £1 million; if he will name the relevant sums for each; and what consideration he has given to excluding such sums from the totals of his current standard spending assessments for the years 1992-93.

Mr. Key: This information is not available.

Loan Guarantees

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will instruct his officials to discuss with building societies and other financial institutions the guarantees they require to advance loans for the repurchase of homes by residents of Hanover square, Bradford.

Mr. Yeo: The Government do not have a statutory power to direct mortgage lenders to provide mortgages to particular types of borrowers. It is up to the lender to decide what conditions should be met for lending prudently; building societies in particular have to safeguard the position of investors.

City Challenge

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, pursuant to his answer of 26 November, *Official Report*, column *473*, what proportion of funding for inner-city programmes will be topsliced for city challenge schemes from 1993 onwards; and what conclusions his Department has reached with regard to the implications for the urban programme budget and individual urban programme initiatives as a result of topslicing for city challenge schemes.

Mr. Portillo: No decision has yet been made on the amount of funds that will be available for 1993 onwards.

Docklands Light Railway

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out what the role, responsibilities and duties of the London Docklands development corporation will be with regard to the operation and investment strategy of the docklands light railway; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The London Docklands development corporation will exercise a strategic role in respect of the Docklands Light Railway. Day to day management will continue to be the responsibility of DLR Ltd.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what budget will be made available to the London Docklands development corporation to *(a)* acquire the docklands light railway and *(b)* operate and manage the docklands light railway.

Mr. Portillo: The transfer of the Docklands Light Railway from London Regional Transport to London Docklands development corporation will be for a nominal sum. There will be an accompanying transfer of the resources required to operate and manage the railway.

Environmental Protection Act

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to introduce those sections of part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 which prevent the surrender of a disposal licence until a certificate of completion has been issued by the relevant authority.

Mr. Baldry: Disposal licences are issued under section 5 of the Control of Pollution Act 1974, and there is no provision in that Act to prevent their surrender. Disposal licences will be replaced by waste management licences granted under section 36 of the Environmental Protection Act. The provisions of section 39, including the issue of certificates of completion, will govern the surrender of those waste management licences that are site licences.

Under the target timetable for the implementation of part II of the Act, announced on 25 June 1991 by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside, these waste management licensing provisions of the Act are due to come into effect in April 1993. The consultation paper "Improving environmental quality—the Government's proposals for a new, independent Environment Agency" issued on 3 October 1991, stated that the timing of these provisions will need to be reviewed in the light of the emerging timetable for the agency.

Travelling Showpeople

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he plans to issue fresh guidance about travelling showpeople.

Mr. Yeo: A circular is being published today. It offers guidance to local planning authorities about making provision for travelling showpeople in their developments plans, gives advice on the handling of planning applications and breaches of planning control, and encourages showpeople and local planning authorities to work together to reduce the risk of conflict.

Showpeople need a permanent, secure base from which to operate, establish their homes, and store and test their fairground equipment. Although they cannot expect preferential treatment, showpeople are entitled to look to local authorities to take account of their needs when determining planning policies.

River Ribble

Mr. Carr: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps he is taking to improve pollution monitoring of the River Ribble; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 4 December 1991]:* Monitoring of river quality is a matter for the National Rivers Authority (NRA). Discharge consents issued by the NRA and the results of its monitoring of the River Ribble are entered on public registers held by the NRA's north west region.

Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution (HMIP) is initiating a monitoring programme for processes it regulates through integrated pollution control under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, the results of which will be placed on public registers held by HMIP.

North Tyneside

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will detail ministerial visits from his Department to North Tyneside in *(a)* 1990 and *(b)* 1991; and give details of meetings with representatives from the local authority which occurred during these visits;

(2) if he will detail the year-on-year changes in housing improvement programme allocations to North Tyneside council from 1978 to 1991 at current prices;

(3) if he will detail the year-on-year changes in block allocations of Government grant to North Tyneside council from 1978 to 1991 at current prices.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 5 December 1991]:* I will write to the hon. Member.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

School Meals

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proposals he has to reinstate nutritional guidelines for school meals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: It is for local education authorities to decide on the nutritional balance of the school meals they offer.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will bring forward proposals to require local education authorities to ensure that drinking water is available at lunch times to pupils eating school meals or packed lunches; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: It is for local education authorities to decide what milk, meals or other refreshment to offer to its pupils.

School Governors

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many places on school governing bodies there are; and how many are currently unfilled.

Mr. Fallon: There are approximately 300,000 places on school governing bodies in England and Wales. A survey

published by the National Foundation for Educational Research in November 1990 indicated a vacancy rate of just under 4 per cent.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much money has been spent on training parents to be school governors; how many parents have been trained; and how many will be ineligible to remain school governors as a result of his proposals to prevent teachers being governors at the school attended by their own children.

Mr. Fallon: Funds for the support and training of school governors are available through the grants for education support and training (GEST) programme. In the current financial year £7·1 million of LEA expenditure is being supported, and this is planned to increase to £10 million next year. No information is collected centrally about the proportion of this sum spent on parent governors, nor about the number of teachers who are parent governors.

Teacher Qualifications

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, further to his answer of 27 November, *Official Report*, column *535-36*, if he will calculate the costs of educating and training a student for *(a)* the postgraduate certificate of education and *(b)* the articled teacher scheme with the average cost of a first degree included, so that the totals are comparable with the figure for the bachelor of education.

Mr. Fallon: The average cost of training a student for the postgraduate certificate of education is about £27,000 and for the articled teacher scheme about £40,500, inclusive of the average cost of a first degree. As in my previous answer these costs take into account institutional funding and student support, and, in the case of articled teachers, the additional expenditure incurred by participating local education authorities and supported through the GEST programme. The bursary for articled teachers, which is the main item covered by the GEST programme, is the equivalent of about a year of a student grant and a first year of a teacher's salary.

Higher and Further Education

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what arrangements he has made to prescribe expenditure under section 133 of the Education Reform Act 1988.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Section 133 of the Education Reform Act empowers the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council (PCFC) to make payments to any local education authority and the governing body of any institution designated under section 129 of the Act in respect of persons employed or formerly employed in the provision of further or higher education. These are payments to meet certain compensation and premature retirement liabilities. The terms of section 133, taken together with section 114 of the Education Act 1944, mean that regulations made by the Secretary of State need to be made to prescribe the classes or descriptions of such payments.

Payments totalling some £60 million, all for the purposes specified in section 133, were made by the PCFC between April 1989 and September 1991 without appropriate regulations being in place. In order to provide for future payments, SI 1991/2307 was brought into force on 19 October 1991. Clause 63 of the Further and Higher Education Bill would regularise past payments.

The Government will also propose an amendment to the Bill during its passage through Parliament to regularise payments made by the PCFC to certain bodies other than local education authorities and governing bodies, and to provide for the proposed Higher Education Funding Council (England) to make similar payments.

HMI (French Visit)

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish the report from Her Majesty's inspectors following their visit to France.

Mr. Eggar *[pursuant to his reply, 14 November 1991, column 625]:* The HMI report on aspects of primary education in France will be published today, 6 December 1991.

EMPLOYMENT

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will take action to deal with the discrepancy between the Wakefield TEC and the Leeds TEC in their treatment of special needs training.

Mr. Forth: TECs and local enterprise companies are required to provide appropriate facilities and support for trainees who have special training needs. My right hon. and learned Friend is satisfied that adequate provision is available in the Wakefield and Leeds TEC areas.

The Wakefield TEC policy is to integrate trainees with special needs into mainstream provision designed to meet individual requirements. On the other hand, Leeds TEC has chosen to contract with several providers who cater specifically for trainees with special needs.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what advice has been given to training and enterprise councils by his Department's solicitors concerning the legality of running employment action under TECs existing memoranda of association; what powers TECs have to revise their articles; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: TECs were advised to consider whether their powers were wide enough to deliver employment action, and to amend their memorandum of association if they considered it necessary to do so.

TECs are private companies and it is for them to decide if such changes are needed and, under the terms of their contract with us, to seek our agreement.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will, as a matter of urgency, meet representatives of the Wakefield TEC to discuss the circumstances of the 400 16 to 18-year-olds within the Wakefield district who currently have no training placement and are ineligible for DSS benefits; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The Department's officials are already in contact with Wakefield training and enterprise council

which is co-operating with the local careers service and has advised that it will be able to meet demand for youth training places in its area.

Business Statistics

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was the change in the number of businesses in *(a)* Amber Valley, *(b)* Derbyshire, *(c)* nationally and *(d)* the east midlands between 1979 and the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Forth: The information requested, based on VAT registration data, is as follows:

Number of business registered for VAT

	end-1979	*end-1990*	*Net change*	*(per cent.)*
Amber valley (district)	2,400	3,200	800	33·5
Derbyshire	18,800	24,900	6,100	32·4
East midlands	88,200	116,300	28,200	31·9
United Kingdom	1,288,900	1,709,300	420,400	32·6

Working Hours

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the average number of hours worked *(a)* excluding overtime and *(b)* including overtime, of each decile income group of earners, and of each percentile within the lowest 20 per cent.

Mr. Forth: Figures of hours worked by decile and percentile income groups are not readily available and would incur disproportionate cost to compile.

SOCIAL SECURITY

National Insurance

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be *(a)* the first year and *(b)* the full year revenue yield from abolishing the national insurance upper earnings limit in Great Britain in (i) 1991-92, (ii) 1992-93, for (1) both employees and the self-employed and (2) only employees, and giving figures separately for the number of men and women who would be affected in each case.

Mr. Jack: The information requested is set out in the table:

	Estimated revenue yield		*Estimated numbers of people affected*	
	First year £ billion	*Full year £ billion*	*Men million*	*Women million*
1991-92				
(employees plus self-employed)	2·4	2·9	3·0	0·4
(employees only)	2·2	2·5	2·6	0·4
1992-93				
(employees plus self-employed)	2·6	3·2	3·2	0·4
(employees only)	2·4	2·7	2·8	0·4

Unemployment Benefit

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the reasons for the withdrawal of the proposal to change the definition of full-time work for unemployment benefit purposes from 24 hours to 16 hours.

Mr. Jack: The Government proposed that the definition of employment in unemployment benefit regulations should be 16 hours per week in line with the change from April 1992 in the definition of remunerative work for income support and family credit purposes.

We received a report from the Social Security Advisory Committee and other representations about the effect of the proposed change to the regulations. Whilst the total number of disqualifications arising from the proposal would have been very small, a few people ineligible for family credit would have faced a difficult choice had disqualification been imposed for declining an offer of between 16 and 24 hours employment. Consequently we decided not to pursue the alignment of hours of work in this area.

Cold Weather

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of people of pensionable age qualify for help under the cold weather payments scheme.

Mr. Scott: We estimate that 1·5 million people of pensionable age are eligible to receive a cold weather payment, representing 14·7 per cent. of the total number of people of pensionable age. Every income support recipient over 60 years of age, not just those of pensionable age, qualifies for help under the cold weather payments scheme as well as recipients who have a child under five in the household or are entitled to the disability premium.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what advice his Department gives to pensioners regarding keeping warm.

Mr. Scott: For the fifth year running, the Department is a major participant in the Government's "Keep Warm Keep Well" campaign, a joint venture with other Government Departments and the voluntary sector. The aim of the campaign is to advise elderly people and other

vulnerable groups about how best to cope with cold weather and where help is available, including details of the social security cold weather payments scheme.

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representations his Department has received regarding the problems faced by older people on low incomes in the winter months.

Mr. Scott: We have received many representations on this issue and on 14 June I announced important improvements to the cold weather payments scheme.

Interest on Capital

Mr. Higgins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what notional rate of interest is assumed to be received by those with capital above the present social security limits when assessing entitlement to social security benefits and relief from the community charge.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) on 6 November at column *149*.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Longest Determinate Sentence

Mr. Gould: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the longest determinate sentence being served by any prisoner, including sentences running consecutively, for offences other than terrorist offences.

Mrs. Rumbold: According to the records held centrally, on 30 June 1991 the longest determinate sentence being served in a prison service establishment in England and Wales for a non-terrorist offence was 38 years.

Victim Support, Lancashire

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement giving the amount of support for victims of crime in Lancashire from 1987 to the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. John Patten: The table gives details of the victim support schemes in Lancashire which are funded by the Home Office to provide help and support for victims of crime.

Financial Year	*Number of schemes operating*	*Total amount of Home Office funding*	*Number of posts supported*[1]	*Number of cases referred to schemes by police*
1987-88	7	66,869	10	7,467
1988-89	8	105,561	11	9,828
1989-90	8	148,499	13	13,830
1990-91	8	159,267	14	20,643

[1] Includes both full-time and part-time posts.

It is not possible to identify how much of the very substantial sums paid in compensation to victims of violent crime by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board went to victims in Lancashire. The total compensation paid in Great Britain has risen from £52 million in 1987-88 to over £125 million this financial year.

Correspondence

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the target time of his Department for answering letters from hon. Members regarding immigration cases.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Under current arrangements, we aim to answer letters on immigration cases within divisional targets ranging between 21 and 50 working days. Target dates for the answering of correspondence from hon. Members are currently under review.

Trespass

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make it his policy to extend powers of eviction to mass trespasses;

(2) if he will seek to amend the Public Order Act 1986 to make mass trespass on common land into a specific offence, and in section 39 to reduce to three the number of trespassing vehicles and allow police to remove vehicles and to arrest offenders without warrant during mass trespasses;

(3) If he will make it his Department's policy to amend guidelines issued to police forces on trespassing, in order to allow police forces to intervene in cases where trespassers are moved on but are thought likely to resume their trespass elsewhere.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Trespass is essentially a matter for the civil law, but section 39 of the Public Order Act 1986 was introduced specifically to give police powers to deal with aggravated trespass. We recently conducted a thorough public review of section 39. On 22 May the Home Secretary announced his conclusion: no change to the law was required but guidance would be issued to the police on the application of section 39. This was done on 22 May. The decision whether or not to use their powers remains entirely an operational matter for the senior officer at the scene.

Terrorist Funds

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to conclude an agreement with India covering the confiscation of terrorist funds; if the agreement will be subject to debate or approval by the House; and if he will place relevant information, including the heads of agreement which are being negotiated, in the Library.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: I hope to conclude early in 1992 an agreement with the Government of the Republic of India concerning the tracing, restraint and confiscation of the proceeds and instruments of crime and terrorist funds. The agreement could not be brought into force without orders in council under the Drug Trafficking Offences Act 1986, the Criminal Justice Act 1988, the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 and the Criminal Justice

(International Co-operation) Act 1990. Each of these orders would require the affirmative resolution of both Houses of Parliament. The text of the agreement is still under discussion but will be published in due course.

HEALTH

NHS Reforms

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been spent *(a)* on the national health service reforms and *(b)* on sustaining the new market structures.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the cost to date of the Government's reforms of the national health service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Around £380 million has been made available to the NHS for implementing the NHS reforms this year. This is in addition to sums of £300 million and £80 million provided in 1990-91 and 1989-90. All this money is in addition to that needed to maintain service levels. An analysis of how this money is expected to be spent is shown in the table.

£ million

NHS Review Expenditure	*1989-90*	*1990-91*	*1991-92*
HCHC Revenue			
100 Consultants initiative	3·0	26·5	37·0
Resource management initiative, clinical audit and IT	20·7	64·7	87·0
Enhancement of personnel, finance and other key staff functions and training	18·0	66·8	87·0
NHS Trusts—mainly consultation and start up costs	—	12·5	22·0
Family Health Service Authorities' Administration	—	29·0	36·0
Other—mainly quality initiatives, pilot projects and capital charges	17.0	29·5	34.0
Total revenue	58·7	229·0	303·0
HCHS capital			
Resource management initiative, medical audit and IT	13·0	54·6	65·0
Quality initiative	—	5·0	5·0
Total capital	13·0	59·6	70·0
FHS			
Practice funds management allowance	—	6·0	6·0
Total FHS	—	6·0	6·0
CFS/DH Admin.			
DH staff and consultancy costs related to the Review	7·4	—	—
Prescription Pricing Authority	—	9·0	4·0
Post Royal Assent Publicity	—	2·7	—
Total CFS/DH Admin/FHS Admin	7·4	11·7	4·0
Total NHS Review	79·1	306·3	383·0

Waiting Lists

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is his estimate of the cost of eradicating national health service waiting lists.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is reducing waiting time, rather than the overall list size, which is important. This is a key national health service objective backed by additional resources through the £37 million waiting list fund. The drive to eliminate excessive waiting is picking up speed. In the six months to September 1991, the number of patients waiting over a year fell by 24 per cent., and the number waiting over two years by 47 per cent.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Disability

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many disabled people are currently employed in his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Counting part-time staff as half units, the Department employs 141½ staff who are registered disabled persons. This does not include staff with disabilities who have chosen not to register.

The Department is fully committed to the policies and principles set out in the code of practice on the employment of people with disabilities in the civil service. Officials are making every effort to ensure that the policies are implemented effectively and sensitively, in order to increase access for people with disabilities to the full range of recruitment and career development opportunities available, irrespective of whether they have chosen to register. The Department also participates in schemes designed to increase opportunities for the employment and retention of people with disabilities such as the sheltered placement scheme.

Deer Farming

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the legislation covering deer farming in Great Britain.

Mr. Curry: The Tuberculosis (Deer) Order 1989 and the Tuberculosis (Deer) Notice of Intended Slaughter and Compensation Order 1989 cover farmed deer. The Welfare of Livestock (Prohibited Operations) Regulations 1982 prohibit the taking of deer antlers in velvet. The Deer Act 1991 mainly covers wild deer but some if its provisions are of relevance to farmed deer. Other legislation not specific to deer but covering livestock, animal health, welfare and slaughtering generally would also apply to farmed deer. In addition, an EC directive concerning public health and animal health problems affecting the production and placing on the market of rabbit meat and farmed game (91/495/EEC) has been agreed. Member states are required to implement this directive by 1 January 1993.

Pigs

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received following the postponement of the European Commission's report on sow confinement conditions.

Mr. Maclean: The recently agreed Council Directive on pig welfare requires a review to be carried out, particularly on the confinement of sows, by the end of 1997. The United Kingdom voted against the directive on the grounds that it should have phased out stall systems as well as tethers and that the time scale for Community action should have been shorter. We have received numerous representations from the industry, welfare interests and individuals agreeing with this view.

We have made it clear that the Government will press for the review to be completed as soon as possible and for our high welfare standards to be adopted throughout the Community.

Staffing Levels

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the present staffing levels of his Department in each of the regions in England and Wales; and what steps he has taken to assure himself that these are sufficient to meet both current need and critical situations which arise from time to time.

Mr. Curry: Staff-in-post numbers in the English regions and in Wales on 2 December 1991 were as follows:

Region	[1]*Staff in post*
Eastern	818·0
Midland and West	1,000·5
Northern	675·0
South-Eastern	533·0
South-Western	844·0
Wales	189·0

[1] Non-industrial and industrial

Responsibility for ensuring the adequacy of staff numbers to deal with both routine and unexpected work lies in the first instance with local management, with input from headquarters in the case of more senior grades. In addition cyclical visits by staff inspectors give independent and objective assessment of the levels set. These visits are carried out in accordance with Treasury guidance on frequency, and the staff inspectors also provide an ad hoc consultancy service within the department as required.

These figures cover administrative, technical and professional staff in England, and professional and technical staff in Wales. (Administrative staff in the Principality come under the Welsh Office). These figures do not include officials who work outside London, but who are not part of the regional organisation structure, for example, Directorate of Fisheries Research.

Food Market Statistics

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the size of the retail food market in volume terms in each of the last five years to date.

Mr. Curry: The table provides estimates of the size of the food market derived from statistics on retail sales of food, confectionery and soft drinks. The current price estimates have been deflated by the food component of the retail prices index, 1986 = 100.

Retail sales of food, confectionery and soft drinks in Great Britain[1]

	£ billion real terms
1986	31·5
1987	32·8
1988	33·5
1989	34·7
1990	[2]35·5

[1] Comparable data are not available for Northern Ireland.
[2] Forecast.
Source: MAFF estimates based on CSO retail inquiries data.

WALES

Factory Space

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many square metres of Welsh Development Agency factory property was sold in 1990-91 and in 1991-92 to the latest possible date; what was the total value of these sales; and what is the estimated total sale for 1991-92 and the total value.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is as follows:

	Total size square metres	*Total value £*
a. 1990-91	63,480	11,716,792
b. 1 April 1991 to 30 November 1991	99,576	6,398,589
c. 1991-92 (estimated)	209,775	26,343,089

Sales of undeveloped land are not included in these figures.

Valleys Programme

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he includes in the aims of the valleys programme *(a)* the reduction of unemployment from the date of the programme's inception and *(b)* sustaining population numbers in the area covered by the programme.

Mr. David Hunt: Yes.

Learning Difficulties

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his estimate of the number of places needed for adults with learning difficulties *(a)* in hospitals, *(b)* in other residential settings and *(c)* in the community in each county in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Estimated need and targets for service development are identified annually by county joint planning teams in their county plans.

National Health Service (Wales)

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will detail the individuals, groups and organisations whom he regards as customers of the national health service in Wales.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Everyone who comes into contact with, or works for, the national health service is a customer of the NHS. Customers include patients, their friends and relatives, the staff of the NHS and the organisations who deal with the NHS.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is his policy in respect of encouraging health authorities and national health service units in Wales to regard those they serve as patients or as customers.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: One of the three main aims of the strategic intent and direction for the NHS in Wales, launched in November 1989, is to develop a people-centred service. This means valuing people as individuals and managing services to this end.

This objective was developed in the all-Wales quality strategy, launched in April 1990. The strategy identified two types of customer of the NHS: external customers —in-patients and out-patients, domiciliary patients, the public and other organisations; internal customers—mainly those who work for the NHS.

The people-centred approach is an important feature of the patients charter for Wales. The charter informs patients of their rights and the standards they can expect within the NHS.

Health authorities and units are continually improving their service to the customers of the NHS within the overall Welsh Office strategy.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

"Spycatcher"

Mr. John Morris: To ask the Attorney-General what consideration he has given to the recent judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in the cases of *The Sunday Times* and others *v.* the United Kingdom and others.

The Attorney-General: I have considered the judgments carefully.

The background is that *The Observer* and *The Guardian* published reports in June 1986 on the Australian "Spycatcher" proceedings. The reports gave details of some of the contents of the manuscript of the book, "Spycatcher", by Peter Wright. I obtained an interlocutory injunction in the High Court on 11 July 1986 preventing *The Observer* and *The Guardian* from publishing further "Spycatcher" material. On 12 July 1987, *The Sunday Times* published extracts from the book. On 14 July 1987 the book was published in the United States. I obtained an interlocutory injunction in the High Court on 16 July 1987 preventing *The Sunday Times* from publishing further "Spycatcher" material. The House of Lords confirmed the interlocutory injunctions against the publishers of all three newspapers on 30 July 1987. At the hearing of the main action on 13 October 1988 the House of Lords discharged all the injunctions.

The European Court of Human Rights found that there was no breach of article 10 of the convention in respect of the injunctions imposed on the publishers of *The Observer* and *The Guardian* for the period up to publication of "Spycatcher" in the United States. The court found that there was a breach of article 10 of the convention in respect of the injunctions imposed on the publishers of *The Observer* and *The Guardian* for the period following publication in the United States. The court also found a breach of article 10 in respect of *The Sunday Times* injunctions, which were imposed when the book had been published in the United States and was being freely imported into this country.

In respect of the period up to 30 July 1987, the court found that the injunctions were necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security and for maintaining the authority of the judiciary. The court thus confirmed the key principle that the Crown was seeking to protect—namely, the right of the Crown to apply to the national courts to restrain publication of confidential material that is not already in the public domain when it is necessary to restrain publication for the protection of national security.

The court's ruling shows that material that has entered the public domain by whatever route has lost its confidentiality and that the further publication of such material cannot be restrained. That ruling is consistent with the conclusions of the House of Lords of 13 October 1988, which held that publication of extracts from the book could not be further restrained in the light of the widespread publication of the material that had already occurred. In those proceedings the House of Lords upheld a lifelong duty of confidentiality to the Crown on the part of members and former members of the security and intelligence services of the Crown. That important principle is not weakened by the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights.

The European Court of Human Rights also found that there was no breach of article 13 of the convention, which provides for everyone to have an effective remedy before a national authority, or of article 14, which provides that the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in the convention shall be secured without discrimination.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Autumn Statement

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update table D1 from the 1990 Autumn Statement Statistical Supplement (Cm 1520).

Mr. Maude: Some of the estimates of the costs of direct tax allowances and reliefs for 1990-91, included in the table referred to, have been revised and publication in "Inland Revenue Statistics 1991" is expected later this month. Estimates for 1991-92 will be published in the 1991 Autumn Statement Statistical Supplement early in the new year.

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total inheritance tax yield in Great Britain and Northern Ireland in the latest year for which information is available.

Mr. Maude: The latest year for which information is available is 1990-91. Receipts in this year were £1,262 million for the United Kingdom, of which £56 million was collected in Northern Ireland. Much of the tax collected in Northern Ireland related to deaths in England and Wales.

National Insurance

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the revenue *(a)* in the first year and *(b)* in a full year, assuming this is introduced at the beginning of 1991-92, and *(c)* in the first year and *(d)* in a full year, assuming this is introduced at the beginning of

1992-93, from extending national insurance contributions to (1) use of credit cards and charge cards and (2) medical bills insurance, for employees who earn over £8,500, distinguishing separately employee contributions and employer contributions, estimating the total revenue yield and, in each case, the number of taxpayers who would be affected.

Mr. Maude: Such a charge on private medical insurance premiums paid by employers would effect some 500,000 taxpayers and would yield £10 million in employee contributions and £40 million in employer contributions in a full year at 1991-92 levels of earnings and benefits. These estimates are based on an employee contribution rate of 9 per cent. and an employer contribution rate of 10·4 per cent. and take account of the fact that many taxpayers who receive private medical insurance from their employers have earnings above the upper earnings limit. The yield in the first year would depend on the administrative arrangements made to collect the new charge. The yield for 1992-93 would depend upon the level of employer-provided benefits in that year.

Detailed information on the extent of the use by employees of credit cards and charge cards provided by employers is not available.

Corporation Tax

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total reduction in corporation tax receipts for provisions on doubtful sovereign debt owed to United Kingdom banks in 1990-91.

Mr. Maude: Corporation tax receipts in 1990-91 are provisionally estimated to be lower by about £650 million as a result of provisions for doubtful sovereign debt by banks operating in the United Kingdom.

Private Health Insurance

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total number of people claiming tax relief for private health insurance; and what proportion of these are higher rate tax payers in (i) Great Britain and (ii) Northern Ireland.

Mr. Maude: It is estimated that, in 1990-91, 330,000 people in the United Kingdom claimed tax relief for private medical insurance for people aged over 60. There are no reliable estimates of the proportion who were higher rate taxpayers or of the split between those in Great Britain and those in Northern Ireland.

Earnings

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate for 1991-92 of the numbers of men and women with earnings below *(a)* the tax threshold and *(b)* the national insurance contribution threshold, in (i) Great Britain and (ii) Northern Ireland.

Mr. Maude: Estimates for the United Kingdom in 1991-92, based on projections from the 1988 and 1989 family expenditure surveys and on the new earnings survey, are as follows:

(million)

	Numbers of employees and self-employed with earnings below the income tax threshold	*Numbers of employees with earnings below the national insurance lower earnings limit*
Women	2·9	2·25
Men	1·0	0·75

Separate estimates for Northern Ireland are not available.

Business Expansion Scheme

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his forecast for the cost to the Exchequer in 1991-92 and in a full year of the business expansion scheme, in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Maude: The cost of tax relief for the business expansion scheme in 1991-92 depends on the total amount raised during the year. The cost of income tax relief is provisionally estimated as £130 million. Reliable estimates of the breakdown of the cost by country are not available.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make a statement on the outcome of the meeting of the intergovernmental conference on economic and monetary union held between 30 November and 3 December.

Mr. Norman Lamont: I attended the final scheduled meeting of the intergovernmental conference on economic and monetary union from 30 November to 3 December. A large number of issues were discussed, in preparation for the meeting of the European Council at Maastricht on 9-10 December. Because of the extra time devoted to the intergovernmental conference, the meeting of the Council of Economics and Finance Ministers scheduled for 3 December did not take place.

Progress was made on a number of issues. Although all matters remain open for negotiation at Maastricht, provisional agreement was reached on:

ensuring that if the United Kingdom decide to move to stage 3 of EMU our coins could continue to bear the head of Her Majesty the Queen, and the right of certain Scottish and Northern Irish banks to issue notes should be protected;

the principle that the status of the Bank of England need not be changed unless and until the United Kingdom decided to move to Stage 3;

making the procedure for monitoring Government budget deficits less inflexible and constraining; and ensuring that legally binding ceilings and sanctions on budget deficits would not apply in stage 2 of EMU.

Among other issues discussed were the transition from stage 2 to stage 3, exchange rate policy in stage 3, the functions of the European Central Bank in stage 3, the structure and role of the European Monetary Institute in stage 2, and economic and social cohesion.

Income Tax

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer by how much the single person's allowance could be increased at a revenue cost of £1 billion in 1991-92 in Great Britain and Northern Ireland with (i) the current system of tax allowances and (ii) all tax allowances and reliefs restricted to the basic rate except the single person's allowance.

Mr. Maude: Raising the personal allowance by £150 for all taxpayers (including those aged 65 and over) would cost about £1 billion in a full year at 1991-92 levels of income.

The yield from restricting all allowances and reliefs except the personal allowance to the basic rate would be about £900 million. This equates approximately to the revenue cost of raising the personal allowance for all taxpayers by a further £140.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the revenue cost of allowing couples to split the married couple's allowance as would be most financially beneficial in *(a)* the first year and *(b)* a full year, assuming this is introduced at the beginning of 1991-92, and *(c)* the first year and *(d)* a full year, assuming this is introduced at the beginning of 1992-93, in Great Britain and Northern Ireland with (i) the current system of tax allowances and (ii) all tax allowances and reliefs restricted to the basic rate except the single person's allowance.

Mr. Maude: Under the current system of tax allowances the revenue cost is estimated to be about £10 million in a full year at both 1991-92 and 1992-93 income levels. If the married couple's allowance were restricted to the basic rate, no couples would gain from the proposed change and there would be no revenue cost.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the revenue yield from freezing the married couple's allowance, additional personal allowance and widow's bereavement allowance, (but not the married couple's allowance for pensioners) in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, *(a)* in the first year and *(b)* in a full year, assuming this is introduced at the beginning of 1991-92, *(c)* in the first year and *(d)* in a full year, assuming this is introduced at the beginning of 1992-93, with full compensatory increases, at the basic rate, in (i) one-parent benefit, (ii) one-parent benefit and means-tested benefits for single parents, (iii) one parent benefit and the widowed mothers' allowance, (iv) one parent benefit and the widowed mothers' allowance and means-tested benefits for single parents and widows, with (1) the current system of tax allowances, and (2) restricting all tax allowances and reliefs except the single person's allowance to the basic rate.

Mr. Maude: It is estimated that, at 1992-93 levels of income, freezing the married couples allowance (for taxpayers aged under 65), the additional personal allowance, and the widow's bereavement allowance in 1992-93 would yield about £140 million in the first year, and £180 million in a full year compared with the illustrative 4 per cent. indexation shown in table 4.2 of the autumn statement 1991. These allowances were not increased in the 1991 Budget.

It is not administratively possible to compensate taxpayers fully and accurately through the benefits system in the way suggested. The benefit system cannot distinguish between taxpayers and non-taxpayers, nor can it take account of a person's tax liability at a particular point in time.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the effect on tax revenues *(a)* in the first year and *(b)* in a full year, assuming this is introduced at the beginning of 1991-92, and *(c)* in the first year and *(d)* in a full year, assuming this is introduced at the beginning of 1992-93, of the income tax at (1) 20 per cent., (2) 21 per cent., (3) 22 per cent., (4) 23 per cent., (5) 24 per cent., on the first (i) £1,000, (ii) £2,000, (iii) £3,000, (iv) £4,000, (v) £5,000, (vi) £8,000 and (vii) £10,000 of annual taxable income, in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Maude: Estimates are as follows. They assume that the basic rate limit (higher rate threshold) would not be affected by the introduction of the reduced rate band.

Full year cost of reduced rate bands at 1991-92 income levels

£ million

Taxable income subject to reduced rate (£)	*Reduced rate*				
	20 per cent.	*21 per cent.*	*22 per cent.*	*23 per cent.*	*24 per cent.*
1,000	1,200	960	720	480	240
2,000	2,290	1,830	1,370	910	460
3,000	3,280	2,620	1,970	1,310	660
4,000	4,170	3,340	2,500	1,670	830
5,000	4,970	3,980	2,980	1,990	990
8,000	6,800	5,440	4,080	2,720	1,360
10,000	7,650	6,120	4,590	3,060	1,530

Full year cost of reduced rate bands at 1991-92 income levels

£ million

Taxable income subject to reduced rate (£)	*Reduced rate*				
	20 per cent.	*21 per cent.*	*22 per cent.*	*23 per cent.*	*24 per cent.*
1,000	1,190	960	720	480	240
2,000	2,280	1,830	1,370	910	460
3,000	3,280	2,620	1,970	1,310	660
4,000	4,180	3,350	2,510	1,670	840
5,000	5,000	4,000	3,000	2,000	1,000
8,000	6,900	5,520	4,140	2,760	1,380
10,000	7,810	6,250	4,690	3,120	1,560

The effect on tax receipts in the first year would depend on administrative arrangements following such a change.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* men, *(b)* women, *(c)* pensioners and *(d)* non-pensioners would be affected by

restricting all tax allowances and reliefs except the single person's allowance to the basic rate in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, respectively, in 1991-92, giving the numbers of each (i) who earn above the 40 per cent. threshold, (ii) who earn below the 40 per cent. threshold, (iii) who are only affected because of the restriction in the married couple's allowance and (iv) who are brought into the higher rate tax bracket by this change.

Mr. Maude: Latest estimates for 1991-92 are as follows:

Restriction of allowances[1] and reliefs to the basic rate
Number of taxpaying individuals affected

	Thousands			
	Higher rate taxpayers	*Basic rate taxpayers*	*Affected by restriction of MCA only*	*Brought into higher rate*
(a) Men	1,340	270	320	270
(b) Women	150	20	—	20
(c) Aged 65 and over	90	10	40	10
(d) Aged under 65	1,400	280	280	280

[1] Except for the personal allowance.

Separate estimates for Great Britain and Northern Ireland are not available.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the cost of a *(a)* £100, *(b)* £200 and *(c)* £300 increase in the single person's allowance in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, (i) in the first year, (ii) in a full year, assuming this is introduced at the beginning of 1991-92, (iii) in the first year and (iv) in a full year, assuming this is introduced at the beginning of 1992-93, with (1) the current system of tax allowances and (2) all tax allowances and reliefs, except the single person's allowance, restricted to the basic rate, giving the numbers in each case who are taken out of tax altogether.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 5 December 1991]:* Estimates of the direct revenue costs are as follows:

Cost under current system of tax allowances (£ million)

Increase in the personal allowance (£)	*1991-92*		*1992-93*	
	First year	*Full year*	*First year*	*Full year*
100	500	650	500	650
200	1,000	1,300	1,000	1,300
300	1,500	1,950	1,500	1,950

Cost following the restriction of all tax allowances and reliefs (except the personal allowance) to the basic rate (£ million)

Increase in the personal allowance (£)	*1991-92*		*1992-93*	
	First year	*Full year*	*First year*	*Full year*
100	550	700	550	700
200	1,050	1,350	1,050	1,350
300	1,550	2,050	1,550	2,000

The numbers taken out of tax in either year are estimated to be (a) 200,000, (b) 500,000 and (c) 700,000.

SCOTLAND

Hospital Beds

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give *(a)* the total number of private and voluntary sector hospital beds, *(b)* the number of private and voluntary sector acute beds, *(c)* the total number of national health service beds and *(d)* the number of national health service acute beds in Scottish hospitals in each year since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested is given in the table:

Number of beds at 31 March (Scotland)

Year	*(a) Private and voluntary sector total*	*(b) Private and voluntary sector acute*	*(c) National Health Service total*	*(d) National Health Service acute*
1979	[1]—	[1]—	58,788	19,005
1980	[1]—	[1]—	58,334	18,984
1981	[1]—	[1]—	58,150	18,755
1982	[1]—	[1]—	57,928	18,649
1983	[1]—	[1]—	57,119	18,092
1984	[1]—	[1]—	57,342	18,079
1985	[1]—	[1]—	56,802	17,753
1986	[1]—	[1]—	55,955	17,384
1987	334	[1]—	55,338	17,223
1988	355	[1]—	54,487	17,005
1989	353	[1]—	53,448	16,595
1990	376	[1]—	52,121	16,270
1991	376	[1]—	50,640	15,883

[1] Information not collected centrally.

Capital Expenditure

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the allotted capital expenditure for local authorities on education in cash and constant price terms since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information given in the following table records actual capital expenditure in each year, taken from local authority financial returns. The fall

in expenditure in real terms during the period reflects a substantial and progressive decline in school pupil numbers which has reduced the requirement for new school building.

Capital expenditure by local authorities on educational building
£ million

	At out-turn prices	At 1990-91 prices
1979-80	52·926	115·004
1980-81	55·799	102·462
1981-82	64·283	107·648
1982-83	58·159	90·916
1983-84	52·825	78·921
1984-85	51·429	73·174
1985-86	59·374	80·061
1986-87	55·262	72·144
1987-88	61·832	76·558
1988-89	74·102	85·603
1989-90	81·593	88·516
1990-91	78·284	78·284

Note:—The figures include expenditure on schools, further education and, from 1985-86, community education. Out-turn figures have been converted to 1990-91 prices using the GDP deflator.

Pension Power

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what response he has made to his recent meeting with representatives of Scottish Pensioner Power; and what action he intends to take as a result of the meeting.

Mr. Lang: I had a useful and constructive meeting with representatives of Scottish Pensioner Power on 18 October in Glenluce, since when I have corresponded with them twice in connection with specific matters raised by them.

Environmental Protection

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the proposals in the citizens charter, the parents charter and the patients charter which have reference to environmental protection.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 4 December 1991]:* There are no proposals in the parents or the patients charters which refer directly to environmental protection, although environmental health aspects are clearly relevant to the patients charter proposals.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Furniture Moving

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Lord President of the Council what arrangements are made for moving chairs and furniture around the Palace of Westminster; and if he will list the outside companies and organisations involved and their cost each year for the last five years.

Mr. MacGregor: The Parliamentary Works Office employs porters to carry out this work on the parliamentary estate. Additional supplementary porterage is provided when needed by Swift and French who hold the Buying Agency's call-off contract for removal of goods within the London region. Bishop's Move has also been used this year to provide a storage and removal service for the furnishing and fitting out of the new parliamentary building.

Departmental Telephone Calls

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Lord President of the Council what information is available on the number of calls made to directory inquiries from House of Commons telephones since 1 April 1991.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 27 November 1991]:* I regret that this information is not available.

Members' Rooms

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many thefts from hon. Members' rooms have been reported in 1991 to the to the most recent practicable date.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 2 December 1991]:* Forty thefts have been reported from Members' rooms in 1991 to date 1 December. I am pleased to be able to let the hon. Member know that, following police investigations, a man is at present on bail, having been arrested in connection with a number of thefts from the House.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he is satisfied with the locking procedures for hon. Members' rooms at the conclusion of parliamentary business each day; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 2 December 1991]:* Yes, I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on 11 November at columns *365-66*.

ENERGY

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what plans the Government have to review the level of funds allocated to the home energy efficiency scheme.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: There is some £26 million available for the home energy efficiency scheme (HEES) during the current financial year. In 1992-93 some £40 million will be available in my Department's budget for the promotion of energy efficiency in low income households of which the major part will be funding for HEES, representing an increase of about 50 per cent.

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what plans the Government have to publicise the help available under the home energy efficiency scheme.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Leaflets about the home energy efficiency scheme (HEES) have already been distributed to local authority housing offices, local offices of the Department of Social Security, citizens advice bureaux, Help the Aged offices and various other organisations. HEES is also promoted via the "Keep Warm Keep Well" campaign. In addition, my Department is exploring with the Department of Social Security other methods by which potential clients may be made aware of the scheme.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what further developments have taken place on future carbon dioxide emission scenarios.

Mr. Wakeham: The Government made a commitment last year to return United Kingdom CO_2 emissions to 1990

levels by 2005 if other countries play their part. It also made clear that it would monitor progress towards achieving this challenging target, and if possible improve on it. There have been several significant and helpful developments since projections of CO_2 emissions were made available in 1989. These include a number of new proposals for more efficient gas fired electricity generation, following the introduction of competition into the electricity industry, which will reduce CO_2 emissions. In the light of these and other changes my Department has prepared some new scenarios for United Kingdom CO_2 emissions taking into account recent trends, including improvements in energy efficiency.

The latest scenarios suggest emissions in millions of tonnes of carbon (mtc) could be within the following ranges:

Year	
1990	[1]160
2000	156-178
2005	166-200
2020	188-284

[1] Provisional.

These figures are produced on the same basis as those in the Digest of Environmental Protection and Water Statistics.

Previous ranges (in mtc) based on data submitted in 1989 to the IPCC and subsequently published in Energy Paper 58 were:

Year	
1985	158
2000	174-206
2005	178-225
2020	188-316

Details of the new scenarios and the assumptions underlying them are being prepared for publication next year.

While it is welcome that these new developments indicate progress towards reducing growth in CO_2 emissions there remains substantial uncertainty about the future path of United Kingdom emissions. It remains our view that the Government's target is a demanding but realistic one. There can be no question of making commitments that we cannot be sure of achieving.

Discussions on further measures to limit CO_2 emissions at national and Community level will continue at the Joint Energy and Environment Council due to take place in Brussels on 13 December. The Government will play a full and active part in these discussions.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Insurance Companies

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what powers he has under the Insurance Companies Act 1982 to preserve the independence of insurance companies and societies from merger with banks and building societies; and how those powers have been used.

Mr. Redwood: The Insurance Companies Act 1982 contains no general restrictions on mergers between insurance companies and banks and building societies.

However, there are limitations on the extent to which insurance companies may carry on non-insurance business. More specifically, the Act gives the Secretary of State a range of intervention powers which are exercisable when the interests of policyholders are at risk. Further, in approving changes of control of insurance companies and in authorising companies to carry on insurance business in the United Kingdom the Secretary of State is required (under sections 61 and 7 of the Act respectively) to be satisfied that a proposed controller, whether a company or an individual, is fit and proper to hold that position.

In exercising these powers the Secretary of State looks at each case individually.

Fraud Investigation

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many cases of fraud in pension schemes his Department is currently investigating; and how many staff are employed on the investigations.

Mr. Lilley: There are currently no cases where inspectors have been appointed under the Companies Act to investigate fraud in pension schemes. However, inspectors are appointed to investigate all the affairs of a company.

Investment Services Directive

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the proposed directive on investment services will be under negotiation at the Maastricht summit; and if it remains Her Majesty's Government's policy to press for its adoption.

Mr. Redwood: The Investment Services Directive is not on the agenda for the Maastricht summit. The Government wish to see a directive which genuinely liberalises the single market in investment services and which does not impose unnecessary restrictions on member states' markets.

Sunday Trading

Sir Michael Neubert: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will refer the action of the supermarket chains in opening on Sundays to the Director-General of Fair Trading on the ground that it represents an unfair trading practice.

Mr. Redwood: No. Competition legislation is not designed to apply to the opening of supermarket chains on Sunday.

ECGD Insurance Services Group

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the vested and non-vested markets in the sale of the Insurance Services Group of the Export Credits Guarantee Department to NCM of Amsterdam.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 5 December 1991]:* The non-vested markets are:

Angola
Egypt
Gambia
Guyana
Iran
Iraq

Jordan
Kuwait
Liberia
Libya
Nigeria
Sierra Leone
Somalia
Soviet Union (all the republics which formed part of the USSR as at 1 January 1990) and the Baltic States
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Tanzania
Yugoslavia (deemed to comprise all of the Republics which formed part of Yugoslavia as at 30 June 1991)
Zambia

The vested markets are all the remaining countries for which ECGD short-term cover was available immediately prior to the sale.

Non-vesting means that neither the risk nor the benefit of business underwritten under ECGD policies on the relevant country has been transferred to NCM credit insurance as part of the sale arrangements. The risk on future business insured under NCM credit insurance policies with those non-vested markets for which ECGD cover was available immediately prior to vesting will in certain cases be assumed by NCM under wholly private sector arrangements and in others under the national interest reinsurance facility provided to it by ECGD.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Diplomatic Missions

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the current establishment at each of United Kingdom's diplomatic missions overseas; what were the comparable figures in 1979; what posts have been closed since 1979; which new ones opened; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer the hon. Member to the current edition of Her Majesty's diplomatic service overseas reference list and the edition for 1979, copies of which are in the Library of the House. This publication provides details of staff at each overseas post. Posts opened since 1979 include: Kiribati, Belmopan, Brazzaville (November 1983), Managua, San Salvador (July 1984), Shanghai, Windhoek, Tallinn, Riga and Vilnius. British Diplomats are now also based in Kiev and St. Petersburg working to establish missions in those cities.

The following posts have been closed since 1979: Bergen, Cadiz, Ostend, Malmo, Winnipeg, San Salvador (February 1980), Adelaide, Palermo, Philadelphia, Saint Louis, Basle, Calais, Ibadan, Innsbruck, Strasbourg, Tangier, Trieste, Rotterdam, Detroit, Hanover, Blantyre, Cagliari, Gothenburg, Halifax, Salonika, Santo Domingo, Vientianne, Vigo, Zagreb, Monrovia, Libreville, Brazzaville (August 1991) and Edmonton.

India (Human Rights)

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations Her Majesty's Government have made to the Government of India in the current year relating to human rights violations in the Punjab and Kashmir; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are deeply concerned about human rights violations in Punjab and Kashmir and have raised this issue regularly with the Indian Government this year. The Indian Government have assured us that action is being taken to improve the situation. They have told us that more than 200 members of the security forces have been punished for violations in Punjab and Kashmir. We have urged the Indian Government to allow Amnesty International to visit Kashmir to make an assessment of the situation.

Cyprus

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will specify the contacts, diplomatic and social, the United Kingdom high commission in Cyprus has with the purported Turkish Cypriot breakaway entity in northern Cyprus; and what economic and other aid, including scholarships, is provided for that entity.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The British Government do not recognise the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus". The British High Commission in Nicosia is accredited to the Government of the Republic of Cyprus.

Since the United Kingdom is a guarantor power, and as part of our active support for the United Nations Secretary-General's mission of good offices, the British High Commission maintains contact with the leaders of the Turkish Cypriot community.

In 1990-91 under the ODA's bilateral aid programme we provided £181,000 to the Turkish Cypriot community, which is channelled through the British Council in Nicosia or the Commonwealth scholarship programme. Similarly, under the EC association agreement the third financial protocol for 1989-93 provides 62 mecu for the whole of Cyprus.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what help he is providing to the Government of Cyprus in seeking to trace Cypriot citizens missing following the Turkish invasion of Cyprus.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The issue is being investigated by the United Nations committee on missing persons, which was established in 1981 to trace and account for all persons reported missing by each side. We fully support the work of this committee, which relies upon the full co-operation of both sides to the intercommunal dispute.

Foreign Affairs Council

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a statement on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council on 2 December.

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and I represented the United Kingdom at the Foreign Affairs Council on 2 December. The Council agreed a package of positive measures towards the Yugoslav republics of Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzgovina and Macedonia. These restored to those republics the preferential trade access arrangements previously available to Yugoslavia as a whole under the trade and co-operation agreement on the ground that they are co-operating with the EC's efforts to restore peace. The Council also invited the Commission to reinstate the EC's PHARE technical assistance programme and disbursement of funds under the EC's second financial protocol with respect to the four republics.

Ministers discussed the bombing of flights Pan Am 103 and UTA 772. They issued a statement affirming that they took a most serious view of the accusation against Libyan officials, endorsing the demands of the British, French and United States Governments and calling upon the Libyan authorities to comply promptly and in full with these demands.

Ministers also issued a statement welcoming the democratic manner in which the Ukrainian people had declared their wish for independence and calling upon the Ukraine to pursue with the Soviet Union and the other republics an open and constructive dialogue intended to ensure that all the Soviet Union's existing international obligations and commitments were carried out.

In a statement on East Timor, Ministers reiterated their condemnation of the unjustifiable actions by the Indonesian armed forces in Dili. They called for a thorough investigation by independent experts and decided to review EC co-operation with Indonesia in the light of the Indonesian response.

The Council had a brief discussion about preparation for the Maastricht European Council. The Council decided to ask the Commission to make proposals for a Community trade embargo against Haiti.

An EC/Egypt Co-operation Council was held in the margins of the Foreign Affairs Council, followed by a lunch at which Ministers discussed with Foreign Minister Moussa the middle east peace process.

Political Union

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a statement on the outcome of the ministerial meeting of the intergovernmental conference on political union on 2 and 3 December.

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and I attended a two-day ministerial meeting of the intergovernmental conference on political union on 2 and 3 December.

The aim of the meeting was to narrow the areas of disagreement between member states in preparation for the Maastricht European Council on 9 and 10 December.

Some progress was made in a number of areas, including the provisions on the common foreign and security policy. Agreement was reached in principle to conference declarations in most of the areas we had proposed, including on the role of national parliaments and animal welfare. In other areas of the negotiation, a number of difficult issues remain to be resolved. Those must now be addressed by Heads of State and Government meeting in the European Council of Maastricht.

I made clear where our principle difficulties lie, but reiterated our commitment to working for an agreement at Maastricht which is satisfactory to all, and to this House.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Child Benefit

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what would be *(a)* the first year and *(b)* the full year costs of raising child benefit to £9·95 (i) in 1991-92 and (ii) 1992-93, including increases in linked, means-tested and national insurance benefits for Northern Ireland;

(2) what would be *(a)* the first year and *(b)* the full year costs of raising child benefit to £10 (i) in 1991-92 and (ii) 1992-93, including increases in linked, means-tested and national insurance benefits for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: The rates of child benefit from April 1991 were £8·25 for the eldest eligible child and £7·25 for each other child and were increased to £9·25 and £7·50, respectively, from October 1991. The estimated gross cost of increasing child benefit from those rates to £9·95 for each child throughout 1991-92 would be about £46 million. If the October 1991 rates had applied throughout 1991-92, the cost would be around £39 million. The gross full year cost in 1992-93 of paying £9·95, instead of the rates of £9·65 and £7·80 payable from April 1992, would be about £31 million.

Raising child benefit on the same basis to £10 instead of £9·95 would increase the above costs by about £1 million to around £47 million, £40 million and £32 million, respectively.

National Insurance

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the latest information on the number of people who pay national insurance contributions at the contracted-out rate in Northern Ireland; and of these how many earn above *(a)* £15,000, *(b)* £20,000, *(c)* £25,000, *(d)* £30,000 and *(e)* £40,000 respectively.

Mr. Hanley: The information is not available in the precise form requested. However, figures for the number of employed earners who paid national insurance at the contracted-out standard rate in 1989-90, the latest year for which provisional information is available, and for the number of them who earned above that year's upper earnings limit for national insurance purposes are given in the table.

	Total	*With earnings above the UEL (£16,900)*
Paying at the standard contracted-out rate	219,000	24,600
Paying a mixture of contracted out and not contracted-out rates	30,100	1,600
Total with some contracted-out contributions	249,100	26,200

Disability

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many disabled people are currently employed in his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: At 29 November 1991 the Northern Ireland civil service employed 1,284 staff who self-reported a disability, of whom 431 were, or had been, registered as disabled.

DEFENCE

Low Flying

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what reduction is planned in the amount of low flying at less than 250 ft over the United Kingdom; and what consideration has been given to closing one or more of the tactical training areas.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) on 18 October 1991 at column *303*.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the one-way flow control system for low flying military aircraft in the Bwlch Llyn Bach valley is marked on the military low flying chart covering the area.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Yes.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the maximum length of time for which air force training units are permitted to use a particular fixed low-level flying route.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Air crew are required to avoid the use of standard routes whenever possible. Where the use of such routes is unavoidable they are replaced at regular intervals.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what specific advice or instructions is given to pilots flying at less than 250 ft over the United Kingdom, regarding flight at speeds greater than 450 knots in the run-up to simulated targets.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The normal cruising speed for all low flying aircraft is 450 knots. While aircraft may fly at faster speeds in the run-up to simulated targets pilots are instructed to observe speed limits ranging from 420 knots to 550 knots, depending on height and aircraft type. These controls were imposed to ensure that noise levels on the ground in excess of 125dB(A) are not created by low-flying aircraft.

Low Flying

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the numbers of low-flying sorties flown by Royal Air Force aircraft in each low-flying area in Germany in each month since January 1990, as collated in accordance with the requirements of the allied forces central Europe low-flying handbook.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Prior to September 1990, a general lower limit of 500 feet applied to low flying in Germany but flying down to 250 feet was permitted in seven discrete low-flying areas. Since 16 September 1990, there has been a general lower limit of 1,000 feet on low flying in Germany and consequently records of entries into the German low-flying areas by RAF aircraft only extend to that date. While the information is not available broken down by sorties, the numbers of entries recorded between January and September 1990 are as follows:

Area	Entries
January 1990	
1	659
2	542
3	248
5	309
6	100
7	79
8	72
February 1990	
1	604
2	572
3	226
5	241
6	43
7	50
8	54
March 1990	
1	450
2	378
3	96
5	163
6	26
7	55
8	56
April 1990	
1	862
2	758
3	380
5	276
6	62
7	18
8	34
May 1990	
1	656
2	522
3	413
5	204
6	29
7	128
8	149
June 1990	
1	302
2	226
3	165
5	81
6	25
7	54
8	42
July 1990	
1	713
2	590
3	482
5	262
6	57
7	81
8	109
August 1990	
1	848
2	646
3	343
5	269
6	49
7	54
8	78
September 1990	
1	226
2	167
3	105
5	76
6	9
7	11
8	26

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the maximum number of times an aircrew is permitted to re-attack the same simulated target at low level; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I refer the hon. Member to my Department's evidence to the inquiry into low flying by the Select Committee on Defence (HC 120/90, page 177).

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all requests made to his Department for low flying avoidance status around bird sanctuaries, wildlife breeding sites and nature reserves in the last three years; and what was the outcome of each request.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I regret that such applications are not recorded separately and it would require disproportionate effort to identify them. However, some 54 bird sanctuaries, wildlife breeding sites and nature reserves are the subject of seasonal or permanent avoidance arrangements.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the flying at less than 250 ft during Exercises Highland Cardinal and OSEX 91 in mid-Wales in June-July 1991, as specified in the Civil Aviation Authority notification of these exercises, was approved by Ministers; and how many sorties at less than 250 ft were flown during the two exercises.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No flying below 250 ft took place during Exercises Highland Cardinal and OSEX 91.

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to retain records of requests from foreign air forces for permission to fly at less than 250 ft over the United Kingdom, and of his Department's responses to those requests.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No. My Department's general policy on such training remains as set out in evidence to the Select Committee on Defence published last year. (HC 120/90, pp. 12-13).

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints about low flying in each of the years 1986 to 1990 came from addresses located within each of low-flying areas 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11 and 14.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The numbers of inquiries or complaints about low-flying training which my Department received in each of the last five years from addresses located within low-flying areas 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11 and 14 were as follows:

Low flying area	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
1	114	115	135	134	90
2	739	890	922	1,058	992
3	11	18	14	14	12
4	401	400	434	646	526
5	451	414	364	620	624
6	364	529	380	519	446
7	733	913	856	1,110	1,086
8	302	286	283	399	413
9	34	42	59	56	41
11	726	594	482	579	537
14	242	425	534	899	564

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the Chepstow transit area was abolished; what was the specific reason for its abolition; and if he will list the parliamentary constituencies over which low flying is newly permitted, or within which the area available for low flying is extended, as a result of this measure.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: It is not our practice to publish detailed information on the United Kingdom low-flying system. As part of the continuous monitoring of the United Kingdom low-flying system, however, a programme of reviews of avoidance areas is carried out and changes made when necessary, reflecting changes on the ground, and aimed at spreading low flying more evenly and enhancing flight safety, while at the same time reducing, where possible, the disturbance to those on the ground.

Iraq

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his oral statement on 22 November, *Official Report*, column 541, if he will set out the sources for his statement that the People's Republic of China and North Korea sold missile technology to Iraq that contributed to the latter's nuclear capabilities.

Mr. Alan Clark: My right hon. Friend sought to make two separate points—that the People's Republic of China and North Korea had exported missile technology; and that Iraq had received external support in its nuclear weapons programme. We do not disclose the sources for such information.

Diesel-powered Staff Cars

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff cars are diesel powered.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A total of 1,487.

RAF Aerobatic Team

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current cost of the RAF aerobatic team.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Operating costs are £14·8 million per annum at 1990-91 prices.

US Air Force Training

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what special considerations are taken into account when selecting data link areas in the United Kingdom for United States air force training with the GBU-15 glide bomb system.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Areas are selected in order to minimise interference with other frequency users.

Army (Hunting)

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost of transporting Army horses and riders to fox and any other hunting events in 1989, 1990 and the current year.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale) on 11 June 1991 at column *521*.

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Army personnel have been involved in hunting and associated duties in the last three years; and what was the number of duty hours involved.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Equestrian skills are essential for all service personnel from units that have a mounted ceremonial role and hunting is a useful form of training and exercise for both horses and riders. Hunting, however, is not recorded as a separate activity and therefore cannot be readily identified.

Technical Data Packages

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps his Department takes to ensure the integrity of technical data packages passing between suppliers of equipment ordered by the procurement executive.

Mr. Alan Clark: Responsibility for ensuring that technical data packages are complete, accurate, and fit for the purpose for which they are required, rests with the company producing them. The Department does not seek to derogate from the company's contractual obligations.

Mr. Cyril Thomas

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will initiate an inquiry into the cause of death in 1988 of Mr. Cyril Thomas, formerly of Narbeth, Dyfed, following his employment at the Royal Ordnance factory at Woolwich and the atomic weapons establishment at Aldermaston; and what recent communication his Department had with Mrs. Margaret Thomas, his widow.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: In the light of the evidence presented at the recent inquest on Mr. Cyril Thomas, I do not consider that there are grounds for any form of special inquiry into the cause of death. His widow, Mrs. Margaret Thomas, has been provided with full copies of his radiation dose record.

Skyguard Radar

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the dates and locations of deployments of Skyguard radars outside Ministry of Defence land for use as mobile simulated threats for training of air crew over the past two years.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Skyguard radars have been deployed outside Ministry of Defence land for use as mobile simulated threats for training of air crew on three occasions in the last two years. They were:

15 to 19 May 1990	East Lothian
18 to 22 November 1991	Dumfries and Galloway
2 to 6 December 1991	Devon

United Scientific Holdings/Avimo

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary aof State for Defence (1) whether his Department is taking any action to secure compensation from any other company in respect of ex-gratia payments made to United Scientific Holdings/Avimo;

(2) what was the amount of ex-gratia payment made by his Department to United Scientific Holdings/Avimo in respect of that company's performance on the most recent contract for the delivery of thermal observation and gunnery sighting equipment.

Mr. Alan Clark: The details of extra-contractual payments made by my Department to particular firms, and of any actions taken with other companies to secure compensation, are commercially confidential.

Mr. Rogers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether his Department is satisfied that the technical data package received by Avimo Ltd. in respect of its recent thermal observation and gunnery sighting equipment contract was sufficient to permit it properly to discharge its contractual obligations.

Mr. Alan Clark: It is not our normal practice to comment on the quality of particular products passing between our suppliers.

Gulf War

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the occasions on which statements made by his Department in respect of the deaths of British service men killed during action in the Gulf conflict have been subsequently corrected.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have been able to identify only one change to an official statement on British personnel killed in action in the Gulf. This was the reduction to 24 of the total "killed in action", which I gave in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) on 28 June at column *579*. I am, however, aware that some of the early accounts about the weather and 3 RRF's activities given to the next of kin of personnel involved in the Warrior/A-10 friendly fire incident, through the regimental support system, later proved to be mistaken. I can assure the hon. Member that these accounts were given in good faith at the time. The answer that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Mr. Oppenheim) on 24 July at columns *706-9* gave the official statement on the incident.

Exercises

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what RAF participation is scheduled in exercises *(a)* Red Flag 92-2, *(b)* Green Flag 92-3, *(c)* Maple Flag 25, *(d)* Red Flag 92-4 and *(e)* Green Flag 92-5.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Eight RAF Tornado and two RAF Hercules aircraft, together with three RAF regiment Rapier squadrons, are scheduled to participate in exercise Red Flag 92-2. Nine RAF Jaguar aircraft are scheduled to participate in exercise Maple Flag 25. No RAF participation is currently scheduled in exercises Green Flag 92-3, Red Flag 92-4 or Green Flag 92-5.

Disability

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many disabled people are currently employed in his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: There are 1,164 registered disabled staff in the MOD. In addition, there are a number of staff with disabilities working in the MOD who have chosen not to register formally as disabled.

The MOD takes very seriously indeed its responsibilities as an equal opportunities employer and early in 1992 we will be launching a major programme for action for people with disabilities.

Military Equipment

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the value of United Kingdom sales of military equipment *(a)* within the United Kingdom, *(b)* to EEC countries and *(c)* internationally, excluding EC countries, for each year since 1979 in (i) cash and (ii) 1991-92 prices.

Mr. Alan Clark: The full information requested could be assembled in the precise form specified only at disproportionate cost.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 9 December 1991

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Government Legal Services

34. **Mr. Carrington:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement about recruitment to the Government legal services.

The Attorney-General: I am pleased to say that recruitment to the Government legal service is very satisfactory. Whenever we advertise, we attract a large number of high calibre applicants.

Solicitors (Disclosure of Information)

35. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Attorney-General under what guidelines the Crown prosecution service may decline to disclose relevant information to solicitors acting for persons accused of murder.

The Attorney-General: None. The guidelines issued by my predecessor in 1981 require that relevant information be disclosed.

Charities

36. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Attorney-General when he last met the Charity Commissioners to discuss the political activities of charities.

The Attorney-General: I have not met them for this purpose.

Prosecutions

37. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the number of prosecutions brought in 1991 and the number of staff currently employed by the Crown prosecution service to pursue them.

The Attorney General: Between January and September 1991 the Crown prosecution service completed 1,320,463 cases and on 31 October employed 5,821 members of staff of whom 1,904·5 were lawyers.

Immigration Appeals

38. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Attorney-General if he has any plans to shorten waiting times for a hearing for immigration appeals.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor's Department has recruited additional staff and part-time adjudicators for the immigration appellate authorities (IAA) to cope with the large number of appeals. Streamlined procedures have been introduced for the initial collation of case papers with the aim of dispatching them to the parties' representatives in this country within two weeks of their receipt. This is a significant improvement on the previous position of eight to 12 weeks and has helped to reduce the time taken for cases to be determined.

A multi-terminal case-tracking computer system will also be operational by January 1992. This will enable the IAA to monitor more accurately and frequently the progress of appeals.

Bailiffs

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Attorney-General if he will list the statutory provisions that govern the hours of working of bailiffs engaged in *(a)* debt recovery in general and *(b)* poll tax enforcement.

The Attorney-General: Order 7, rule 3 of the County Court Rules 1981 provides that county court bailiffs are not permitted to serve or execute process on Sunday, Good Friday or Christmas day without leave of the court.

There are no statutory provisions which govern the hours of working of bailiffs engaged in community charge enforcement.

Maxwell Communication Corporation

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Attorney-General what is the remit of the Serious Fraud Office inquiry into the Maxwell Communication Corporation.

The Attorney-General: The Serious Fraud Office is investigating the circumstances surrounding a £55 million loan from Swiss Bank Corporation to Adviser 188 Ltd., a company owned by Headington Investments Ltd., which is itself associated with the late Mr. Robert Maxwell. Subsequently the director of the Serious Fraud Office decided to investigate allegations concerning the management of the assets of the pension funds of various companies also associated with Mr. Maxwell.

The investigations are being carried out in conjunction with the City of London police.

Paintball Guns

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Attorney-General how many prosecutions are a waiting trial at Crown courts involving the use or possession of paintball guns.

The Attorney-General: The use and possession of paintball guns are not covered by any specific legislation, but may contravene a number of enactments depending on the characteristics of the item and the circumstances and purpose of the possession. The CPS does not maintain records which in respect of any category of offence enables those involving paintball guns to be identified from those which do not.

PRIME MINISTER

Zionism

Mr. Janner: To ask the Prime Minister (1) whether he has now held discussions with the United States of America on how best to achieve the repeal of United Nations resolution 3379;

(2) what discussions have been held with Britain's European partners on how best to achieve the repeal of United Nations resolution 3379 on Zionism, to which he referred in his letter of 14 October 1991; at what level they were conducted; and what was the outcome;

(3) with which countries he intends to discuss the issue of repealing United Nations resolution 3379 in his forthcoming bilateral contacts.

The Prime Minister: As I told the hon. and learned Member in my letter to him of 14 October, we support the United States proposal to secure the repeal of this resolution. We have discussed how to achieve repeal with the Unites States administration and have said we shall co-sponsor a draft resolution which revokes it. Our discussions with our European partners, primarily through our missions in New York, continue. We expect to raise the matter with other countries before a repealing resolution is put to the vote.

United Nations

Sir Gerard Vaughan: To ask the Prime Minister if he will raise at the next meeting of the United Nations the question of late payment of subscriptions by *(a)* the United States of America and *(b)* other member countries.

The Prime Minister: We repeatedly make clear our concern at the failure on the part of a large number of member states to pay their assessed contributions in full and on time.

Non-proliferation Policies

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Prime Minister what extra resources he proposes to commit in support of the agreement at the G7 summit to combat the proliferation of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and to foster non-proliferation policies among additional nations; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Together with our G7 and other partners we are addressing the question of how we can best strengthen the various regimes designed to combat nuclear, biological and chemical proliferation.

Arms Sales

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Prime Minister what are the implications to the United Kingdom of the principle of transparency in international transfers of conventional weapons and associated military technology as agreed at the G7 summit in London; and if he will press the United Nations to publish a register of arms sales.

The Prime Minister: As an important step towards openness in conventional arms transfers, the declaration at the London economic summit called for the early adoption of a United Nations register of arms transfers. This followed our initiative to establish such a register. The Twelve and Japan tabled a resolution at this year's United Nations General Assembly with this aim in mind. The resolution was approved by a large majority in the First Committee of the General Assembly on 15 November and will shortly be adopted at the plenary stage of the General Assembly. It will allow the international community to monitor the scale of arms build-up by any one country. Information will be provided on an annual basis and the register will be established and maintained at the United Nations headquarters in New York by the Secretary General.

United Nations

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Prime Minister whether he intends to commit additional resources to the proposed extension of the capacity of the United Nations to respond to emergencies and appeals for aid; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: The proposals to which the hon. Member refers are the result of an initiative by this Government together with the German Government which was subsequently taken up by the G7 summit and the European Council. They are currently under consideration by the United Nations. We are pressing for their early adoption. We fully intend to contribute our share of the required funds.

Non-proliferation Treaty

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Prime Minister what response he has made to the proposal of the Secretary General of the International Atomic Energy Agency at its 35th conference concerning *(a)* the need to strengthen International Atomic Energy Agency nuclear safeguards by increasing the number of special inspections under the provisions of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and *(b)* the need for the International Atomic Energy Agency to be given additional information on nuclear programmes by the security services of non-proliferation treaty and International Atomic Energy Agency member states.

The Prime Minister: The director-general in his statement to the International Atomic Energy Agency called for a strengthening of the safeguards system to provide, through special inspections, confidence that no undeclared nuclear installations or material exist in states which have accepted full-scope safeguards. The United Kingdom fully endorses this policy and has made this support clear.

To enable the agency to exercise its right to make special inspections of undeclared activities, it requires access to information pointing to their existence. It is the intention of the Government to assist the agency in this context as far as possible by providing relevant information as appropriate.

Disabled People

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 11 November, *Official Report*, column *355*, if he will list the proposals relating to disabled people which are under consideration.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 6 December 1991]:* The proposals relating to disabled people, published by the European Commission and presently under consideration are:

Proposals for a Council directive on minimum requirements to improve the mobility and safe transport to work of workers with reduced mobility (published February 1991).

Proposals for a Council decision establishing a third Community action programme to assist disabled people—HELIOS II (published October 1991).

In addition we are participating in two recent Community initiatives specifically for disabled people: TIDE—Technology for the socio-economic integration of disabled and elderly people; and HORIZON—a programme within the European social fund which aims at improving the conditions of access to the employment market for disabled and disadvantaged people.

Maastricht

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Prime Minister whether he will submit a resolution to the EC summit at Maastricht condemning the growth of racist sentiment and attacks in Europe.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 6 December 1991]:* The Government view with concern the recent manifestations of racism across Europe. I understand that the EC presidency has it in mind to propose a resolution on these matters at the forthcoming meeting of the European Council.

Sterling

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has had on the similarity of design between the £5 note and the £20 note; if he will withdraw the £20 note; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 6 December 1991]:* I have received a number of letters on the new £5 and £20 notes. However, the design of banknotes is the responsibility of the Bank of England and not the Government. The bank believes that its new notes achieve an appropriate blend of security features and distinguishing characteristics. It will, however, take account of the reactions to the notes already issued in designing future issues.

"Faith in the Countryside"

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister what response he intends to make to the archbishop's commission on rural areas report "Faith in the Countryside".

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 6 December 1991]:* The report "Faith in the Countryside" was debated in the House of Lords on 15 November 1990.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Yugoslavia

45. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his proposals for aid to Yugoslavia.

Mrs. Chalker: British aid for Yugoslavia during the current civil strife will depend upon the specific needs of the emergency, taking account of how the international community responds to them. We have already provided blankets and cash to the international committee of the Red Cross, valued at £1·75 million.

Finance Ministers

46. **Mr. Allen McKay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to hold discussions with Finance Ministers from developing countries in London over the coming month.

Mrs. Chalker: I met Ghana's Prime Minister and Finance Minister last Thursday and Friday; I discussed the Botswanan economy this morning with His Excellency President Masire.

In early January I hope to meet the Finance Minister of Nepal. In addition I hope to see the ANC president tomorrow, when I will discuss the investment needs of South Africa.

Mauritius

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what aid is currently being paid to Mauritius; what future aid to Mauritius is planned; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: British bilateral aid to Mauritius totalled nearly £5 million in 1990, including £3·2 million of investment by the Commonwealth Development Corporation. Expenditure this year will be of a similar order. Future aid would be for discussion in bilateral talks in due course.

EC Aid

Mr. David Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the Minister for Overseas Development last met her French counterpart to discuss EC aid programmes.

Mrs. Chalker: I visited Paris on 29 November for discussions with Madame Avice on EC aid and other development issues of mutual interest.

EC Development Council

Dr. Twinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the discussions at the EC Development Council meeting on 28 November.

Mrs. Chalker: This was a very constructive Development Council, at which we discussed a number of issues. We reached agreement on new regulations governing EC aid to Asia and Latin America and the EC investment partners' scheme. We approved resolutions on human rights and democracy in developing countries, on emergency aid, and on the EC approach to UNCED.

Contract Legal Personnel

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all the names of contract legal personnel overseas funded under the British aid programme, the countries in which they work and the total cost of their salaries to the taxpayer.

Mrs. Chalker: There are currently 21 contract legal personnel working overseas under the British aid programme:

Countries	*Legal personnel*
Barbados	Regional legal adviser
Gibraltar	Chief Justice
Kenya	Chief Justice 2 Puisne judges
Kiribati	Chief Justice
Lesotho	Chief Justice
St. Helena	Attorney General
Solomon Islands	Chief Justice Chief Magistrate
Swaziland	High Court Judge

Countries	Legal personnel
Turks and Caicos Islands	Attorney General Chief Magistrate
Tonga	Puisne Judge Senior Crown Counsel/ Acting Chief Justice
Uganda	Supreme Court Judge
Vanuatu	Puisne Judge/ Acting Chief Justice Public Prosecutor Regional Legal Adviser
Zimbabwe	Chief Law Officer Training Officer

We do not publish the names of individual officers. The total salary cost is currently about £750,000 per annum.

British Virgin Islands

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs why the outstanding debt on the Wickams Cay and Anegada loans to the British Virgin Islands was remitted, as recorded in the appropriation accounts 1990-91, vol. 1, class I, page 18; what was the nature of the projects funded by the loans; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: Loans were made to the BVI Government in 1971 to repurchase lands sold to developers. That Government's intention was to use the lands to generate revenue from tourism. It has never proved possible to generate the income from which the Government of BVI could have been expected to service the loans and it was not regarded as appropriate to press for repayment from general revenues.

South Africa

Sir Gerard Vaughan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take steps to move for the Republic of South Africa, as a member of the United Nations organisation, to be re-admitted to participation in the General Assembly; and if he will represent to the South African Government the advantages in it thereafter bringing up to date its subscriptions to the United Nations organisation.

Mrs. Chalker: We understand that the South African Government are considering how best to move forward to full participation in United Nations bodies. We shall keep in touch with them and monitor developments closely. As and when South Africa does regain membership of United Nations bodies, we would expect them to pay their subscriptions fully and on time.

Aid Review

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the cost to public funds of publishing the 1991 British overseas aid annual review; and how many copies were printed.

Mrs. Chalker: Fifteen thousand copies of "British Overseas Aid 1991" were produced at a cost of £98,100.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

EC (Visits)

Mr. Forman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list for himself, and for each of the Ministers at his Department, details of (i) the number of visits made during the past month to destinations outside the United Kingdom but within the European Community on official business related to the European Community, (ii) the number of visits made to Brussels within the past month on official business related to the European Community and (iii) the number of nights spent over the past month away from the United Kingdom on official European Community business.

Mr. Lilley: The following is the information:

	Visits made to other member states on official EC business	Of which visits to Brussels	Nights spent away
Secretary of State	2	1	1
Minister for Trade	2	1	2
Minister for Corporate Affairs	2	2	0
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs	1	0	1
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Industry and Technology	2	0	1

Ozone-depleting Substances

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what are the import and exports figures for the latest available year for the United Kingdom for *(a)* chlorofluorocarbons, *(b)* carbon tetrachloride, *(c)* halons, *(d)* HCFCs and *(e)* methyl chloroform; and what is the monetary value.

Mr. Leigh: Information about trade in carbon tetrachloride is published under standard international trade code 511.36 (commodity code 290314000) in "Overseas Trade Statistics of the United Kingdom", which is available in the Library of the House. The other products identified in the question are also mostly grouped under SITC code 511.3—"halogenated derivatives of hydrocarbons". However, trade figures for some of them are not published for reasons of commercial confidentiality.

Director General of Telecommunications

Mr. Hain: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consultations he has held with the Council of Tribunals regarding the powers of the Director General of Telecommunications to settle disputes.

Mr. Redwood: The Council of Tribunals has expressed a potential interest in dispute procedures of all four utilities covered by the Competition Service (Utilities) Bill. This is being considered, in conjunction with other Departments, and a response to the Council will be made shortly.

Operation Scotcheck

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement about his Department's involvement in Operation Scotcheck carried out on 13 November in Scotland.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 5 December 1991]:* This is an operational matter for the Radiocommunications Agency and I have asked the chief executive to reply.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Pesticides

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which pesticides are classified as poisonous or toxic; and if he will list those substances which are available for use as pesticides but which are not harmful to humans or animals.

Mr. Maclean: The detailed information requested cannot be provided except at disporportionate cost. All pesticides are subject to rigorous scrutiny by the independent advisory committee on pesticides and must be approved by Ministers in six Government Departments before they can be used. Approval would not be given if there was evidence of adverse health effects in humans or animals.

It is a requirement that the label of each pesticide produce—of which there are over 3,000—must display a hazard classification symbol, if appropriate, in addition to the relevant precautions and statutory conditions.

Dumping at Sea

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when his Department last undertook a prosecution for breach of a dumping at sea licence.

Mr. Gummer: In November this Department successfully prosecuted a marina and a skipper of a dumping vessel for breach of conditions set in a licence issued under part II of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985. The marina was fined £1,000 on each of three charges and £500 costs. The skipper was fined £300 on each of the three charges and £100 costs.

We shall not hesitate to take firm action, including prosecution when appropriate, to enforce licence conditions set to protect the marine environment and to avoid interference with other uses of the sea, including fishing.

Wind Energy

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn), *Official Report*, 28 November, column *651*, he will set out *(a)* the nature of his departmental representation and *(b)* what new information his Department gained from attendance at the seminar on wind energy and agriculture held on 20 November.

Mr. Curry: The following is the information:

(a) Two officers of the Ministry's Agricultural Development and Advisory Service attended the seminar one of whom presented a paper.

(b) The aim of the seminar was to heighten the awareness of farmers regarding the uses of wind energy and the types of equipment available. Information was obtained on the growing interest of farmers in renewable sources of energy including wind power.

Set-aside Scheme

Mr. Burns: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action he has taken to detect fraudulent applications for a five-year set-aside scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer *[pursuant to his reply, 4 December 1991, Official Report,* col. *166]:* Yesterday's *Sunday Times* (8 December) claims that I misled the House in my earlier reply. This is a most serious allegation and quite untrue.

The points raised by *The Sunday Times* in defence of its story were rebutted in a letter from me to the paper's deputy editor on Friday evening. The newspaper chose not to publish this.

In elaborating yesterday on its misleading claims of the previous week, *The Sunday Times* has introduced no new evidence of substance. It has placed great stress on the existence of one taped telephone conversation between a MAFF inspector and the Insight team journalist who posed as a landowner. In its selective use of events the newspaper has chosen not to disclose other telephone conversations as a result of which the journalist was left in no doubt as to the true position.

The Sunday Times knows and knew at the time that there could have been no justification for it to claim that Dr. Rufford's application had been approved. The central point remains that no formal approval letter was issued or would have been issued until a satisfactory site inspection had been carried out. It also remains true that its journalist signed false declarations, and that the Insight team fabricated a MAFF letterhead in order to give credence to what they knew was not a final letter of approval.

WALES

Expenditure

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the latest available figures showing how much was spent by *(a)* each executive body, *(b)* each advisory body, *(c)* each health authority and *(d)* each tribunal on (i) legal services, (ii) accounting advice, (iii) auditing, (iv) advice on business plans, (v) market research, (vi) management advice, (vii) public relations communications advice, (viii) time and motion studies and (ix) opinion polls, respectively; and how much was spent in each case exclusively within Wales.

Mr. David Hunt: This information is not held centrally for non-departmental public bodies. The information available for health authorities is shown in the following table. This shows total spending in each category and

therefore includes both the costs of in-house services and contracts placed outside each authority. It is not possible to identify separately how much was spent in Wales.

1990-91 Expenditure by Health Authorities (provisional)

	Clwyd	*East Dyfed*	*Gwent*	*Gwynedd*	*Mid Glamorgan*	*Pembrokeshire*	*Powys*	*South Glamorgan*	*West Glamorgan*	*WHCSA*	*WHPA*	*Wales*
Legal services	18,376	0	27,772	0	0	0	0	142,532	0	0	2,170	190,850
Accounting advice auditing	1,568,741	941,834	1,436,364	913,980	1,545,074	440,678	404,726	1,754,622	1,064,134	504,389	55,586	10,630,128
Advice on business plans	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Market research[1]	202,620	315,333	231,937	70,292	167,061	58,626	85,745	423,048	321,528	0	158,647	2,034,837
Management advice	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Public relations	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	34,340	0	0	108,771	143,111
Communications advice	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Time and motion studies	22,426	32,770	0	55,417	130,904	0	46,365	199,698	27,791	0	0	515,371
Opinion polls	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Source: Summarised accounts of health authorities for the year ended 31 March 1991.
[1] Includes the provision of statistical and epidemiological information and planning activies.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has of the number of young people in each area to whom the training and enterprise councils have not been able to fulfil a guarantee of a training place.

Mr. David Hunt: Reliable estimates are not available.

Minor Works Grant

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the number of householders who became ineligible for a minor works grant with the introduction of the community charge general reduction of £140.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This information is not held centrally.

Public Rights of Way

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how he proposes to apply the principles of the citizens charter to the way the Welsh Office handles opposed public path orders and definitive map modification orders.

Mr. David Hunt: All orders handled by my Department are subject to the procedures set out in the relevant legislation. Existing procedures are in keeping with the principles of the citizens charter.

Health "Customers"

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what guidance or advice he or his officials have given to health authorities and national health service units in Wales regarding the use of the term "customer" in publicity, information to the public, education and training work and in official or internal documents and letters.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: No specific guidance or advice has been given by the Welsh Office to health authorities and NHS units in Wales on the term "customer". The term is used within the NHS to describe those who come into contact with, or work for, the NHS.

Service Contracts

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish the latest available figures showing *(a)* the total number of bought-in service contracts and *(b)* the number of bought-in service contracts completed with firms issued in Wales by (i) each executive body, (ii) each advisory body and (iii) each tribunal operational in Wales; and if he will publish a breakdown in the categories of (1) legal advice, (2) accounting, (3) auditing, (4) business plans, (5) market research, (6) management advice, (7) public relations advice and communications in general, (8) time and motion studies and (9) opinion polling.

Mr. David Hunt: The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will issue guidelines to *(a)* all executive bodies, *(b)* all advisory bodies, *(c)* all tribunals and *(d)* all health authorities operational in Wales, encouraging them to give priority to firms based in Wales when fixing contracts or seeking advice, where they are legally entitled to do so, and where there is no significant additional cost in so doing.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: No. Such guidelines would contravene the United Kingdom's international obligations under the treaty of Rome and the general agreement on tariffs and trade.

Welsh World Trade Centre (Grant)

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the urban development grant payments *(a)* already made and *(b)* still to be made to the Welsh world trade centre, Cardiff and the conditions requiring to be met before eligibility for further urban development grant payments can be established.

Mr. David Hunt: Under the urban development grant agreement between Cardiff city council and Brent Walker Group plc, £2·5 million has been paid to Brent Walker and £750,000 remains to be paid. A total of 75 per cent. of the payments are funded by the Welsh Office. For the remainder of the payments to be made, Brent Walker would need to satisfy the city council that the terms of the legal agreement between them have been met.

Standard Spending Assessments

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what arrangements he is making for informing Welsh local authorities of their standard spending assessments.

Mr. David Hunt: My officials have today written to Welsh authorities, advising them of their provisional SSAs. I am placing a copy of that letter in the Library of the House. Final figures will be contained in the distribution report which I plan to lay before the House after the Christmas recess.

Rural Initiative

Mr. Gwilyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library the document he intends to publish on the rural initiative.

Mr. David Hunt: I have today published a document setting out my proposals for developing the rural initiative in Wales. A copy of the document has already been placed in the Library of the House.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Poll Tax

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will issue guidelines on the need to establish consistency and equivalence of impact in judgments in poll tax cases.

Mr. John Patten: It is not for Ministers to issue guidelines on how the courts should exercise their judicial discretion.

Terrorist Suspects

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how often suspects detained under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act in England and Wales requested access to a solicitor and how often such access was deferred in each month over the past five years.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The available information is as follows: of 253 suspects detained under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 in England and Wales between 22 March 1989 and 11 November 1990, 125 requested access to legal advice, and delay of access to legal advice was authorised in 66 cases. In 30 of the 66 cases in which delay was authorised, the suspect had not however requested access to legal advice.

Private Security Industry

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what representations he has received about the need to regulate the private security industry; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what consideration he has given to the introduction of a statutory licensing system for the private security industry;

(3) what consideration he has given to the introduction of compulsory self-regulation for the private security industry;

(4) what views have been expressed to him by the private security industry about regulation.

Mr. John Patten: Following the receipt of a number of representations to my right hon. Friend expressing concern at the lack of regulation of the private security industry, a working group was set up in 1989 which later that year produced a report recommending ways in which the regulation of the industry could be improved.

We subsequently considered a range of options for improving the regulation of the private security industry which goes wider than those considered by the working group. We will make a statement in due course covering all the relevant issues.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has about the number of private security firms operating in England and Wales which are not members of the British Security Industry Association.

Mr. John Patten: Such information is not held centrally.

Correspondence

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Hammersmith dated 11 September 1991, Home Office reference F148287/2.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: A reply will shortly be sent to the hon. Member.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Sedgemore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many police officers in the Metropolitan force are currently the subject of complaints investigation procedures; and how many of those officers are based in the GN or GH divisions of 2 area;

(2) how many police officers in the Metropolitan force have been advised, reprimanded, dismissed or faced criminal prosecution in the past 12 months as a result of complaints investigations being carried out; how many of those officers come from area 2 of that force; and how many of those officers are based in the GN or GH divisions of that area;

(3) how many police officers in the Metropolitan force have been suspended in the past 12 months as a result of

complaints investigations being carried out; what the total cost of the wages paid to them in that period is; how many of those officers come from area 2 of that force; and how many of those officers are based in the GN or GH divisions of that area.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: These are matters for the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis.

Hepatitis B (Prisons)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners have contracted hepatitis B while in prison; and how many prisoners have died from hepatitis B *(a)* in prison and *(b)* following release in each of the last five years.

Mrs. Rumbold: The number of reported cases of acute hepatitis B infectition among prisoners in England and Wales for each of the last five statistical years—April to March—is:

	Number
1986-87	150
1987-88	155
1988-89	105
1989-90	56
1990-91	20

From the available statistical information it is not possible to presume how many of these prisoners became infected in prison. No prisoner died from hepatitis B infection in the five-year period. Statistical information about deaths after release from prison custody is not collected.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners were immunised against hepatitis B while in prison in each of the last five years.

Mrs. Rumbold: I regret that this information is not available in statistical form and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the prison medical service offers immunisation against hepatitis B.

Mrs. Rumbold: Yes. Prison medical officers are recommended to offer vaccination to those prisoners who are identified as belonging to a high-risk behaviour group and who are expected to remain in the prison system long enough to complete the six-month course.

Mr. Ian Borovikov

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when Mr. Ian Borovikov (XC1225), currently in Her Majesty's prison, Pentonville, completed his sentence; when he expects to make a decision regarding his deportation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Mr. Borovikov completed his sentence on 16 August and he has since been detained by virtue of Winchester Crown court's recommendation on 31 July 1991 that he be deported. Mr. Borovikov's appeal against his conviction was dismissed on 28 November but he has until 16 December to renew his application. No decision will be taken about his deportation until the final outcome of his appeal is known.

Police Statistics

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list in rank order for each (i) police authority, (ii) county police authority in England, including average figures, *(a)* the number of police officers per 1,000 of the population and *(b)* the amount spent on the police per person.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is set out in the following tables, for the most recent year for which actual outturn information is available.

Police authority	*Expenditure per head of population 1990-91* £
City of London	9,724·24
Metropolitan police	174·33
Merseyside	112·91
Cleveland[1]	97·28
West Yorkshire	93·58
Greater Manchester	91·75
West Midlands	90·64
Northumbria	89·32
Cumbria[1]	85·91
Humberside[1]	82·95
Lancashire[1]	81·08
Surrey[1]	80·61
Warwickshire[1]	80·42
Dorset[1]	78·77
Gloucestershire[1]	78·76
South Yorkshire	78·49
Avon and Somerset	78·11
Nottinghamshire[1]	77·82
Leicestershire[1]	76·88
Durham[1]	76·15
Staffordshire[1]	75·07
Wiltshire[1]	74·25
Thames Valley	73·57
Essex[1]	73·42
Lincolnshire[1]	73·20
Kent[1]	72·88
Northamptonshire[1]	72·35
Hertfordshire[1]	71·82
Devon and Cornwall	71·64
Suffolk[1]	69·85
West Mercia	69·11
Sussex	68·89
Hampshire	68·44
North Yorkshire[1]	68·03
Cheshire[1]	67·08
Bedfordshire[1]	67·06
Derbyshire[1]	66·47
Cambridgeshire[1]	65·43
Norfolk[1]	64·96
Total average	94·41
Average (excluding city)	93·61
County average	74·81

[1] County police authority.

Police authority	*Police officers per 1,000 population 1990-91*
City of London	202·1
Metropolitan police	3·9
Merseyside	3·3
Cleveland[1]	2·7
Greater Manchester	2·7
West Midlands	2·6

Police authority	Police officers per 1,000 population 1990-91
West Yorkshire	2·6
Northumbria	2·5
Cumbria[1]	2·4
Humberside[1]	2·3
South Yorkshire	2·3
Nottinghamshire[1]	2·3
Lancashire[1]	2·3
Durham[1]	2·3
Surrey[1]	2·2
Gloucestershire[1]	2·2
Avon and Somerset	2·2
Staffordshire[1]	2·1
Sussex	2·1
Warwickshire[1]	2·1
Lincolnshire[1]	2·0
Leicestershire[1]	2·0
Bedfordshire[1]	2·0
Hertfordshire[1]	2·0
Kent[1]	2·0
Cheshire[1]	2·0
Northamptonshire[1]	2·0
Wiltshire[1]	2·0
Essex[1]	2·0
North Yorkshire[1]	1·9
Dorset[1]	1·9
Derbyshire[1]	1·9
Devon and Cornwall	1·9
Hampshire	1·9
Norfolk[1]	1·9
West Mercia	1·9
Suffolk[1]	1·9
Thames Valley	1·9
Cambridgeshire[1]	1·8
Total average	2·5
Average (excluding city)	2·5
County average	2·1

[1] County police authority.

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list in rank order for each (i) police authority (ii) county police authority in England, including average figures, the increase in spending on the police per person since 1979.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is as follows.

Expenditure per head of population
Percentage Increase 1978-79 to 1990-91

Police Authority	Cash Increase	Real Terms[1]
1 City of London	423·4	106·4
2 Warwickshire[2]	381·6	90·0
3 Essex[2]	365·8	83·7
4 Thames Valley	362·6	82·5
5 Metropolitan Police	342·6	74·6
6 Cleveland[2]	339·0	73·2
7 West Yorkshire	338·5	73·0
8 West Midlands	338·1	72·8
9 Cumbria[2]	335·9	71·9
10 Dorset[2]	331·5	70·2
11 Gloucestershire[2]	330·0	69·6
12 Wiltshire[2]	328·2	68·9
13 Northumbria	323·2	66·9
14 Merseyside	322·5	66·6
15 South Yorkshire	318·3	65·0
16 Northamptonshire[2]	316·2	64·2
17 Surrey[2]	310·8	62·0
18 West Mercia	309·4	61·5
19 Leicestershire[2]	309·3	61·4
20 Staffordshire[2]	308·3	61·1
21 Lancashire[2]	304·1	59·4
22 Greater Manchester	297·8	56·9
23 Avon and Somerset	296·4	56·4
24 Norfolk[2]	294·5	55·6
25 Hampshire	292·1	54·7
26 Hertfordshire[2]	291·4	54·4
27 Kent[2]	290·4	54·0
28 Devon and Cornwall	286·2	52·3
29 Humberside[2]	285·6	52·1
30 Cheshire[2]	282·5	50·9
31 Nottinghamshire[2]	282·5	50·9
32 Suffolk[2]	274·3	47·6
33 Cambridgeshire[2]	266·4	44·5
34 Durham[2]	259·1	41·6
35 North Yorkshire[2]	258·7	41·5
36 Derbyshire[2]	258·1	41·2
37 Bedfordshire[2]	256·8	40·7
38 Sussex	252·2	38·9
39 Lincolnshire[2]	226·9	28·9
Total Average	311·2	62·2
County Average	297·7	56·9

[1] Using GDP Deflator
[2] County Police Authority

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each (i) police authority and (ii) county police authority in England, including average figures, *(a)* the standard spending assessment for police expenditure, *(b)* police spending and *(c)* the percentage difference, ranking by *(c)*.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is set out in the table, for the most recent year for which actual outturn information is available.

Police authority	1990-91 police standard spending assessment £000[2]	1990-91 comparable expenditure £000[3]	Percentage over and under SSA
1. Dorset[1]	20,801	25,171	21·0
2. Cambridgeshire[1]	19,824	23,540	18·7
3. Wiltshire[1]	17,954	20,519	14·3
4. City of London	17,983	20,345	13·1
5. Warwickshire[1]	16,415	18,284	11·4
6. Northamptonshire[1]	18,550	20,522	10·6
7. Kent[1]	51,544	56,143	8·9
8. Cumbria[1]	19,129	20,741	8·4
9. Suffolk[1]	19.626	21,206	8·1
10. Leicestershire[1]	29,124	31,388	7·8
11. Norfolk[1]	22,538	24,219	7·5
12. Avon and Somerset	50,802	54,455	7·2
13. Lincolnshire[1]	19,576	20,921	6·9

Police authority	1990-91 police standard spending assessment £000[2]	1990-91 comparable expenditure £000[3]	Percentage over and under SSA
14. West Yorkshire	86,473	92,221	6·6
15. Humberside[1]	32,963	34,869	5·8
16. West Mercia	32,946	34,774	5·5
17. Devon and Cornwall	47,032	49,408	5·1
18. Merseyside	76,806	80,372	4·6
19. Essex[1]	49,255	51,402	4·4
20. Derbyshire[1]	29,670	30,949	4·3
21. West Midlands	112,329	117,074	4·2
22. Cleveland[1]	24,640	25,446	3·3
23. Greater Manchester	114,059	117,609	3·1
24. Staffordshire[1]	36,207	36,910	1·9
25. Hampshire	54,289	55,246	1·8
26. Durham[1]	22,753	23,111	1·6
27. Northumbria	58,132	58,734	1·0
28. Thames Valley	63,248	63,804	0·9
29. Hertfordshire[1]	29,917	29,928	0·0
30. North Yorkshire[1]	22,886	22,823	−0·3
31. Cheshire[1]	30,911	30,807	−0·3
32. South Yorkshire	48,861	48,659	−0·4
33. Gloucestershire[1]	19,262	19,120	−0·7
34. Lancashire[1]	52,506	51,708	−1·5
35. Bedfordshire[1]	18,039	17,673	−2·0
36. Nottinghamshire[1]	38,358	37,083	−3·3
37. Metropolitan Police	632,132	604,512	−4·4
38. Sussex	50,825	46,886	−7·8
39. Surrey[1]	30,103	27,668	−8·1
TOTAL AVERAGE	54,833	55,545	1·3
COUNTY AVERAGE	27,702	28,886	4·3

[1] County police authority.
[2] Standard level of expenditure on the police after specific grant has been deducted.
[3] Includes element of authorities' expenditure on unallocated contingencies, residuary body levies (where appropriate) and other adjustments.

Mr. Oppenheim: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list in rank order for each (i) police authority and (ii) county police authority in England, including average figures, the percentage increase in spending on the police since 1979.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information requested is set out in the table.

Total expenditure

Police authority	Percentage increase 1978-79 to 1990-91 Cash increase	Real terms[2]
1 Thames Valley	427·9	108·2
2 Essex[1]	399·2	96·9
3 Warwickshire[1]	395·1	95·3
4 Dorset[1]	384·3	91·0
5 Northamptonshire[1]	367·6	84·4
6 Wiltshire[1]	366·1	83·8
7 Gloucestershire[1]	361·3	81·9
8 Cumbria[1]	354·1	79·1
9 West Mercia	353·5	78·9
10 Leicestershire[1]	340·9	73·9
11 West Yorkshire	339·0	73·1
12 Norfolk[1]	335·6	71·8
13 Metropolitan Police	334·6	71·4
14 Cambridgeshire[1]	327·0	68·4
15 Cleveland[1]	326·6	68·3
16 Staffordshire[1]	326·3	68·1
17 Devon and Cornwall	323·9	67·2
18 Surrey[1]	322·7	66·7
19 West Midlands	322·4	66·6
20 Avon and Somerset	321·4	66·2
21 Hampshire	319·4	65·4
22 Northumbria	316·7	64·3
23 South Yorkshire	315·8	64·0
24 Lancashire[1]	311·7	62·4
25 Kent[1]	311·0	62·1
26 Hertfordshire[1]	310·5	61·9
27 Suffolk[1]	306·6	60·4
28 Nottinghamshire[1]	299·3	57·5
29 Cheshire[1]	298·8	57·3
30 Merseyside	294·6	55·7
31 North Yorkshire[1]	294·0	55·4
32 Humberside[1]	292·1	54·6
33 Sussex	288·1	53·1
34 Greater Manchester	286·9	52·6
35 Bedfordshire[1]	286·2	52·3
36 Derbyshire[1]	272·8	47·0
37 City of London	269·1	45·6
38 Lincolnshire[1]	264·6	43·8
39 Durham[1]	256·5	40·6
Total average	324·4	67·4
County average	321·2	66·1

[1] County Police Authority.
[2] Using GDP Deflator.

Alleged Police Assaults

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Metropolitan police commissioner regarding the number of complaints he has received of alleged assault in each of the following police stations: *(a)* Dalston E8, *(b)* Carter

street SE17, *(c)* Fulham SW6, *(d)* Hammersmith W6 and *(e)* Stoke Newington N16; and what has been the outcome in each case.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. These are matters for the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Police Complaints Authority regarding the number of complaints it has received of alleged assault at each of the following police stations: *(a)* Dalston E8, *(b)* Carter street SE17, *(c)* Fulham SW6, *(d)* Hammersmith W6 and *(e)* Stoke Newington N16; and what has been the outcome in each case.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. This is a matter for the Police Complaints Authority and it would not be appropriate for my right hon. Friend to call formally for a report from it on its supervision or review of specific complaints.

Data Protection Registrar

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will bring forward proposals to require the Data Protection Registrar to allow any group or organisation to register either *(a)* using a Welsh language title or *(b)* through the Welsh language.

Mrs. Rumbold: Enforcement of the Data Protection Act 1984 is a matter for the registrar and ultimately for the Data Protection Tribunal and the courts. I understand, however, that the registrar has for some years provided a Welsh version of the registration application form and associated booklet. An organisation with a Welsh title may register in this form.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to ensure that the Data Protection Registrar responds to all correspondence in Welsh to his Department by replying in the Welsh language, or, at least, bilingually in Welsh and English.

Mrs. Rumbold: Enforcement of the Data Protection Act 1984 is a matter for the registrar and ultimately the Data Protection Tribunal and the courts. I understand, however, that the language in which the registrar replies to correspondence in Welsh is currently the subject of correspondence between him and the Welsh Language Board.

Police Batons

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will consider the introduction of the side-handled baton as a means of providing enhanced protection for police officers.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We should be prepared to consider arranging for a scientific evaluation of any equipment which might assist in public order control if chief officers requested it. I understand that chief officers have no wish to bring the side-handled baton into use.

Electoral Registration

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place the public opinion survey carried out by his Department, entitled "Post Campaign Research for Electoral Registration Advertising", in the Library.

Mrs. Rumbold: The findings of research into the effectiveness of this year's advertising campaign on electoral registration are not yet available. I shall arrange for a copy of the report to be placed in the Library early in the new year.

Prison Escapes

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what attempts Nicholas Mullen is known to have made, or been involved in, to escape from prison prior to his recent attempt to escape from Full Sutton prison;

(2) if he will make a statement on the recent attempted escape from Full Sutton prison by Nicholas Mullen and others and on the circumstances which led to its discovery.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: As a result of security intelligence, cell searches made at Her Majesty's prison Full Sutton on 24 November led to the discovery of a quantity of escape equipment. Appropriate security and other action has been taken by the governor. It is not the practice to disclose detailed security information about arrangements at the prison or in relation to individual inmates.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons have now been taken to court and convicted for non-payment of the poll tax in England and Wales; how many have received prison sentences; how many have turned up in court to argue their cases; how many hours of court time have been involved and, based on the average cost per hour of a magistrates court, at what cost to public funds.

Mr. John Patten *[pursuant to his reply, 22 November 1991, col. 329]:* During the period 1 April 1990 to 30 September 1991 195,480 people in England and Wales attended community charge liability hearings.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Pupil Exclusions

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what advice his Department issues to local education authorities about the number of hours of tuition to be provided for children on permanent or indefinite exclusion from school; and what assessment he has made of whether such children are receiving sufficient tuition to cover the whole of the national curriculum provisions.

Mr. Fallon: The Department does not issue guidance about the number of hours of tuition to be provided for children excluded from school. That is a matter for local education authorities to decide in the light of individual circumstances. It is the responsibility of the head teacher, the governing body and the local education authority to secure the provision of the full national curriculum to all pupils of compulsory school age registered at maintained schools, save to the extent that they may have been statutorily excepted from some part of it.

Science Research Fellowships

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has concerning science research fellowships offered *(a)* by United Kingdom companies and *(b)* to United Kingdom residents by overseas companies; and if he will make a statement on the support offered by British industry and to scientific research in educational establishments.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Department does not collect this information. We do, however, welcome support for scientific research from both United Kingdom businesses and overseas companies with a base in the United Kingdom.

School Meals

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the average subsidy paid by both local government and Her Majesty's Government for each paid school meal.

Mr. Fallon: This information is not collected centrally.

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many children are on the school roll in England and Wales; and how many of those receive free school meals in primary, secondary and special schools, respectively.

Mr. Fallon: A table showing provisional figures for the number of children on roll in maintained primary, secondary and special schools in England in January 1991 and, of those, the number receiving free school meals on the census date follows. Information on schools in Wales is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

	Pupils on roll	*Free Meals*
Primary Schools	4,099,607	562,993
Secondary Schools	2,848,224	235,107
Special Schools	82,952	23,273

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much it would cost to extend the provision of free school meals beyond children of families in receipt of income support to children of families in receipt of family credit.

Mr. Fallon: Family credit rates already include an allowance towards school costs. As the cost of a school meal is not fixed it is impossible to calculate the figure requested.

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much it would cost to make free school meals available to all, assuming the current take-up rate of 75 per cent.; and what increase in the education budgets of both central and local expenditure this would represent.

Mr. Fallon: Provision of school meals and the level of charges for them are matters for local education authorities. In 1989-90 local education authorities in England collected some £296 million of income from customers as payment for school meals and milk. That represents some 1·9 per cent. of their total net recurrent expenditure on education.

GCSE

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) into how many streams he intends that students for the new GCSE courses should be divided; by what criteria the students concerned, including new entrants into each new school, are allocated into specific streams; and whether such allocation will be made by *(a)* school authorities, *(b)* parents of each student or *(c)* the students themselves;

(2) what extra resources will be made available by the Government to the local education authority in Devon in 1991 to enable separate streams of students in each GCSE to be instructed properly; how the need for such resources has been calculated, and upon what assumptions; and what specific provision has been made for streaming in small secondary schools.

Mr. Eggar: School organisation and the allocation of resources are matters for the schools and local education authorities themselves to decide.

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what time interval he has allowed in his calculations for ordering and delivery of the necessary books and teaching aids by schools between the publication of the new GCSE syllabi and the commencement of the autumn terms of secondary schools in 1992.

Mr. Eggar: Syllabuses in the core subjects are expected to be in schools by April 1992. This should allow sufficient time for the ordering of those materials needed by the start of the autumn term, especially given that schools already have information on the curriculum and that not all books and aids are required from the start of the two-year GCSE courses.

Elmbridge Road School, Gloucester

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he received an application for Gloucestershire education authority for an allocation of capital funds for Elmbridge road infants school, Gloucester, on the grounds of exceptional need; and what action he proposes to take.

Mr. Fallon: Following my reply of 3 October to the hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. French), Gloucestershire submitted a request on 8 November for the proposed building work at Elmbridge county infants school to be considered as exceptional basic need in the allocation of annual capital guidelines for education (ACGs) for 1992-93. This is being considered in the light of bids from all local education authorities and of the resources available.

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received regarding conditions at Elmbridge road infants school, Gloucester; and what action he proposes to take.

Mr. Fallon: Seven letters about conditions at Elmbridge county infants school have been received from the hon. Member for Gloucester (Mr. French), as well as a petition from parents of children at the school. It is for the local education authority to decide the allocation of resources for building work at its schools.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what assumption has been made by the Government regarding the level of the teachers' pay award to be implemented from April 1992;

(2) what recognition is given in the standard spending assessment figures for 1992-1993 to the full year effects of last year's teacher pay settlement.

Mr. Eggar: The education standard spending total for 1992-93 takes account in broad terms of the range of pressures on the education service, including follow through from the 1991-92 teachers' pay settlement. It also takes general account of the scope that local authorities have to make efficiency savings. My right hon. and learned Friend has asked the school teachers' review body, in making its recommendations for teachers' pay for 1992-93, to have regard to affordability given the level of education standard spending for 1992-93.

Costs and Allowances

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what allowances in cash terms has been made for the additional costs in 1992-93 of implementing Government legislation for the *(a)* Education Reform Act, national curriculum and local management of schools, *(b)* introducing a regular programme of teacher appraisal, *(c)* vocational training arising from the introduction of non-vocational qualifications, and *(d)* additional education welfare officers required to cope with education supervision orders arising from the Children Act 1989;

(2) what allowance in cash terms has been made for further additional costs in 1992-93 to reflect *(a)* additional teachers for the projected increase in primary and secondary pupil numbers, *(b)* non-teaching staff, books, equipment, and home-to-school transport for these additional pupils, *(c)* additional lecturers and associated running costs due to the projected increase in student numbers in higher and further education, *(d)* the 2·2 per cent. increase in discretionary awards to reflect the projected increase in the number of further education students, *(e)* increased maintenance of school buildings, *(f)* increases in number of statemented pupils and pupils with special educational needs, *(g)* salary increments and incentive allowances and *(h)* commitments on capital projects.

Mr. Eggar: The 1992-93 RSG settlement allows for local authorities in England to spend £18,730 million on education, some £1,245 million or 7·1 per cent. more than allowed for in this year's RSG settlement. In setting the total of £18,730 million, the Government have taken general account of demographic and other pressures on the service and of the scope for making savings and re-deploying spending to meet new priorities. Within the settlement, the Government are providing specific grant support to help implement their reforms through the combined programme of education support grants and LEA training grants. This will support £377 million earmarked expenditure in 1992-93, including £176 million on implementation of the national curriculum; £82·5 million on school management, including local management of schools, and teacher appraisal; and £10 million on training for NVQs in further education and to help schools and sixth form colleges offer vocational qualifications post-16.

Budget, Wolverhampton

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what assumption has been made regarding the level of inflation throughout 1992-93 in the allocation of the education budget for Wolverhampton borough council.

Mr. Eggar: It is for Wolverhampton metropolitan borough council to decide the basis on which to draw up its educational budget for 1992-93.

Reading Standards

Sir Gerard Vaughan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will take steps to establish, in respect of children shown as unable to read at the age of seven years, the correlation with *(a)* the socio-economic conditions of their home background and *(b)* the provision of under-fives schooling.

Mr. Eggar: The results of the 1991 assessments of seven-year-olds once published may provide the basis for further studies of the kind outlined by my hon. Friend.

Research Councils

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what guidance he has offered to research councils on the desirability of raising revenue from their activities and projects; and if he will place the text of such guidance in the Library.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Within their charter responsibilities, the terms of their financial memoranda with the Department, and central guidance on fees and charges, the research councils are free to raise revenue from their activities and projects, and are encouraged to do so where appropriate. In particular, they are expected to protect and exploit fully any intellectual property that they own.

Pupil Testing

Dame Janet Fookes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many local education authorities have received the full results for the tests for seven-year-olds and have submitted them to his Department.

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will now publish the aggregate test results for the standard assessment tests at key stage 1 for each local education authority and nationally.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend intends to publish the national results of this summer's tests on seven-year-olds, together with the results of LEAs in England, as soon as the outstanding results, submitted by LEAs to the Department by the end of November, have been checked and analysed.

Exclusion from School

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has on the number of children on *(a)* permanent and *(b)* indefinite exclusion from school; and if he will list this in tabular form by local education authority.

Mr. Fallon: The Department is collecting data on permanent exclusions in the two-year period from May 1990. It is not yet possible to provide data by local education authority on a standard basis.

No information on indefinite exclusions is collected centrally.

School Governors

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received concerning the proposals to prevent teachers from being school governors at the school which their own children attend.

Mr. Fallon: Representations have been received from local education authorities and other interested bodies about the proposed amendments to the Education (School Government) Regulations 1989.

Higher Education

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give the Scottish total of degrees and higher diplomas awarded per 100 of relevant age group in Scotland on the same basis as used in figure C on page 4 of "Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge" (Cm. 114).

Mr. Alan Howarth: In 1988-89, on the same basis as used in figure C on page 4 of "Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge", it is estimated that 26 per cent. of the appropriate age group in the United Kingdom, and 31 per cent. of the age group in Scotland, achieved first degrees or other undergraduate higher education qualifications.

NATIONAL FINANCE

BT (Share Sale)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Government's sale of part of its residual shareholding in British Telecommunications plc.

Mr. Maude: I am pleased to report that the BT share sale was successfully completed this morning, when dealings started in the partly paid shares on the London stock exchange.

Reflecting bids received in the international tender, the price of the third instalment was set at 105p per share.

Accordingly, the offer price for United Kingdom public applicants was 335p per share—comprising 110p paid on successful application, 120p to be paid by 7 July 1992, and 105p to be paid by 2 March 1993—and the offer price for applicants in the international tender was 350p per share—comprising 125p paid on successful application, 120p to be paid by 7 July 1992, and 105p to be paid by 2 March 1993.

Some 2·8 million applications were received in the United Kingdom public offer for a total of some 1·760 million BT shares. This represented some two and a half times the 675 million shares initially expected to be sold in the United Kingdom public offer.

In response to this level of applications, the Government took advantage of their ability to increase the total number of offered shares from 1,350 million to 1,575 million. The Government also decided—within this figure—to make 1,050 million shares available to applicants in the United Kingdom public offer. The remaining 525 million shares were made available to bidders in the international tender.

The number of shares to which I have referred does not include any shares that S. G. Warburg Securities may have over-allotted in connection with the international tender offer, and the extent of any such over-allotment is not to be disclosed. As already announced, S. G. Warburg Securities may also effect stabilisation transactions.

For this reason, details of the numbers of shares taken up by each of the 10 regional bidding syndicates cannot be given until after 7 January 1992. However, I can say that the United Kingdom represented more than half the shares sold by Her Majesty's Treasury in the international tender offer, and that individual investors bidding in the United Kingdom retail tender bid for some 125 million shares.

In addition to the shares sold in the offers, S. G. Warburg Securities, as global co-ordinator for the sale, holds an option to acquire from HM Treasury up to a further 118·125 million shares for the purpose of meeting any over-allotments made by it in connection with the international tender offer. This option must be exercised by 7 January 1992.

Under the United Kingdom public offer, the number of shares applied for represented some 1·7 times the 1,050 million BT shares sold. Almost 99 per cent. of applicants received an allocation of BT shares, and some 43 per cent. of applicants had their applications met in full. Some 88 per cent. of applications were made through share shops, stockbrokers or other financial intermediaries.

More than 400,000 qualifying BT shareholders and more than 50,000 eligible BT employees made applications in the United Kingdom public offer, all of whom received an allocation of BT shares.

Total gross proceeds from the sale of the offered shares amount to some £5·35 billion, of which some £1·81 billion are received in this financial year.

Total gross proceeds, and proceeds this year, may be further increased—up to maxima of £5·77 billion and £1·96 billion respectively—depending on the extent, if any, to which S. G. Warburg Securities exercises its option to acquire further shares.

Details of the costs of the share sale will be published in the new year.

Following the share offer, the Government will hold some 1,366 million BT shares, approximately 22 per cent. of the total currently in issue, before deducting any BT shares that may be purchased by S. G. Warburg Securities pursuant to its over-allotment option and the BT shares that may be needed to meet share bonus entitlements under the United Kingdom public offer.

VAT

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list all the changes to the VAT system since 1978-79, including both changes in the rate of VAT and changes in classification of goods and services.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: From 18 June 1979, the higher rate of VAT, which was applied at the rate of 12½ per cent. to petrol, domestic electric appliances, radios, televisions and hi-fi equipment, pleasure boats and aircraft, towing caravans, photographic equipment, furs and jewellery, was abolished and the standard rate of VAT was increased from 8 to 15 per cent. On 1 April 1991 the standard rate was increased to 17½ per cent.

Other major changes to the VAT system are listed in the "Financial Statement and Budget Reports" for each year.

National Insurance

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for each Budget since May 1979 if he will list each of the changes to national insurance contributions and income tax which raised more than £5 million in revenue, in 1991-92 prices, giving for each change the full-year yield in 1991-92 prices.

Mr. Maude: Information in terms of money of the day is available in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" and the autumn statement for the years in question.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* basic rate and *(b)* higher rate taxpayers would be affected in 1991-92 by extending national insurance contributions to all employee taxable benefits in kind, for employees who earn over £8,500; and if he will give the average annual cost per individual with gross incomes between *(a)* £10,000 and £20,000, *(b)* £20,000 and £30,000, *(c)* £30,000 and £40,000, *(d)* £40,000 and £50,000 and *(e)* over £50,000, respectively.

Mr. Maude: Estimates of those who would be subject to such a charge for 1991-92 are as follows:

Total Income	*Basic Rate Taxpayers* *Numbers (000s)*	*Average cost*[1] *£*
below £10,000	200	120
£10,000—£19,999	1,300	120
£20,000—£29,999	500	200
£30,000 and over	—	—
Total	2,000	140

[1]Assuming the contracted-in contribution rate of 9 per cent.

In addition, some 100,000 higher rate taxpayers would face an additional charge averaging £570.

Most higher-rate taxpayers and some basic rate taxpayers have earnings above the upper earnings limit for employee national insurance contributions and therefore would not be subject to an additional charge on their benefits.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the revenue yield in *(a)* the first year, *(b)* a full year, assuming this is introduced at the beginning of 1991-92, *(c)* the first year and *(d)* a full year, assuming this is introduced at the beginning of 1992-93, of extending national insurance contributions to all employee taxable benefits in kind, for employees in (1) Great Britain and (2) Northern Ireland who earn over £8,500, distinguishing between employee and employer contributions and listing the revenue from each benefit.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 5 December 1991]:* The additional revenue for the United Kingdom in a full year at 1991-92 levels is shown in the table, which gives the available analysis by type of benefit. The estimates are based on an employee contribution rate of 9 per cent. and an employer contribution rate of 10·4 per cent. and take account of the fact that many taxpayers who receive taxable benefits have earnings above the upper earnings limit. The estimates are calculated using the taxable value of the benefits. The yield in the first year would depend on the administrative arrangements made to collect the new charge. The yield for 1992-93 would depend on the level of employer-provided benefits in that year. Separate estimates are not available for Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Revenue yield for 1991-92

Type of benefit	*From employees £ million*	*From employers £ million*
Car	200	[1]0
Car fuel	20	[1]0
Private medical insurance	10	40
Home telephone	—	10
Beneficial loans	—	20
Other benefits	110	230
Total	340	300

[1] These items are already subject to employer contributions.

Income Tax

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the effect on Treasury revenues in 1991-92 and in a full year of introducing an upper limit on all income tax allowances and reliefs of *(a)* £10,000, *(b)* £15,000 and *(c)* £20,000 a year, with (i) the current tax allowances and reliefs and (ii) limiting the following allowances and reliefs to the basic rate (1) the married couple's allowance, (2) age allowances, (3) relief on contributions to personal pensions and (4) relief on employee's contributions to occupational pension schemes, giving the revenue from each relief separately, the total revenue and the numbers of people affected, for Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Maude: It is estimated that at 1991-92 levels of income the introduction of the upper limits specified would yield the following:

	£	*£*	*£*
Upper limit for total allowances and reliefs	10,000	15,000	20,000
Yield in a full year under the current tax regime (£ million)	590	240	140
Yield following the restriction of specified reliefs and allowances to the basic rate (£ million)	410	180	110

The estimated yield from restricting all allowances, except the basic personal allowance, to the basic rate is about £300 million. The estimated yield from restricting relief on occupational pension contributions to the basic rate is about £250 million in a full year. About 800,000 people would lose as a result of this change. For personal pensions the yield would be about £150 million with some 300,000 people losing.

The number of people with total allowances and reliefs in excess of £10,000 is about 635,000. The corresponding figures for £15,000 and £20,000 are about 75,000 and 35,000 respectively. The estimates of revenue yield do not take account of any behavioural effects which might result from the introduction of such a limit.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the revenue yield from the introduction of a 50 per cent. top rate of income tax on

annual taxable incomes of (i) £31,705, (ii) £33,705, (iii) £36,705, (iv) £39,705 and (v) £42,705, *(a)* in the first year and *(b)* in a full year, assuming this is introduced at the beginning of 1991-92, and *(c)* in the first year and *(d)* in a full year, assuming this is introduced at the beginning of 1992-93, with (1) the current system of tax allowances and (2) limiting all tax allowances and reliefs (except the single person's allowance) to the basic rate, in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Maude: Estimates of the increase in liability to income tax are as follows. These do not allow for any behavioural effects that might result from such changes to the tax system and do not include capital gains tax.

Yield from introduction of a 50 per cent. income tax band

£ million

Threshold taxable income (£)	*With current tax structure*		*Restricting allowances[1] and reliefs to basic rate*	
	1991-92	*1992-93*	*1991-92*	*1992-93*
31,705	2,330	2,540	3,650	3,960
33,705	2,170	2,360	3,460	3,740
36,705	1,960	2,130	3,210	3,470
39,705	1,790	1,940	3,010	3,240
42,705	1,640	1,780	2,830	3,050

[1] Except the personal allowance.

Approximately one half of the full year yield from such a 50 per cent. band would affect income tax receipts in the year of its introduction.

Third World Debt

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the value to the United Kingdom was of debt interest payments from developing countries in 1990-91.

Mr. Maples: The total of debt interest payments from developing countries to the United Kingdom Government during 1990-91 was £232 million, comprising approximately £228 million of payments to the Export Credits Guarantee Department on rescheduled debt and £4 million of payments to the Overseas Development Administration in respect of aid loans.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current total of outstanding debt owed to the United Kingdom by developing countries.

Mr. Maples: The total of developing country debt outstanding owed to the United Kingdom Government is £5,739 million, comprising £5,089 million of claims and outstanding interest on those claims owed to the Export Credits Guarantee Department and £650 million owed to the Overseas Development Administration.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current total of outstanding debt owed to United Kingdom commercial banks by developing countries.

Mr. Maples: I refer the hon. Lady to the figures contained in table 15 of the latest "Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin", published in November 1991.

Operation Scotcheck

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the involvement of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise in Operation Scotcheck carried out in Scotland on 13 November.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 5 December 1991]:* Officers of Customs and Excise carried out tests of the fuel in vehicles' tanks during Operation Scotcheck. The operation, which was primarily a police check on vehicles carrying dangerous substances, was conducted between 0930 and 1600 on Wednesday 13 November at eight separate locations. A total of 528 tests were carried out by two customs officers at each of the eight locations. One vehicle, which was found to be running on rebated fuel, was seized under section 141 of the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 and restored for the sum of £200.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when this year's public expenditure exercise was completed.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 6 December 1991]:* This year's public expenditure plans were announced on 6 November in the autumn statement and published on 13 November in Cm. 1729.

TRANSPORT

Air Fares

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will meet the chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority to discuss the level of fares charged by British Airways on its European routes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: I have no present plans to do so. The Commission has taken a decision on certain fares which the CAA judged to be too high and which we accordingly referred to the Commission under the current EC Air Fares Regulation. The Commission appears to have agreed with us, at least to some extent. But the decision has not yet been received, and we shall need, in conjunction with the CAA, to study it carefully once we have it.

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will meet the EC Transport Commissioner to discuss the reduction of European air fares; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: I have no plans to do so. The Commission has taken a decision on certain fares which we referred to it under the current EC Air Fares Regulation as being too high. It appears to have agreed with us, at least to some extent. But the formal decision has not yet been received and we shall need to study it carefully once we have it.

Multi-airline Business

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made in establishing a more competitive multi-airline business in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Government have continued to pursue policies of increasing the scope for competition in all aviation markets, so that a variety of United Kingdom airlines have as many opportunities as possible to offer services to the public. Both internationally and domestically this has been reflected in the competition

between two or more United Kingdom operators on a substantial number of routes, and in the benefits that that has brought to the consumer. Between 1985 and 1990, the number of domestic routes served by two or more United Kingdom airlines rose from 22 to 38. The Government have been successful in negotiating more liberal bilateral agreements with a number of foreign Governments, and will vigorously continue to seek further opportunities to do so. Within the European Community the United Kingdom is prominent in pressing for a truly liberal aviation regime after 1992, so that all British airlines have full and fair opportunities to compete in the single market.

Marine Accident Investigation Branch

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make it his policy to review the work of the marine accident investigation branch of his Department with a view to strengthening its powers to include the initiation of prosecutions against those who break maritime laws.

Mr. McLoughlin: Although the marine accident investigation branch has no powers to prosecute, it can and does recommend to the Department's marine directorate that legal proceedings should be instituted if such a course of action is practicable and warranted.

As the regulatory body it is proper that the initiation of prosecution proceedings should be exercised by the marine directorate and not by the MAIB.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes he proposes to make in the running of the marine accident investigation branch of his Department following the accidents involving the Wilhelmina J and the Zulfikar; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: No changes to the marine accident investigation branch inquiry procedures are necessary following the Wilhelmina J/Zulfikar accident. Administrative procedures concerning the general release of information gained from an investigation are, however, under review and if, as a result, changes in statutory provisions are required, these will be made and placed before Parliament.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about the work, powers and responsibilities of the marine accident investigation branch of his Department.

Mr. McLoughlin: The work of the marine accident investigation branch is largely governed by the Merchant Shipping (Accident Investigation) Regulations 1989. The powers of inspectors, which are wide, are set out in section 27 of the Merchant Shipping Act 1979. The principal responsibility of the branch is to investigate marine accidents to determine their circumstances and causes with the aim of improving the safety of life at sea and the avoidance of accidents in the future. The chief inspector of marine accidents is required under the Accident Investigation Regulations to publish from time to time collective summaries of investigations and, where an inspectors' inquiry has taken place, to make a report to the Secretary of State.

Ocean Hound

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assistance is being offered by his Department to the widows of the fishermen on the trawler Ocean Hound to salvage the ship and bring the bodies home for burial.

Mr. McLoughlin: Sadly, the Ocean Hound is not the only fishing vessel to have sunk in recent months with the loss of all on board. The Department cannot justify paying for, or contributing towards the costs of, raising the wrecks in the hope (and it can only be a hope) that the bodies might be recovered.

Motorway Lighting

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will examine the feasibility of providing increased lighting on motorways.

Mr. Chope: Lighting is installed on motorways where the predicted night-time accident savings due to lighting outweigh the installation and future maintenance costs, taking account of possible environmental effects. The increase in traffic now forecast and current proposals to widen much of the motorway system will result in increased lighting provision on motorways.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has had over the standard of lighting on motorways.

Mr. Chope: Representations are received from time to time on motorway lighting standards, which are required to comply with British and international standards.

Marine Pollution

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made on the implementation of annex II of Marpol 73/78; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Merchant Shipping (Control of Pollution by Noxious Liquid Substances in Bulk) Regulations 1987 came into force on 6 April 1987. They apply to United Kingdom ships wherever they may be and to other ships while they are in the United Kingdom or its territorial waters.

The regulations were updated with effect from 1 January 1991 to take into account additional noxious substances.

A1 (Upgrading)

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the schemes in preparation for the upgrading of the A1 to motorway, indicating in each case the position reached and the future timetable.

Mr. Chope: Listed in the table are details of all the schemes along the A1 which are either under construction or in preparation. Work is in hand to determine the scope and timing of further schemes to upgrade the remaining stretches of the route to motorway standard between London (junction with the M25) and Tyneside.

A1 schemes under construction	*Next key preparation stage and target date*
Branham-Wetherby improvements, Leeds MB	Completion date 1992
Dishforth-Leeming improvements phase 1 (Gatenby land junction), North Yorkshire	Completion December 1991
A1 schemes in preparation	
Leeming-Scotch Corner improvements North Yorkshire	Order publication autumn 1993
Dishforth-Leeming improvements phase 2, North Yorkshire	Order publication autumn 1993
Wetherby-Walshford improvements North Yorkshire	Order publication early 1993
Walshford-Dishforth improvements North Yorkshire	Public inquiry spring 1992
Hook Moor-Bramham improvements Leeds MB, North Yorkshire	Order publication Spring 1992
Ferrybridge-Hook Moor Wakefield MB, Leeds MB, North Yorkshire	Preferred route announcement Autumn 1992
Redhouse-Ferrybridge Conversion to motorway, Doncaster MB, Wakefield MB, North Yorkshire	Public consultation spring 1992
Peterborough-Stamford improvement Cambridgeshire	Preferred route—1993
Alconbury-Peterborough improvement Cambridgeshire	Public inquiry—1992
Baldock-Alconbury Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire	Preferred route—1993
Tempsford grade separated junction Bedfordshire	Preferred route end of 1991
Langford turn grade separated junction, Bedfordshire	Preferred route 1993

Rail Crossings

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many applications he estimates will be made in England in the five years following the coming into operation of the provisions in schedule 2 of the Transport and Works Bill for *(a)* rail crossing diversion orders in respect of bridleways, *(b)* rail crossing extinguishment orders in respect of bridleways, *(c)* rail crossing diversion orders in respect of footpaths and *(d)* rail crossing extinguishment orders in respect of footpaths.

Mr. Freeman: This is a matter for railway operators, primarily British Rail, but I understand that no comprehensive forecasts are currently available.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many crossings of *(a)* footpaths and *(b)* bridleways there are in England over railway lines where the line speed is 100 mph or higher;

(2) how many crossings of *(a)* footpaths and *(b)* bridleways there are in Scotland over railway lines where the line speed is 100 mph or higher.

Mr. Freeman: Full information is not available. I understand from BR that on the east coast main line there is a total of 139 footpath and bridleway crossings in England, and none in Scotland.

Road Contracts

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the 20 contractors who have received the largest share of motorway and trunk road contracts in each of the last three years, giving for each contractor the value of the contracts received.

Mr. Chope: Motorway and trunk road construction contracts valued at more than £1 million were awarded as attached.

Financial Year 1989-90

Contractor	*Total value of awards £ million*
1. Balfour Beatty Ltd.	72·9
2. Fairclough Civil Engineering Ltd.	72·2
3. Tarmac Construction Ltd.	65·8
4. A. F. Budge (Contractors) Ltd.	55·4
5. John Mowlem & Co. Plc.	46·4
6. Wimpey Construction Ltd.	41·4
7. Alfred McAlpine Construction Ltd.	32·1
8. Galliford (UK) Ltd.	20·2
9. Amey Construction Ltd.	19·4
10. J. Murphy & Sons Ltd.	16·2
11. Roadworks (1952) Ltd.	11·3
12. Edmund Nuttall Ltd.	10.3
13. Birse Construction Ltd.	8·8
14. Cumbrian Construction Ltd.	8·6
15. Redland Aggregates Ltd.	5·2
16. Clugston Construction Ltd.	5·0
17. May Gurney & Co., Ltd.	4·4
18. Serco Contracting Ltd.	3·5
19. J. Breheny (Contractors) Ltd.	2.2
20. Geoffrey Osborne Ltd.	1·2
Midland Oak Construction Ltd.	1·2

Financial Year 1990-91

Contractor	*Total value of awards £ million*
1. Tarmac Construction Ltd.	71·8
2. Balfour Beatty Ltd.	56·5
3. Alfred McAlpine Construction Ltd.	52·9
4. A. F. Budge (Contractors) Ltd.	47·5
5. Fairclough Civil Engineering Ltd.	34·3
6. Birse Construction Ltd.	29·5
7. Edmund Nuttall Ltd.	25·8
8. Hochtief Ag.	22·5
9. Monk Construction Ltd.	16·4
10. Shephard Hill Civil Engineering Ltd.	15·9
11. Wimpey Construction Ltd	15·3
12. Amey Construction Ltd.	14·8
May Gurney & Co. Ltd.	14·8
14. Miller Construction Ltd.	9·0
15. M. J. Gleeson Group Plc	8·8
16. Cementation (Major Projects) Ltd.	8·3
17. A. E. Farr Ltd.	8·1
18. Eden Construction Ltd.	6·2
19. J. Breheny Contractors Ltd.	5·9
20. John Mowlem & Co., Plc.	4·5

Financial Year 1991-92 to date

Contractor	*Total value of awards £ million*
1. Balfour Beatty Ltd.	80·9
2. Tarmac Construction Ltd.	80·7
3. John Laing Construction Ltd.	59·4
4. Costain Civil Engineering Ltd.	23·9

Contractor	Total value of awards £ million
5. Norwest Holst Construction Ltd.	21·7
6. A. F. Budge (Contractors) Ltd.	20·0
7. Alfred McAlpine Construction Ltd.	10·8
8. Fitzpatrick Contractors Ltd.	10·7
9. Miller Construction Ltd.	7·9
10. Birse Construction Ltd.	7·3
11. Henry Boot (Southern) Ltd.	7·0
12. Galliford (UK) Ltd.	5·8
13. Kier Construction Ltd.	4·1
14. Amey Construction Ltd.	3·9
15. May Gurney & Co. Ltd	2·2
Midland Oak Construction Ltd.	2·2
Cumbrian Industrials Ltd.	2·2
18. C. M. R. Electronics Ltd.	2·1
19. Pirelli Construction Ltd.	2·0
20. Edmund Nuttall Ltd.	1·8

A13 (Lane Closure)

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how long he expects the lane closure to be in effect on the A13 south of Barking.

Mr. Chope: The closure is necessary to reduce the loading on the old bridge over the River Roding which a recent assessment has shown to be overstressed. Investigations are being undertaken urgently to determine the extent of any remedial work. Until these are completed I am unable to say how long the closure will continue.

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has had from driving instructors concerning the DVLA's mailing of provisional licences along with a British School of Motoring advertisement.

Mr. Chope: I have received many representations both direct from individual driving instructors and via Members of Parliament.

East London River Crossing

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport why it was decided to serve the compulsory orders for the east London river crossing roads before satisfying the European Commission about compliance with the directive on environmental assessment.

Mr. Chope: The decision to make all the outstanding orders was announced on 27 September. The making of these orders does not prejudice the outcome of the exchange with the European Commission on this matter. Major construction work will not start for some time. We intend to reply to the Commission shortly.

Driving Licence Fees

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his policy regarding charging drivers over 70 years of age a fee every three years to renew their driving licences; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 6 December 1991]:* The driver licensing system is required to be self-financing. It is currently in deficit and will continue to be so unless the fee structure is revised. The main reasons for this are the sharp reduction in the number of 17-year-olds who are applying for first provisional driving licences—and provide the main source of income to the driver licensing system—and the increase in the number of drivers at age 70 and over who are renewing their licences.

Unless the fee base is broadened, the first applicants will have to pay a substantially higher fee and will bear an increasingly disproportionate amount of the cost of running the system.

The balance of equity within the new fee structure has been supported generally in public consultation. The new £6 fee for the over-70s renewal remains less than the average cost of dealing with applications from this age group. The cost of expensive medical examinations, often required at the Secretary of State's request, continue to be paid by DVLA. The over-70s are more likely to require these examinations and therefore benefit most from this continuing cross-subsidy within the system.

Provisional Car Licences

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what is his estimate of the number of provisional car licences to be issued in 1992-93.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 6 December 1991]:* It is estimated that 920,000 provisional car licences will be issued in 1992-93.

Road Advertisements

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Wakefield of 22 November, *Official Report*, column *319*, what action he has taken following his receipt of a copy of a complaint to the Advertising Standards Authority regarding the placing of roadside advertisements with the slogan "Road Ahead Flooded".

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 6 December 1991]:* We are awaiting the adjudication of the Advertising Standards Authority.

ENVIRONMENT

Priority Homeless Statistics

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the proportion of all permanent lettings to new tenants in two-bedroom or larger dwellings going to the priority homeless for (i) lettings in the local authority's own stock, (ii) nominations to housing associations, (iii) nominations to mobility schemes and for each local authority all lettings (iv) in England and by his Department's regions in England in 1990-91.

Mr. Yeo: The information derived from English local authorities' annual housing investment programme returns is as follows:

Percentage of lettings of 2 bedroom or larger dwellings to households accepted as priority cases under homelessness legislation—1 April 1990 to 31 March 1991

DOE region	*Local authority secure lettings to new tenants*	*Nominations to housing associations*	*Nominations to mobility schemes*	*All lettings of local authority dwellings*[1]
North	29	22	—	19
Yorkshire and Humberside	28	16	2	19
East Midlands	46	30	1	29
Eastern	47	31	4	27
Greater London	82	70	26	59
South Eastern	47	50	15	27
South West	51	42	14	26
West Midlands	48	27	—	28
North West	26	19	—	17
England	43	37	8	29

—Nil or negligible.
[1]All lettings of local authority stock of this type, including transfers of existing tenants and non-secure lettings to new tenants.

Inland Waterways Amenities Advisory Council

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether a representative of the Government attends meetings of the Inland Waterways Amenities Advisory Council; when the last meeting between the Inland Waterways Amenities Advisory Council and a representative of the Government took place; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: An official from the Department commonly attends meetings of the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council. The chairman and the vice-chairman designate of the council met my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry), on 17 October 1991, and officials on 27 November 1991.

Noise Abatement

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he proposes to introduce any changes in the noise abatement zone procedures.

Mr. Baldry: The noise review working party last year recommended that noise abatement zone procedures would be more useful if they were to be simplified. We intend to consult a sample of local authorities next year on this proposition.

Housing

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number of vacant dwellings by tenure for each local authority in England and Wales.

Mr. Yeo: Local authorities report the number of their own dwellings which were vacant and estimates of the numbers of vacant dwellings owned by housing associations, by other public sector landlords and in the private sector in their annual housing investment programme (HIP1) returns. "Other public sector" includes dwellings owned by another local authority.

The available figures for 1 April 1990 and 1991 are in columns A71, A72, A73 and A74, respectively, of the "HIP1 All Items Print" for those years. For 1 April 1980 the figures for local authority dwellings are in column A81, for local authority-financed housing association dwellings in A82, for other housing association dwellings in A83, for other public sector in A84 and for private sector in A85 of the "1980 HIP1 All Items Print".

Copies of all these documents are in the Library.

For information about Wales I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each local authority in England and Wales, in 1979-80, 1989-90 and 1990-91, the number of unfit dwellings and number of dwellings not unfit but in need of renovation, by tenure.

Mr. Yeo: Local authorities provide estimates of the number of such dwellings at 1 April each year in their annual housing investment programme returns (HIP1). The available information for local authorities in England appears in the "HIP1 All Items Print" for the relevant year, at the column references stated. The figures are not necessarily comparable as authorities' criteria differ and they are generally best estimates based on available information rather than comprehensive surveys.

	1980	*1990 and 1991*
Local authority		
Unfit[1]	A41	A31
Lacking amenities[1]	A51	
Needing renovation[2]	A61	A41
Other public sector[4]		
Unfit[1]	A44	A33
Lacking amenities[1]	A54	
Needing renovation[2]	A64	A43
Housing association		
Unfit[1]	A42, A43[3]	A32
Lacking amenities[2]	A52, A53[3]	
Needing renovation[2]	A62, A63[3]	A42
Private		
Unfit[1]	A45	A34
Lacking amenities[1]	A55	
Needing renovation[2]	A65	A44

[1] The statutory definition of unfitness was changed in 1990. The revised definition brings more dwellings into this category which includes all those lacking amenities. Separate figures for dwellings that were fit under the old definition but lacked basic amenities were collected for previous years.
[2] The information collected for private sector dwellings that were not substandard but in need of renovation in 1991 relates only to dwellings whose owners were likely to be eligible for discretionary renovation grants.
[3] For 1980 there were separate estimates for local authority funded housing association dwellings and others.
[4] Other public sector includes dwellings owned by other local authorities, government departments and other public sector agencies.

Copies of all the documents are in the Library.

For information about Welsh authorities I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Disabled Facilities Grant

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received regarding the operation of disabled facilities grant under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: Since the disabled facilities grant was introduced in July 1990, my Department has received about 150 representations from hon. Members and around 130 representations from local authorities and members of the public. A further 64 representations on the operation of the scheme have been received from local authorities and other bodies, in response to the Department's current review of the renovation grant system, and these are not being analysed. We hope to announce the results of this review in the new year.

Environmental Conferences

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many conferences Ministers or civil servants in his Department have attended on the environment from 1985 to date; and if he will list the conferences at which his Department will be represented in each of the next four years.

Mr. Trippier: Comprehensive information on the period from 1985 could not be made available except at disproportionate cost. Information for each of the next four years is not available.

Toxic Waste

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much toxic waste in tonnes was produced by industries in the United Kingdom for every year since 1979.

Mr. Baldry: The amount of toxic wastes—that is, special waste as defined under the Control of Pollution Act (Special Waste) Regulations 1980—produced in industries in the United Kingdom in each year since 1986 were:

	thousand tonnes
1986-87	1,630
1987-88	[1]2,140
1988-90	2,320
1990-91	[2]2,000

[1] Not including Wales.
[2] Figures incomplete, awaiting final reports and validations.

Figures for years before 1986 are not readily available.

Rents into Mortgages

Mr. Soley: To ask The Secretary of State for the Environment how many properties have been sold to date under the rents into mortgages pilot schemes in *(a)* Basildon and *(b)* Milton Keynes; how many sales are expected in the remainder of the current financial year; and what is the total estimated cost of setting up, promoting and administering the respective pilot schemes.

Sir George Young: In Basildon, 28 sales have so far been completed and a further 53 are currently with solicitors; 67 properties were sold in Milton Keynes before the pilot scheme was concluded in preparation for the bulk transfer of the development corporation's housing stock to new landlords. In addition, a total of more than 100 applicants have decided instead to exercise their right to buy.

The pilot schemes were financed within the existing budgets of the Commission for the New Towns in Basildon and the Milton Keynes development corporation.

Household Waste (Burning)

Mr. Jacques Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the emission limits and storage controls on electric power-generating plants which burn household waste.

Mr. Baldry: All plant burning household waste will require an authorisation under part 1 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. For plants designed to incinerate such waste at a rate of less than 1 tonne per hour the emission limits and storage controls are given in "Environmental Protection Act 1990, Part 1; Processes Prescribed for Air Pollution Control by Local Authorities; Secretary of State's Guidance" PG 5/4 (91) (ISBN 0-11-752397-6), available from HMSO. For plants designed to incinerate such waste at a rate of 1 tonne or more per hour the emission limits and storage controls are given in "Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution, Chief Inspector's Guidance to Inspectors. IPR 5/3". This guidance note is currently the subject of consultation and is scheduled for publication in April 1992. Copies of the draft note may be obtained from HMIP.

Corine Programme

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when his Department received the Commission report SEC(91) 958 final on the Corine programme concerning the gathering, co-ordination and standardisation of information on the environment and national resources in the EC; and if he will make a statement on the programme's effects in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Baldry: A copy of the final Commission report was received by my Department in early June 1991.

The Corine programme has resulted in improved co-ordination in the environmental information field between all EC member states. In particular, common methodologies have been developed, and some data collection procedures established, thus enabling progress to be made towards a decentralised Community-wide environmental information system. These developments will contribute to the formulation and monitoring of EC environmental policy.

New Town Housing, Warrington

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give the results of the ballot of former new town housing tenants in Warrington.

Mr. Yeo: The results of the ballot of new town tenants in Warrington on the future ownership of their homes

were announced by the Commission for the New Towns on 2 December. A total of 85·5 per cent. of those eligible took part in the ballot and, of these, 81 per cent. (2,746) voted for a housing association as their future landlord and 19 per cent. (654) voted for their properties to be transferred to Warrington borough council. Each tenant was given the choice between the borough council and the housing association currently managing their estate for the commission on an agency basis, and the details for each housing association are:

(a) Grosvenor housing association and Warrington borough council

	per cent.
Rate of participation	79
Percentage voting for housing association	[1]74
Percentage voting for borough council	[1]26

[1] Of valid vote.

(b) Manchester and district housing association and Warrington borough council

	per cent.
Rate of participation	87
Percentage voting for housing association	[1]82
Percentage voting for borough council	[1]18

[1] Of valid vote.

(c) Muir Group housing association and Warrington borough council

	per cent.
Rate of participation	91
Percentage voting for housing association	[1]84
Percentage voting for borough council	[1]16

[1] Of valid vote.

(d) Warrington housing association and Warrington borough council

	per cent.
Rate of participation	93
Percentage voting for housing association	[1]88
Percentage voting for borough council	[1]12

[1] Of valid vote.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in determining the revenue support grant level for 1992-93, what recognition has been given to the fact that local authorities are experiencing difficulties in selling surplus assets at reasonable prices and that fewer tenants are willing to take on a mortgage to purchase their council house.

Mr. Key: Total standard spending for 1992-93 represents the Government's view of the appropriate amount of revenue spending by local authorities to provide services to a standard level taking account of what can be afforded nationally. Within that total, allowance is made for the revenue consequences of capital spending —any factors affecting the potential for generating capital receipts have been considered in reaching a view about that figure.

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the basis of his assessment that the need for revenue resources to finance capital expenditure by local authorities will fall by £133 million next year; and if he expects local authorities to reduce their capital programmes by this amount, or whether equivalent resources have been transferred to capital credit approvals for next year.

Mr. Key: Total standard spending (TSS) for 1992-93 has been determined to permit an appropriate level of revenue spending on all local authority services, bearing in mind the need for efficiency and taking a realistic view of what taxpayers locally and nationally can afford. Within that, the total amount allowed for capital spending financed from revenue represents the Government's view of the relative priority to be accorded to this type of financing. It is, however, for individual authorities to determine their spending priorities as between services and their preferred methods of financing that expenditure.

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the factors on which his assumption that the revenue support grant will enable local authorities to increase their interest received on cash flow balances etc. by £293 million are based.

Mr. Key: The element within standard spending assessments which takes account of the interest received on balances etc. will in fact be £292 million lower for 1992-93 on the basis of the proposals announced by my right hon. Friend on 26 November. This is because of a decrease in the assumed rate of interest on such receipts.

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when local authorities will receive their credit approvals for 1992-93.

Mr. Key: Local authorities' basic credit approvals (BCAs) are calculated by reference to each authority's annual capital guidelines (ACGs), which are issued by the Secretary of State responsible for each service block. I hope it will be possible for all 1992-93 ACGs to be issued by Christmas. BCAs will be issued as soon as possible thereafter.

Local authorities may also receive supplementary credit approvals (SCAs) for certain types of project or programmes, which may be issued by the appropriate Minister up to six months after the end of the financial year to which the SCA relates.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what facilities his Department has provided for staff from different local authorities to meet and exchange experiences of the use of bailiffs in poll tax recovery; and at what cost to public funds.

Mr. Key: None. However, the local taxation working party, on which my Department and the local authority associations are represented, has discussed on a number of occasions the use of bailiffs in community charge enforcement.

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of revenue support grant has been transferred to highways capital allocations; what is the overall financial impact; and why the transfer was necessary.

Mr. Key: Within the proposals for the 1992-93 revenue support grant settlement £100 million of expenditure on highway maintenance has been reclassified as capital rather than current spending. This represents 6 per cent. of the standard spending assessment for highway maintenance 1991-92. There will be a corresponding uplift in

the available capital resources through an increase of £50 million in both transport supplementary grant and credit approvals. This switch is part of a phased programme announced by the Department of Transport in 1989. It will bring the treatment of local authority spending on structural maintenance into line with that of central Government, which is already treated as capital.

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the likely impact of the reduction in the standard spending assessment on the provision of services by local authorities.

Mr. Key: Under my right hon. Friend's proposals the total of standard spending assessments for local authorities in England will increase by 6·8 per cent.

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the basis on which the level of interest rate received on capital receipts is assumed by the standard spending assessment to fall by 12 per cent.

Mr. Key: The interest rate used to calculate the provisional 1992-93 SSA element for interest on capital receipts at 10 per cent. is 1 per cent. less than that used for the 1991-92 settlement. That rate is based on an average of short and long-term interest rates for August 1991. The precise weighting of the various rates reflects the pattern of borrowing by all local authorities.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will issue guidelines to local authority officers on their response to requests from district auditors to give examples of helpful and unhelpful actions by council members in regard to poll tax recovery procedures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: No.

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the impact on metropolitan districts of the changed methodology on the ability of different classes of authorities to generate interest receipts; how much shire counties and outer London boroughs benefited in real terms by this change; and how much metropolitan districts lost.

Mr. Key: The proposal to change the method by which the interest receipts element of the 1992-93 SSA is distributed results in a cash increase in SSA for the shire counties of £72·271 million; and slight decreases for the metropolitan districts and outer London boroughs of £0·709 million and £1·019 million respectively. The figures are expressed in cash terms rather than real terms as the effects relate to the same period and are directly comparable.

Mr. Dixon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what would be the total level of Government grant per head of adult population for 1992-93 for *(a)* Wandsworth, *(b)* Westminster and *(c)* each metropolitan district council in Tyne and Wear.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 6 December 1991]:* Under my right hon. Friend's proposals, the information for the total of revenue support grant and, where appropriate, area protection grant and inner London education grant per head of adult population is included in the list:

	£
Camden	1,066
Greenwich	1,085
Hackney	1,734
Hammersmith and Fulham	1,118
Islington	1,338
Kensington and Chelsea	906
Lambeth	1,275
Lewisham	1,120
Southwark	1,260
Tower Hamlets	1,803
Wandsworth	1,077
Westminster	1,293
Gateshead	530
Newcastle upon Tyne	525
North Tyneside	453
South Tyneside	555
Sunderland	535

River Pollution

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has had over the levels of toxic chemicals found in fish due to high levels of contamination in rivers.

Mr. Baldry: Around 70 representations have recently been received concerning levels of chemicals in fish. Advice was issued to angling associations by the National Rivers Authority and MAFF earlier this year concerning the consumption of sport fish from contaminated waters.

Homelessness

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met representatives of Shelter to discuss housing policy and resources needed to reduce the number of homeless people this winter.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 4 December 1991]:* My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning meets representatives of Shelter regularly. My Department has discussed with Single Homeless in London (SHIL) the need for the provision of shelters for those sleeping out in central London this winter. Through SHIL, my Department is providing 325 additional places in shelters between 1 December 1991 and 31 March 1992, as part of a co-ordinated strategy which includes shelters, transportation and support services to those sleeping rough in central London.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Subsidiarity

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will publish his proposals to include in the European union treaty the principle of subsidiarity.

Mr. Garel-Jones: At the start of the political union negotiations we proposed that the principle of subsidiarity should be written into the treaty. That suggestion has been taken up and article 3B of the draft treaty, available in the Library of the House, now contains a justiciable text of this principle.

United Nations

Sir Gerard Vaughan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish a statement of information available to him as to arrears of subscriptions to the United Nations by its various members.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The status of contributions by member states to the United Nations as at 31 October 1991 is contained in United Nations document ST/ADM/SER.B/361, a copy of which is being placed in the Library of the House.

Sir Gerard Vaughan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information is available to him as to the apportionment of responsibility for arrears of subscription by the former Soviet Union to the United Nations organisation and as to the payment of these.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The payment of the assessed contribution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to the United Nations is the responsibility of the central Soviet authorities, who have been advised of our view that any arrears in their contribution should be paid promptly.

Western Sahara

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps Her Majesty's Government, as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, are taking to ensure the effectiveness of United Nations officials in securing a fair and orderly referendum in the western Sahara.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: As a permanent member of the Security Council, we are naturally concerned to ensure the success of the United Nations settlement plan. We have already contributed towards the cost of the United Nations mission for a referendum in the western Sahara. We have also provided 15 military observers. We shall continue to give our full support to the Secretary General's efforts to bring this long-standing dispute to a peaceful conclusion.

Zionism

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) whether the United Kingdom ambassador to the United Nations this year had raised the issue of UN resolution 3379 with all the members of the Security Council or whether there are any plans to do so; and whom the ambassador has met to discuss this issue;

(2) with which countries he intends to discuss the issue of repealing UN resolution 3379 in his forthcoming bilateral contacts;

(3) if he will list the states with which he has raised the issue of rescinding UN resolution 3379 in bilateral contacts.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The United Kingdom permanent representative to the United Nations in New York is currently discussing with his EC colleagues and representatives of other UN missions how best to secure the repeal of this odious resolution. We have said that we are ready to co-sponsor a draft resolution which revokes it. We expect to discuss the matter with a wide range of countries at the United Nations and shall be seeking the support of other delegations before a repealing resolution is put to a vote. The repeal of a General Assembly resolution is not, however, a matter for the Security Council.

Japan (Plutonium)

Mr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what studies have been undertaken by his nuclear non-proliferation department into the requirement of the Japanese nuclear industry for the return of plutonium separated at Sellafield prior to agreeing to give an export licence for the plutonium; and if his Department has received any recent representations from non-governmental organisations on the problems and risks of the international commerce in plutonium.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: None. The matters raised in the first part of the question are more properly an issue for the Department of Energy. However, the basic guidelines of British policy on exports and transfers of nuclear materials were announced by Lord Callaghan, then Foreign Secretary, in a parliamentary answer on 31 March 1976. The topic of international commerce in plutonium was raised at my recent meeting with 34 non-governmental organisations on 26 November.

Ukraine

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received for the recognition of Ukraine's independence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Following Ukraine's declaration of independence on 24 August, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister received a letter from Mr. Kravchuk expressing his hope for Britain's recognition of the independence of Ukraine and the establishment of diplomatic relations. This wish also has been conveyed in official correspondence from Ukraine and at meetings between British and Ukrainian rerpresentatives. We are consulting closely our EC partners and NATO allies on the question of recognition, with a view to exploring with the Ukrainian Government how they intend to approach such key practical issues as the Soviet Union's foreign debt and control of nuclear weapons. I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the declaration on Ukraine by EC Foreign Ministers on 2 December which called upon Ukraine to take these matters forward with the centre and other republics in a peaceful, democratic and orderly way.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations between the United Kingdom and the Ukraine.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We seek close, friendly relations with Ukraine and aim to broaden our contacts at all levels. A British representative is now in Kiev to help establish a permanent British mission. The British Council is also establishing a presence.

Romanian Children (Adoptions)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information is currently being issued to prospective adopters of

Romanian children by the British embassy in Bucharest; if this advice is currently being revised following the Romanian Government's decision to permit foreign adoptions from 1 January 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Romanian adoption law, which came into effect on 17 July this year, continues to allow adoption of Romanian children by non-Romanians living abroad. The Department of Health has discussed the new adoption procedures with the Romanian authorities. Those seeking advice and assistance from the British embassy in Bucharest are told that all adoption applications will in future be processed through the Romanian Committee for Adoption; that though currently closed for reorganisation the committee will resume its work in early 1992; and that the Department of Health will in future act direct with the committee on behalf of prospective adopters.

Pakistan

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from the Government of Pakistan on the current investigation by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise over the illegal sale to Pakistan of computers with a military use by United Kingdom-based companies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: None. Investigations into a possible export by a Norwegian company via the United Kingdom are being pursued by the Norwegian authorities with our assistance.

Iraq (Nuclear Scientists)

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what entry visas his Department issued for Iraqi nuclear scientists for each year from 1979.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The information requested is not available.

Pearl Harbour

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department has taken to mark the 50th anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl harbour and to commemorate the allied service men and civilians killed in the war by the Japanese; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have not marked this anniversary. We fully recognise how much the nation owes to all those who fought and died during the second world war. We shall never forget this great debt nor the terrible sufferings of so many in Japanese prison camps.

Lockerbie

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he delivered his message to the Libyan Government over the alleged participants of the Lockerbie bombing; and what reply he has received or been notified of.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Lord Advocate issued a warrant for the arrest of two Libyan officials on 14 November. On that day we passed a copy of the warrant and a detailed statement of the facts to the Libyan permanent representative to the United Nations. These documents, together with our demand for the surrender of the two accused, were also conveyed to the Libyan Government by Italy, who act as our protecting power in Libya. On 27 November we issued two statements: one in conjunction with the United States and the other in conjuction with the United States and France. Copies are being place in the Library of the House. Both statements were conveyed to the Libyan Government by the Italians. We have so far received no indication from Libya that it is willing to accede to our demands.

Nuclear Tests

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consideration he has given to the Nuclear Testing Moratorium Act (HR 3636) introduced to the United States Congress on 29 October by Representative R. Gephardt and Representative M. Kopetski in regard to the effect it would have on United Kingdom access to the Nevada nuclear test site for the continued testing of British nuclear warheads.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: United Kingdom nuclear tests take place at Nevada under the terms of the agreement between the United Kingdom and United States Governments signed in 1958. The United States Government share our view that, for the foreseeable future, testing will remain essential to maintaining a safe and effective nuclear deterrent.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Government-funded Projects

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has on how many subcontractors suffered financial loss as a result of main contractors on Government-funded projects going into receivership in each of the last five years.

Dr. Mawhinney: None.

Contract Law

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will initiate a change in contract law to give greater protection to sub-contractors in the event of main contractors going into receivership.

Dr. Mawhinney: No. The problems faced by sub-contractors in such circumstances do not arise from deficiencies in the law of contract itself but from the contractual relationships into which they have entered.

Catholic Maintained Schools

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) for each of the last 10 years, what percentage of all the costs, capital and recurring, of maintained schools, other than those now associated with the Council of Catholic Maintained Schools, were paid by the trustees of such schools;

(2) for each of the last 10 years, what percentage of all the costs, capital and recurring, of the maintained schools now associated with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, were paid by the trustees of such schools.

Dr. Mawhinney: The establishment of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools had no bearing on the recurrent or capital costs borne by the trustees of maintained schools. All recurrent costs in maintained schools in the last 10 years were met by the education and library boards: 15 per cent. of approved capital costs were met by the trustees.

Women-only Employment Courses

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action the Department of Education for Northern Ireland has taken in relation to the provision of women-only courses and to the provision of courses on non-traditional skills; and what support services have been provided to enable women to attend such courses.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is a matter for further education colleges to determine what courses they should provide. However, the Department of Education has encouraged colleges, when making course provision, to consider the particular needs of women who wish to re-enter the work force following absence owing to family and home responsibilities. A number of colleges provide child care arrangements to facilitate the enrolment of women.

RUC Holding Centres

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to introduce lay visitors to RUC holding centres.

Dr. Mawhinney: There are no plans to introduce lay visitors to the RUC holding centres. However, the Government are currently considering the appointment of an independent commissioner to monitor procedures governing the treatment of terrorist suspects in police custody.

Non-traditional Skills

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many colleges of further education are organising courses in non-traditional skills for women; and how many such courses are funded by the European social fund.

Dr. Mawhinney: None of the colleges in Northern Ireland organises courses specifically designed to equip women with non-traditional skills. However, over the last four years there has been a 40 per cent. increase in the numbers of women enrolling in courses in a number of subject areas, such as engineering and construction, which have in the past been largely male dominated.

Ms. Pauline Quinn

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the outcome of the internal inquiry held on 2 May 1991 into an incident involving Ms. Pauline Quinn in Her Majesty's prison, Maghaberry, on 26 April 1991.

Dr. Mawhinney: The inquiry into the enforced full search of Ms. Pauline Quinn in Her Majesty's prison, Maghaberry on 26 April 1991 found, inter alia, that:

(i) the incident and its unfortunate aftermath would have been avoided if Ms. Quinn had co-operated as she had done on other occasions before and after this particular incident;

(ii) in carrying out the search, the officers concerned acted properly on the basis of orders which they were given; and

(iii) no internal search had taken place.

The inquiry also recommended some local procedural changes and these have now been implemented.

Information Service

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will place in the Library a copy of the review of the information service, conducted by his Department.

Dr. Mawhinney: No. The review of the information services, which was completed in 1988, is an internal management document.

Right of Silence

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what research has been done in Northern Ireland comparing the exercise of the right of silence by suspects detained under the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order and those detained under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act; and if he will publish the findings.

Dr. Mawhinney: A modest research programme is being undertaken in relation to the operation of the Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order. The results of this research are not yet available.

Schoolchildren (Statistics)

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many children are on the school roll in Northern Ireland; and how many of those receive free school meals in primary, secondary and special schools, respectively.

Dr. Mawhinney: The figures for January 1991 were as follows:

Schools	*Enrolments*	*Pupils receiving free meals*
Primary	189,548	47,302
Secondary	141,146	25,237
Special	3,987	3,518
Total	334,681	76,057

Northern Ireland Block

Mr. Knapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the management of the Northern Ireland block in the current financial year.

Mr. Brooke: Expenditure across a wide range of programmes within the Northern Ireland block has been running ahead of plans in this financial year. I have, therefore, initiated a pause in spending on new capital contracts and on some maintenance works for the remainder of the financial year. However, the public expenditure position will be kept under close review.

SERPS

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will estimate *(a)* the first year and *(b)* the full year total cost to the national insurance fund in (i) 1991-92 and (ii) 1992-93, of allowing people to contract out of the state earnings-related pension scheme into money purchase personal pension schemes giving figures separately for (1) people contracting out of the state earnings-related pension scheme in 1991-92 and (2) all schemes.

Mr. Hanley: The information is not available in precisely the form requested. However, such information as is available is shown below:

Analysis of contribution income in 1992-93[1] by class of contribution

Northern Ireland (£ millions)

	Class 1			Class 2	Class 3	Class 4	Total
	Primary (Employees)	Secondary (Employers)	Total Class 1				
National insurance fund							
Gross contributions before contracted-out reductions	336·4	521·1	857·5	10·1	0·7	12·8	881·1
Less contracted-out contributions reductions[2]	75·8	113·5	189·3	—	—	—	189·3
Net contributions[3]	260·6	407·6	668·2	10·1	0·7	12·8	691·8
National health service	40·8	51·7	92·5	1·9	0·1	2·9	97·4
Total contributions[3]	301·4	459·3	760·7	12·0	0·8	15·7	789·2

[1] The contributions are partly in respect of 1992-93 and partly in respect of earlier years.
[2] Including rebates and incentives in respect of personal pensions and incentives in respect of occupational pension schemes.
[3] Before deducting recoveries including abatements in respect of statutory sick pay and statutory maternity pay estimated at £14·94 million and £7·7 million respectively.

Contracted-out rebate and 2 per cent. incentives in respect of personal pensions and 2 per cent. incentives for contracted-out schemes

Northern Ireland (£ million)

		Rebates personal pensions			Incentives			
Paid in year	In respect of year	Employee	Employer	Total	Personal pensions	New schemes	Total	Grand total
1991-92	1990-91	12·2	23·1	35·3	10·9	2·4	13·3	48·6
	1989-90 and earlier	0·2	0·5	0·7	0·2	0·1	0·3	1·0
	Total	12·4	23·6	36·0	11·1	2·5	13·6	49·6
1992-93	1991-92	14·1	26·7	40·8	13·6	3·1	16·7	57·5
	1990-91 and earlier	0·3	0·6	0·9	0·3	0·1	0·4	1·3
	Total	14·4	27·3	41·7	13·9	3·2	17·1	58·8

Social Fund

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people received *(a)* crisis loans, *(b)* budgeting loans and *(c)* community care grants in each year since 1 April 1988 to 31 March 1991 and 1 April 1991 to 31 October 1991; what amounts were paid out at each social security office in South Down; and how many were refused and for what amount.

Mr. Hanley: Social security operational matters are the responsibility of Mr. Alec Wylie, chief executive of the Social Security Agency. He will write to the hon. Gentleman and copies of his reply will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

English Teaching

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what sums are available and projected for the current financial year and the next two financial years for the training enterprise and education directorate; when it is proposed to release finance to fund students' course fees and expenses for the current term for English for speakers of other languages; how many ESOL students there are in Northern Ireland for the current year; what are his projections for the following two years; what were the sums available and expended in the last two years; and how many students were assisted in each of those years.

Mr. Needham: The training enterprise and education directorate is an arm of the Department of Employment and its remit does not extend to Northern Ireland.

Children at Risk

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many children are registered at risk in each social services department in the constituency of South Down in each year since 1985.

Mr. Hanley: The constituency of South Down includes the Down unit of management of the Eastern health and social services board and part of the Craigavon and Banbridge and the Newry and Mourne units of management of the Southern health and social services board. Information is not available below unit of management level.

Health and social services boards are at present redesignating their child abuse registers, which did not contain an "at risk" category, as child protection registers.

The latter will record the names of children who have been abused or are at risk of abuse and who are the subject of a child protection plan.

Separate statistics on children at risk are not yet available for all areas. The total numbers of children known to have been, or suspected of being abused, on the registers for the three units of management in the period 1985 to 1991 are as follows:

Number on register at	*Down*	*Craigavon and Banbridge*	*Newry and Mourne*
31 December 1985	50	97	50
31 December 1986	[2]n/a	94	47
31 December 1987	133	109	45
31 December 1988	155	95	55
31 March 1989[1]	170	108	61
31 March 1990	166	77	55
31 March 1991	153	84	38

[1] From 1989 the maintenance of child abuse registers changed from a calendar to a financial year basis.
[2] In 1986 the Eastern health board did not provide statistics for individual units of management.

Travellers

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the percentage of travellers in Northern Ireland accommodated on serviced sites.

Mr. Needham: A total of 30 per cent. of travellers in Northern Ireland are presently accommodated on serviced sites. That figure will rise to 54 per cent. when sites currently under construction are completed and to 82 per cent. when sites for which district councils have already been given approval for grant purposes are also brought into use.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many serviced sites for travellers there are in Greater Belfast.

Mr. Needham: Belfast city council has two sites currently under construction which are due to be completed in April and August 1992 respectively. Two further sites have been given approval for grant. When complete these four serviced sites will provide 80 permanent pitches and cater for about 95 per cent. of the travellers in Greater Belfast.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he has any plans to ensure that sufficient accommodation is available for all travellers in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: Yes. While responsibility for the provision of serviced sites for travellers lies with district councils such provision is actively encouraged with 100 per cent. grants available for land acquisition and construction costs.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to improve conditions in roadside camps for travellers in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: The Department of the Environment encourages district councils which have not yet provided serviced sites to alleviate conditions on unapproved encampments through the provision of temporary amenities. The Advisory Committee on Travellers, with the active co-operation of health and social services boards, attempts to ensure that adequate medical and social services are available.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to amend the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 to ensure that serviced sites for travellers are provided by local authorities.

Mr. Needham: There are no plans at present to do so. The possibility of introducing a statutory obligation on district councils to provide serviced sites is, however, kept under review in the light of the progress being made in site provision.

Housing (Security Improvements)

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what payments for security improvements to houses of persons considered to be at risk from paramilitary groups are taken from the social fund; how much has been spent in this way; what steps are being taken to retrieve these payments from the security budget; and if he will make a statment.

Mr. Hanley: Under the social fund scheme, help in the form of a loan or a grant, generally only to those on income support, may be considered towards the cost of locks, bolts, chains and viewers for outside doors and windows where there is a need for such items. Information about the total amount paid is not available. Loans are recovered direct from applicants in the usual way. Grants are not recouped from any source and there are no plans to change existing policy.

One-Parent Families

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many one-parent families were registered for benefit at each of the social security offices in South Down in each year since 1985.

Mr. Hanley: Social security operational matters are the responsibility of Mr. Alex Wylie, chief executive of the Social Security Agency. He will write to the hon. Gentleman and copies of his reply will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

HEALTH

NHS Charges (Exemptions)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the percentage by each sub-division shown in his answer of 22 October 1991, *Official Report*, column 597, of people in the United Kingdom exempt from paying for *(a)* eye tests, *(b)* dental examinations and *(c)* prescription charges.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information requested is as follows:

(A) Sight Tests

The percentage of the population in England estimated to be eligible for free NHS sight tests in 1990-91 is as follows:

Categories	Percentage
Children under 16	20
Income support and family credit recipients and adult dependants	11
Others (breakdown not available)	[1]7
Total	38

[1]Approximate.

(B) Dental Charges

Percentage exempt from dental charges in England and Wales 1989-90

Categories	Percentage
Children under 16	27
Young people over 16 and under 18	3
Young people aged 18 and over in full-time education	[1]1
Income support, family credit and people on low income	8
War disablement pensioner	n.a.
Pregnant women and women with babies under 12 months	3
Total	42

[1]Less than.

Source: DPB Digest of Statistics.

(C) Prescription Charges

The proportion of people in England estimated to be eligible for free prescriptions is as follows:

Categories	Percentage
Children under 16	20
Students under 19 in full time education	1
Men over 65/women over 60	18
Income support and family credit recipients and people receiving help under the NHS low income scheme and their dependants	8
Pregnant/nursing mothers	2
Medical exemptions	2
People receiving war disablement pensions	[1]1
Total	51

[1]Less than.

Adoption

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to issue his discussion paper on inter-country adoption as part of his review of adoption laws.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We intend to issue the discussion paper by Christmas.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the recent visit by officials to meet the Romanian Adoption Committee.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Officials from the Department of Health and Home Office visited Romania in November at the request of the Romanian authorities in connection with the adoption of Romanian children by citizens of the United Kingdom.

Visits were made to children's homes in Bucharest and a children's hospital in Alexandria. Meetings took place with the chairman and executive secretary of the Romanian Adoption Committee as well as officials from the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and the Ministry of Education.

Officials were also able to learn about the work being done by British and other voluntary agencies in the field of adoption and child care and had the opportunity to see at first hand some of the work carried out by the Romanian Orphanage Trust.

One of the successful outcomes of the visit was establishing strong links with the Romanian Adoption Committee and assisting it to set up effective procedures for processing applications from people in the United Kingdom who wish to adopt Romanian children.

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has yet finalised the format for presenting the case of prospective adopters of children from overseas to foreign Governments; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department has no plans to prepare a format for presenting cases to foreign Governments when United Kingdom citizens apply to adopt children from overseas. Cases are handled on a discrete basis and vary according to the country concerned.

Cot Death

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will obtain a copy of the report, "Must Babies Still Die?" published by Mr. Barry Richardson in November for his departmental library.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: A copy of the report has been received and been very carefully studied by professional staff. The data it contains were available to and considered by the independent expert working group whose report on sudden infant death syndrome was published in June, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether there is a significant risk of poisonous gases being given off from previously soiled cot mattresses; and what plans he has to warn parents of this risk to second babies.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The independent expert working group which considered the hypothesis that poisonous gases given off from mattresses were a cause of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) found no link between the mattresses, microbial contamination and the generation of toxic volatile gases. The factors associated with SIDS are listed in its report, a copy of which is in the Library, and have been publicised by the Chief Medical Officer. Nursing a baby on a mattress that has been used by another baby is not one of these.

Quest Cancer Test

Mr. Corbett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his reply to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington, of 4 December, *Official Report*, column *159*, when he now expects to reach a conclusion on the application by Quest Cancer Test for a re-assessment of its application for funding.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have no current formal request for research funding for projects from Quest Cancer Test.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the proportion of originating debt covered by public dividend capital for each of the first wave national health service trusts.

Mr. Dorrell: The proportion will be determined individually for each trust on the basis of their opening valuations. It is likely that in almost every case it will be 50 per cent.—which is the figure trusts have used in their financial assumptions.

GPs (Computers)

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to refund the costs incurred by general practitioners in Hampshire who have computerised their operations.

Mr. Dorrell: This is a matter for health authorities. My hon. Friend may wish to contact Sir Robin Buchanan, the chairman of Wessex regional health authority, for details.

Expenditure Statistics

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what allowance in cash terms has been made for the additional costs in 1992-93 of implementing Government legislation for *(a)* additional residential and day care facilities, *(b)* improvements to standards in line with social services inspectorate reports and Audit Commission reviews, *(c)* funding the care element of hostel dwellers' fees and secure accommodation for alleged young offenders on remand under proposals contained in the Criminal Justice Bill and *(d)* the need for mentally disordered offenders to be kept out of prison;

(2) what allowance in cash terms has been made for additional costs in 1992-93 to reflect the *(a)* forecast increase in the numbers of elderly people and children, *(b)* increasing rate of dependency among elderly people, *(c)* child protection and preventative work, *(d)* unaccompanied child refugees and asylum seekers, *(e)* joint finance-tapering and time-expired projects, *(f)* inner city time-expired projects, *(g)* the impact of section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966, *(h)* commitments on capital projects and running costs and *(i)* incentive allowances;

(3) what allowance in cash terms has been made for the additional costs in 1992-93 of implementing Government legislation for *(a)* the Children Act 1989, *(b)* development of home care management under the White Paper "Caring for People", *(c)* advocacy service for people with special needs, *(d)* provision for new cohorts of disabled people leaving special education under sections 5 and 6 of the Disabled Persons Act 1986, *(e)* AIDS and HIV and *(f)* staff training in respect of community care, the Children Act 1989, child care and non-vocational qualifications;

(4) whether the 1992-93 standard spending assessment figures recognise the full-year effects of last year's pay settlement to social workers and other staff employed in social services; and what assumption has been made by the Government regarding the level of next year's pay award settlements and inflation.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Earlier this year the local authority associations were invited to take part in discussions with central Government in order to inform the Government's decision on total standard spending for the purposes of the 1992-93 revenue support grant settlement. These questions were considered in the discussions. The scope for increased efficiency in existing services and for other expenditure savings was also discussed. The Government's decisions, in detail, were announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment on 26 November at columns *779-95*.

Central Government do not specify in detail how local authorities should allocate the overall resources available to them but rather indicate their view of appropriate spending through standard spending control totals. Personal social services standard spending for 1992-93 has been set at £4,850 million, a cash increase of £347 million over 1991-92. Within this total, to improve the distribution of the revenue support grant, separate standard spending totals exist for the broad client groups: of services for elderly people at £2,225 million, a cash increase of £165 million; for children at £1,654 million, a cash increase of £113 million; and for other clients at £971 million, a cash increase of £69 million. Also within these totals are the new and increased specific grants for personal social services. These are for social services training £29 million, a cash increase of £4·2 million; for AIDS and HIV £15·3 million, a cash increase of £5·1 million; for mental illness £31·4 million, a cash increase of £10·4 million; for services for alcohol and drug misusers £2·1 million, a cash increase of £0·7 million; a new grant for guardians ad litem of £5·7 million; for services in connection with Commonwealth immigrants £8·5 million, a cash increase of £3·5 million; and for the urban programme £23·4 million, a cash increase of £0·6 million.

Meat and Bonemeal

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, further to his answer of 28 November, *Official Report*, column *593*, if he will now issue guidelines to ensure that any vehicle having transported meat and bonemeal is regarded as insanitary for the purpose of the Food Hygiene (Market Stalls and Delivery Vehicles) Regulations 1966, as amended.

Mr. Dorrell: The Food Hygiene (Market Stalls and Delivery Vehicles) Regulations 1966 (as amended) require food businesses to keep delivery vehicles clean and to protect food in order to prevent the risk of contamination. A vehicle used to transport meat and bonemeal would not be insanitary if it were effectively kept clean and foods were placed so as to be protected from any risk of contamination.

ENERGY

Oil Industry

3. **Mr. Mans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what efforts he has made to assist the United Kingdom oil industry in securing business overseas.

Mr. Wakeham: I have recently returned from the far east where I visited Vietnam, Hong Kong, Japan and Korea in order to promote the United Kingdom's wide-ranging expertise in the energy sector. I hope that my visit will provide opportunities for the United Kingdom oil industry to participate in the development of oil and gas fields in the region.

Coal Industry

13. **Mr. Lofthouse:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any plans to meet the chairman of British Coal to discuss the Rothschild report; and if he will make a statement.

17. **Mr. Eadie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he intends to meet the chairman of British Coal to discuss the future of the coal industry.

Mr. Wakeham: I meet the chairman of British Coal regularly to discuss all aspects of the coal industry.

27. **Mr. Barron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the current status of the Rothchild's report on British Coal.

Mr. Wakeham: Rothschild, along with the Government's other advisers on coal privatisation, are analysing options for the sale of the industry. No decision on the form or timing of privatisation will be taken until after the general election.

28. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many pits were working in January 1984; and how many are still in operation.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: At the beginning of the financial year 1984-85 British Coal had 170 producing collieries. There are currently 54 collieries in operation.

22. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he next intends to meet representatives of the Scottish TUC to discuss the future of the coal industry.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have no immediate plans to meet representatives of the Scottish Trades Union Congress to discuss the future of the coal industry.

Wood

19. **Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what initiatives he is undertaking to promote the use of wood as a fuel.

Mr. Moynihan: The latest Government initiative to promote the use of wood as fuel is a project to demonstrate the first commercial application of short rotation arable coppice as an energy crop. My Department is also co-funding feasibility studies to promote the use of the residues from forestry operations to fuel power stations with a proposed total installed capacity in excess of 20 MW.

Waste Incineration

20. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what progress has been recently made in generating electricity by the incineration of waste products.

Mr. Moynihan: Orders made under the non-fossil fuel obligation have so far set an obligation to secure a declared net capacity of 375·63 MW from a total of 21 schemes for waste incineration.

Energy Conservation

21. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will visit the Findhorn Foundation to discuss matters relating to energy conservation.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am aware of the good work of the Findhorn Foundation on sustainable development and, in particular, their commendable efforts in constructing highly energy-efficient housing. Officials working on behalf of my Energy Efficiency Office are keeping in touch with the Foundation's initiatives.

Coal Mining (Productivity)

23. **Mr. Alison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy by how much British Coal's productivity has changed since 1984-85.

Mr. Wakeham: Productivity in 1984-85 was exceptionally low due to the miner's strike. Compared to 1983-84, the year preceding the strike, productivity in British Coal mines has increased by an impressive 105 per cent.

Energy Efficiency

24. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he has any new initiatives under preparation to improve Britain's record on energy efficiency.

Mr. Wakeham: Several substantial new initiatives are currently under way to improve energy efficiency. These include the "Making a Corporate Commitment Campaign" that I announced on 16 October, the "Helping the Earth begins at Home" campaign which the Secretary of State for the Environment and I launched on 4 November, the voluntary scheme for labelling of domestic appliances which I announced on 12 November, and the energy management assistance scheme which will come into effect next year.

Pylon Lines

25. **Mr. Devlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has received about the construction of pylon lines in Teesside.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend is considering applications for his consent to install two such lines on Teeside—between Norton and Saltholme and between Lackenby and Picton. In respect of the Norton—Saltholme proposals, four objections have been received from individuals within the time allowed for such objections and three objections, including one from a relevant planning authority, outside that time. In the case of the Lackenby—Picton proposals, two objections have been received from relevant planning authorities, and over 400 other objections from individuals, together with nine petitions.

Domestic Heating and Insulation

26. **Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has about the improvement in heating and insulation levels in domestic properties since 1981; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what information he has about the improvement in heating and insulation levels in domestic properties between 1981 and 1990.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Between 1981 and 1990 the level of loft insulation increased from 75 per cent. to 90 per cent,

the level of cavity wall insulation increased from 9 per cent. to 22 per cent. and the level of central heating ownership increased from 59 per cent. to 79 per cent.

Energy Prices

29. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what has been the change in the price of gas and electricity, respectively, since privatisation compared to the retail prices index.

Mr. Wakeham: Since privatisation in 1986, the average price for all supplies of gas from British Gas has increased by 10 per cent., compared with an increase in the retail prices index (RPI) of 30 per cent. over the same period. The average price of all electricity sold has increased by 3·7 per cent. since the regional electricity companies in England and Wales were privatised in the fourth quarter of 1990, whereas the RPI has increased by 3·2 per cent.

Redundant Pipelines

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any proposals to modify the Petroleum Act 1987 in relation to the dismantling of redundant structures and pipeline networks.

Mr. Moynihan: The Offshore Safety Bill makes provision for those powers in the Petroleum Act 1987 which relate to the ability to make safety regulations for the abandonment of offshore installations and pipelines to be made an "existing statutory provision" of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.

Wind-generated Electricity

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what progress has been made with regard to establishing a schedule of commencement dates for the additional wind-generated electricity capacity recently announced by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: Details of the commissioning dates associated with individual projects which obtained contracts under the 1991 Renewables Order are commercially confidential. However, all wind projects included under this order are planned to commission by mid-1993.

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether his Department's Energy Technology Support Unit has been invited to attend or make a presentation at the European wind energy conference to be held in Amsterdam.

Mr. Moynihan: The European wind energy conference was held in Amsterdam on 14-18 October 1991. Officials from my Department and the Energy Technology Support Unit attended and contractors to our programme contributed papers.

Energy Policy

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will place in the Library a copy of his Department's memorandum on energy policy which was submitted to the National Economic Development Council earlier in the current year.

Mr. Wakeham: I have today placed in the Library of the House a copy of the memorandum I submitted to the NEDC earlier this year. This addressed energy efficiency rather than general energy policy. For a succinct statement of the latter, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) on 1 December 1989 at column *451*.

Nuclear Facility Attachments

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many of the 40 agreed nuclear facility attachments mentioned in the European Commission reply 1358/90 of 14 March 1991, *Official Journal* of the European Communities C168, volume 34, of 27 June 1991, were negotiated for facilities in the United Kingdom; and if he will list the current number of any such agreements.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: At 14 March 1991, one facility attachment was in force at the Capenhurst works. A further facility attachment came into force for plutonium store 9 at Sellafield on 1 May 1991.

Euratom Safeguards

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he has received any indication from Euratom as to when the second bi-annual report on the operation of Euratom safeguards will be released; and what information was requested from, and through, his Department in preparation for this report.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have received no such indication.

Euratom has sought no information from my Department specifically in connection with this report.

Energy from Waste

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what contribution was made by his Department to the conference on "Energy from Waste, Clean, Green and Profitable", held at the CBI in London on 9 October 1991.

Mr. Moynihan: The energy technology support unit, on behalf of my Department, gave a paper and helped to organise and publicise the conference on energy from waste. An official from my Department attended.

Euratom

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy who are the United Kingdom appointees to the scientific and technical committee of Euratom.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: A list of all appointments to the current Euratom scientific and technical committee was published by the Commission in the *Official Journal* of the European Communities on 23 February 1989 (OJ 89/C44/02, volume 32). The United Kingdom members are:

Mr. H. J. Dunster (formerly Director, National Radiological Protection Board).
Dr. F. Feates (formerly Chief Inspector, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Pollution).
Dr. D. Pooley (Managing Director, Nuclear Business Group, AEA Technology).
Dr. B. Woodfine (formerly Managing Director, ANS Consultants Ltd.).
Dr. J. K. Wright (formerly Director of Health and Safety, Nuclear Electric).

Nuclear Energy

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will obtain for his Department's library a copy of "The International Politics of Nuclear Waste", by Andrew Blowers et al, published in August 1991; and if he will arrange for the library to subscribe to the newsletter "Soft Energy Europe" published by Ove of Copenhagen.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: A copy of "The International Politics of Nuclear Waste" is in my Department's library. My Department is also on the mailing list of the free newsletter, "Soft Energy Europe".

Nuclear Industry

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what consideration he has given to the implications for the work of his Department in its monitoring of the activities of the United Kingdom civil nuclear industry of the statement made by the Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Authority at its 35th conference.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Director-General's interesting and important statement to the 35th conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency covered a wide range of issues affecting all aspects of the agency's activities. The Government are reflecting on the implications of this statement, especially those aspects which may have an impact on our own nuclear industry. The United Kingdom will continue to take an active part in the discussions of the agency, on the questions raised by the director-general.

Monktonhall Colliery

Mr. Eadie: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what assurances were given to the Midlothian consortia, in discussions on Monktonhall colliery, in respect of a possible dispensation by the mines inspectorate on the permitted manpower that can be employed in private mines; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The limit on the number of men who may be employed below ground in a licensed mine was increased from 30 to 150 by the Coal Industry Act 1990. British Coal may therefore issue licences only in conformity with this manpower limit. Any changes to the limit would require primary legislation.

Mr. Eadie: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy who arranged the meeting between the Minister with responsibility for coal with the Midlothian consortia to discuss Monktonhall colliery in Midlothian; and who was present at the meeting.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I and my officials met representatives of the Monktonhall mineworkers consortium following a request from the leader of the City of Edinburgh council Conservative group.

Sizewell

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement about safety at Sizewell power station, Suffolk, in the light of recent flooding.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The incident to which my hon. Friend refers occurred on 3 December when two out of the station's four sea water cooling pumps were flooded. Both reactors were shut down normally by station staff and all post shut-down safety functions operated satisfactorily as intended. There were no injuries and there was no release of radioactivity.

The incident has been rated as a level 1 on the international nuclear event scale—the lowest rating.

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what representations he has had about both safety and life expectancy of the Sizewell power station, Suffolk, in the past six months; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend wrote to me about this recently and I will reply shortly. That apart, I have received one other representation from a constituent of my right hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor).

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what discussions he has had about the continued use of Sizewell A power station in Suffolk; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: This is a commercial matter for Nuclear Electric plc, which must of course continue to satisfy the Health and Safety Executive's nuclear installations inspectorate that the very high standards of safety required by them are being met.

Nuclear Waste (Accidents)

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether his Department has made any notifications to the EC on accidents involving nuclear waste in the United Kingdom since the decision of the European Council on this matter on 14 December 1987.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No. The situation warranting a formal report under the EC decision has not arisen in this country.

EMPLOYMENT

Tourism

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of Government expenditure on tourism is accounted for by grants to the British Tourist Authority, the English tourist board, Scottish tourist board and Welsh tourist board, respectively.

Mr. Jackson: Of the £60·9 million total in grants in aid which the Government have allocated in 1991-92 to these four statutory tourist bodies, some 48 per cent., £29·2 million, is for the British Tourist Authority; 24 per cent., £14·9 million for the English tourist board; 15 per cent., £9·1 million for the Scottish tourist board and the remaining 13 per cent., £7·7 million for the Wales tourist board.

Training (North-West)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are on youth training schemes in the north-west.

Mr. Jackson: In October, the latest date for which information is available, there were about 48,000 young people on youth training in the north-west region.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many job club entrants and leavers there were in the north-west between January and September 1991;

(2) how many young people in the north-west region have had their entitlement to bridging allowances terminated;

(3) how many people from the north-west region attended restart interviews between January and June 1991.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Youth Training

Ms. Short: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the number of accidents on the youth training scheme, fatal, major and minor for the period from January to March 1991.

Mr. Jackson: Table A gives the YT accident figures.

Quarter	*Fatal*	*Major*	*Minor*
January-March 1991	3	100	359

Notes:

(a) Employment Department figures for trainees have been compiled on a similar basis to those prepared by the Health and Safety Executive for employed persons. However, the Employment Department's figures include a number of accidents to trainees in educational establishments, and road traffic accidents, which would not have been reportable to the Health and Safety Executive had the individuals been employed.

(b) Major injuries are classified according to the severity criteria laid down in the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985. These regulations, which came into force on 1 April 1986, reclassified fractured wrists and ankles as major injuries. These were not classed as major injuries in the previous regulations, the Notification of Accidents and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1980 (NADOR).

Public Holidays

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment, further to his answer of 2 December, *Official Report, c. 27,* what status is accorded to the Queen's birthday and Liberation day as public holidays in the Netherlands.

Mr. Jackson: According to the Royal Dutch embassy in London the Queen's birthday and Liberation day are holidays taken by Netherlands' civil servants and some shops and offices. They are not considered national public holidays and their status appears to be similar to that of Her Majesty the Queen's official birthday on 15 June, for which United Kingdom civil servants are allowed a "privilege day" holiday.

Mr. Grocott: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list public holidays in each of the European Community member states, using the same definition as the European Commission in the *Official Journal* of 30 January 1991, OJ 91/C22/02.

Mr. Jackson: I am not aware of any general definition of "public holidays" used by the European Commission and the publication referred to by the hon. Member does not contain one. This is an area where member states' custom and practice varies considerably and illustrates the difficulties in putting forward hasty proposals for harmonisation.

Redundant Mineworkers

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many miners made redundant since 1985 *(a)* gained full-time employment within one year of redundancy and *(b)* remained unemployed for one year or more after redundancy.

Mr. Jackson: The information is not available.

Iraqi Nuclear Scientists

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what applications for temporary employment permits have been issued through his Department since 1970 for Iraqi nuclear scientists to work in *(a)* the United Kingdom nuclear industry and *(b)* nuclear research at United Kingdom academic institutions.

Mr. Forth: Since 1984, prior to which date information is not available, the Department's records show that no work permits have been issued for Iraqi nationals to work as nuclear scientists in either the United Kingdom nuclear industry or in nuclear research at United Kingdom academic institutions.

Special Needs Training

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what consideration was given to the training needs of people with special needs when the contracts with each training and enterprise council were negotiated by his Department.

Mr. Jackson: Training for people with special needs was covered in each training and enterprise council's business plan which formed part of its contract with the Department.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether any allowance is made in funding provided to training and enterprise councils to take account of the extra costs of providing training for people with special needs.

Mr. Jackson: Training and enterprise councils are contractually required to provide suitable training for people with special needs. The funding which the TEC receives from the Department takes account of the level of special training needs.

Accident, Isles of Scilly

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will direct the Health and Safety Executive to interview the crane driver injured in the accident which occurred on 13 July 1991 at St. Mary's, Isles of Scilly.

Mr. Jackson: No. The Health and Safety Executive already had sufficient information from its investigation to take up with the company the necessary action to prevent a recurrence of the accident.

Mr. A. A. Binns (Accident)

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the actions taken by the Health and Safety Executive in connection with the fatal accident to Mr. A. A. Binns on 6 November 1990 at Beeston, Nottingham, in the premises of Boots plc; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The Health and Safety Executive investigation into the fatal accident on 6 November 1990 to Mr. A. A. Binns at Boots plc., Beeston, Nottingham started on the day of the accident. HSE examined the nature of the task being carried out at the time of the accident and the working procedures being followed, interviewed witnesses, including the man working with Mr. Binns when the accident happened, examined the technical evidence available and also considered the experience of the fitters involved.

In addition, HSE prepared a report on the investigation for HM coroner and provided evidence and assistance at the inquest.

Earnings

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) how many people in each of the constituencies of Edmonton, Hornsey and Wood Green and Tottenham, are earning less than £3·40 an hour broken down by *(a)* gender, *(b)* manual and non-manual work and *(c)* age, expressed as numbers and as percentages of each group at all wage levels;

(2) how much many people in each of the constituencies of Edmonton, Hornsey and Wood Green and Tottenham, are earning less than £3·40 an hour for *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time work, expressed as numbers and as percentages of each group at all wage levels.

Mr. Jackson: The information available from the 1991 New Earnings Survey is given in the following table.

Full time employees on adult rates whose pay was unaffected by absence and whose gross hourly earnings (excluding overtime) were below £3·40
April 1991

	Enfield		*Haringey*	
	Sample numbers	*Per cent. of total*	*Sample numbers*	*Per cent. of total*
Men				
Manual	—	—	4	5·7
Non-manual	—	—	—	—
All	3	1·1	5	3·2
Women				
Manual	—	—	—	—
Non-manual	5	4·0	3	3·4
All	14	8·7	8	7·3
Adults				
Manual	10	6·5	9	9·8
Non-manual	7	2·6	4	2·3
All	17	4·0	13	4·9

Source: New Earnings Survey
Notes:
(1) "—" denotes sampling error too large or sample size too small for reliable estimate.
(2) Due to small sample numbers, the information may be unreliable.

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if he will show for part-timers the number of women earning less than £2 per hour, £2·20 per hour, £2·40 per hour, £2·50 per hour, £2·80 per hour, £3 per hour, £3·20 per hour, £3·40 per hour, £3·50 per hour, £4 per hour, £4·40 per hour, £4·50 per hour, £4·80 per hour, £4·90 per hour, £5 per hour and £5·10 per hour for (i) manual, (ii) non-manual and (iii) all women in (i) West Yorkshire, (ii) South Yorkshire, (iii) North Yorkshire, (iv) Humberside and (v) Great Britain;

(2) if he will show for full-time workers the percentages with hourly earnings less than £2·50, £3, £3·40, £3·50, £4, £4·40, £4·50, £4·80, £4·90, £5 and £5·10 per hour, giving the information for *(a)* women and *(b)* men, (i) manual, (ii) non manual and (iii) all, both including and excluding overtime in the following regions (1) West Yorkshire, (2) South Yorkshire, (3) North Yorkshire, (4) Humberside and (5) Great Britain;

(3) if he will show for full-time workers the percentage earning less than *(a)* £100, *(b)* £110, *(c)* £120, *(d)* £130, *(e)* £140, *(f)* £150, *(g)* £160, *(h)* £170, *(i)* £180, *(j)* £190 and *(k)* £200 giving the ratio for (i) women and (ii) men, (1) manual, (2) non-manual and (3) both including and excluding overtime in the following regions (A) West Yorkshire, (B) South Yorkshire, (C) North Yorkshire, (D) Humberside and (E) Great Britain.

Mr. Jackson: In view of the considerable amount of information requested, I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the number of employees who earn less than *(a)* £5,000, *(b)* £7,500, *(c)* £10,000, *(d)* £12,500, *(e)* £15,000, *(f)* £17,500 and *(g)* £20,000.

Mr. Jackson: The information available closest to that requested is published in table 14 of part A of the 1991 New Earnings Survey results, a copy of which is in the Library.

Health and Safety

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the Health and Safety Executive's policy with regard to interviewing injured persons when investigating an accident; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Health and Safety Executive inspectors use their professional judgment and discretion when deciding whether it is necessary to interview injured persons as part of their investigations into accidents. It is the policy of HSE's field operations division that, wherever possible, injured persons should be interviewed if legal proceedings are proposed or where it is alleged that the injured person has made a substantial contribution to the cause of the accident.

Schools

Mrs. Maureen Hicks: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how much funding is allocated to individual compacts operating in urban areas; and what consideration is being given to providing additional funding in response to the increasing numbers of schools now included in the original schemes.

Mr. Jackson: A compact operating in an urban programme authority (UPA) area in England receives up to £450,0000 of pump-priming funding over five years to assist its establishment. The existing funding arrangements encourage the expansion of the compact to cover further schools in the area, and to raise resources which will lead to self-sufficiency after Government funding ceases.

SCOTLAND

Haddington Bypass

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if his plans for the extension of the A1 dual carriageway from Tranent to Haddington will incorporate a new Haddington bypass; and if he will make a further statement on the time scale for this work.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The provision of a bypass of Haddington has been included as part of the feasibility study being conducted by consultants. The report which has been submitted will have to be considered very carefully and no decisions can yet be taken on whether or not a bypass should be incorporated in the first phase of the proposed extension of the A1 dual carriageway between Tranent and Haddington. Once a preferred scheme has been identified, decisions on the timing of the work will be dependent on satisfactory completion of the public consultation and statutory procedures. The views of those directly affected by the detailed proposals will be a major factor in how quickly the scheme can be taken forward. However, the Government are keen to see early progress on this route and, subject to the conclusions of the consultants' report, I expect to be able to publish draft orders for the scheme in the first half of next year.

Schoolchildren (Statistics)

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many children are on the school roll in Scotland; and how many of those receive free school meals in primary, secondary and special schools, respectively.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information requested, taken from the 1991 annual school meals census returns, is as follows:

Number of pupils

	On school register	Present on census day: Total	Present on census day: Receiving free meals
Primary	[1]438,688	[1]404,910	[1]72,437
Secondary	[1]283,326	[2]245,986	[2]23,505
Special	7,984	7,042	4,418

[1] Includes 9 special departments where special data has been included in primary school figures.
[2] Includes 10 special departments where special data has been included in secondary school figures.

CAP

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what response he proposes to make in respect of the Scottish agricultural college's preliminary report on common agricultural policy reform and its impact on the Borders region of Scotland.

Mr. Lang: My Department has received a copy of this report which was commissioned by Borders regional council. Its findings on the initial impact of the reform proposals are broadly in line with the Government's assessment and help to illustrate why the Government have opposed the discriminatory features of those proposals.

Crime Rates, Strathclyde

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide an updated version of the tables on the change in crime rates in Strathclyde since 1979 published in his answer of 30 October, *Official Report*, column *475-78*.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested is given in the following table.

Number of crimes and offences recorded by the police and percentage change: 1979-90
K Division, Strathclyde Regional Police Authority

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	Percentage change 1979-90
Total crimes and offences	25,585	29,068	28,784	31,390	30,256	33,534	32,758	34,372	36,125	33,301	36,007	37,332	46
Total crimes	15,064	16,224	17,330	19,491	19,113	21,633	21,350	22,031	23,346	21,758	23,555	25,943	72
Group 1 Non-sexual crimes of violence	394	337	419	443	499	575	584	595	820	714	630	749	90
Group 2 Crimes of indecency	134	173	178	148	128	163	162	130	150	117	138	134	0
Group 3 Crimes of dishonesty	11,415	12,430	13,662	15,500	14,831	16,526	15,998	16,594	17,901	16,738	18,048	19,948	75
Group 4 Fireraising, vandalism, etc.	2,966	3,081	2,817	3,103	3,342	4,007	4,141	4,238	3,857	3,443	3,912	3,967	34
Group 5 Other crimes	155	203	254	297	313	362	465	474	618	746	827	1,145	639
Total offences	10,521	12,844	11,454	11,899	11,143	11,901	11,408	12,341	12,779	11,543	12,452	11,389	8
Group 6 Miscellaneous offences	5,187	5,334	5,291	5,170	5,071	5,305	5,500	5,893	5,844	5,412	5,169	4,594	−11
Group 7 Motor vehicle offences	5,334	7,510	6,163	6,729	6,072	6,596	5,908	6,448	6,935	6,131	7,283	6,795	27

Number of crimes and offences recorded by the police and percentage change: 1979-90
Strathclyde regional police authority

	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	Percentage change 1979-90
Total crimes and offences	351,269	374,904	384,143	393,682	407,659	417,077	403,637	412,971	435,444	431,863	465,187	487,575	39
Total crimes	195,485	198,826	223,685	240,349	243,160	259,502	250,062	246,610	257,722	259,666	275,134	293,655	50
Group 1 Non-sexual crimes of violence	7,008	6,715	7,535	7,446	7,895	8,472	9,062	8,852	10,630	10,237	10,519	10,918	56
Group 2 Crimes of indecency	2,619	3,027	2,916	2,925	3,099	3,233	3,013	2,648	2,627	2,425	2,601	3,026	16
Group 3 Crimes of dishonesty	151,073	152,937	175,998	188,435	187,349	197,784	187,950	185,150	195,625	197,105	207,053	219,434	45
Group 4 Fireraising, vandalism, etc.	31,261	31,787	32,158	34,757	37,307	41,685	40,958	40,832	38,845	37,773	40,012	42,571	36
Group 5 Other crimes	3,524	4,360	5,078	6,786	7,510	8,328	9,079	9,128	9,995	12,126	14,949	17,706	402
Total offences	155,784	176,078	160,458	153,333	164,499	157,575	153,575	166,361	177,722	172,197	190,053	193,920	24
Group 6 Miscellaneous offences	68,908	69,069	66,592	64,798	63,880	63,662	65,013	66,414	69,297	64,460	65,453	64,024	−7
Group 7 Motor vehicle offences	86,876	107,009	93,866	88,535	100,619	93,913	88,562	99,947	108,425	107,737	124,600	129,896	50

Notes:
Data for 1979 have been regrouped on the basis of the current Scottish Office Home and Health Department classification of crimes and offences which was revised in 1980.
Prior to 1980, the return included crimes and offences reported to the Procurator Fiscal by agencies other than the police in which a prosecution was taken. Since 1980, these cases have been excluded. In 1982, there were about 6,400 such cases in the whole of Scotland, of a total of 762,483 crimes and offences.
Most of the increase in crimes in Group 5 is in recorded cases of re-offending while on bail which may in part be explained by changes in recording practice.

Stobhill Hospital

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the future of the urology department at Stobhill hospital.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Greater Glasgow health board's acute services strategy approved by my right hon. Friend in February this year envisaged the rationalisation of urology services on three sites, instead of the present five, by 1996. Thereafter, urology services currently provided from Stobhill hospital would be withdrawn.

Catholic Schools

Mr. Trimble: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland for each of the last 10 years which was the percentage of all the costs, capital and recurring, of all Catholic church schools paid by the trustees of such schools.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In Scotland, denominational education is provided in local authority schools, the costs of which are fully met by the authorities.

Disability

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many disabled people are currently employed in his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: The Scottish Office and associated departments currently employ 89 registered disabled persons as well as an unrecorded number of disabled persons who have chosen not to register.

The Scottish Office is fully aware of its obligations in this area. In common with other Government Departments it implements the policies set out in the code of practice on the employment of people with disabilities, and participates in the Employment Service's "More Than Just a Symbol" initiative.

Knitwear and Textiles

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he intends to make to ensure that Scottish knitwear and textile businesses receive adequate and fair support from the European Community.

Mr. Lang: The EC Commission is giving consideration to a Community initiative (RETEX) to provide European structural fund grants in textile areas. I am drawing the Commission's attention to the high dependence on textiles employment in the right hon. Gentleman's constituency. It is not yet clear how far the proposed initiative may offer assistance to textiles businesses themselves, but in that event I would attach importance to avoiding any unfair competition against Scottish producers.

Capital Expenditure

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the capital expenditure on central institutions in cash and constant prices in every year since 1979.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is set out in the table:

£ million

	Cash	1990-91 prices
1979-80	3·4	7·3
1980-81	4·8	8·8
1981-82	6·6	11·1
1982-83	6·0	9·4
1983-84	6·7	10·0
1984-85	7·0	10·0
1985-86	9·1	12·3
1986-87	17·2	22·4
1987-88	15·9	19·7
1988-89	10·5	12·1
1989-90	12·2	13·2
1990-91	14·9	14·9

Notes:

1. Capital expenditure includes expenditure on buildings and major items of equipment.
2. The 12 central institutions together with the five colleges of education form the grant-aided colleges and are treated as one sector for funding purposes.
3. The figures reflect the transfer into the grant-aided colleges sector of Napier Polytechnic of Edinburgh and Glasgow Polytechnic on 1 September 1985 and the transfer to the local authority sector of Leith Nautical College with effect from 1 August 1987.
4. The figures reflect the inevitably uneven pattern of expenditure on capital projects.

DEFENCE

Verification Demands

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his verification research centre at Blacknest has made any recent substantive contribution to the outstanding verification demands of *(a)* the START 1 agreement, *(b)* a comprehensive nuclear test ban draft and *(c)* an international fissile material store for materials removed from redundant nuclear warheads.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Blacknest facility of the Atomic Weapons Establishment continues to conduct work of international importance in exploring how seismology can contribute to the verification of a comprehensive test ban treaty.

Scientists Against Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what publications produced by Scientists Against Nuclear Weapons are held in his Department's library; and in what numbers.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: MOD headquarters library can find no record of any publications produced by Scientists Against Nuclear Weapons, but holds one copy of three publications produced by Scientists Against Nuclear Arms (SANA): "Ground Zero"; "Star Wars"; and "Nuclear Illusions". It also holds two copies of the SANA publication "Nuclear Winter". Two of these titles, "Nuclear Winter" and "Star Wars", later formed the basis of expanded commercial publications and two copies of "Nuclear Winter" (Polity Press, 1985) and three copies of "Star Wars" (Penguin, 1985) are held by the MOD headquarters library.

Nuclear Testing

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, further to his oral replies to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Rutherglen (Mr. McAvoy) of 19 November, *Official Report*, column 136, if he will list all the relevant international treaties on nuclear testing; what are the reasons for the practice of refusing to confirm or deny that a British nuclear warhead test is to take place; how the operational safety of nuclear weapons benefits from nuclear tests conducted at the Nevada nuclear test site; and what proportion of British nuclear tests conducted at Nevada have been for the purpose of safety tests.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: International treaties related directly to nuclear testing are:

a. The Partial Test Ban Treaty;
b. The Peaceful Nuclear Explosions Treaty;
c. The Threshold Test Ban Treaty.

The United Kingdom is party only to the first of these. The second and third are bilateral between the United States and Soviet Union. As United Kingdom nuclear tests are carried out at the United States test site in Nevada, however, we invariably respect their provisions. In addition, nuclear testing is covered in the preamble to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

For reasons of safety and national security it has been the practice of successive Governments not to make a prior announcement of forthcoming United Kingdom nuclear tests. The development of new safety features is an important element of the United Kingdom nuclear test programme, but I am not prepared to give further details.

Environmental Exhibition

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration was given to using recycled or recyclable materials and low energy lighting at his Department's exhibition stall at the recent environmental exhibition at Olympia,

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: In accordance with the Department's policy of promoting recycling and the use of recycled products, the MOD publications made available to the public at the Olympia environmental exhibition were all printed on some form of recycled paper. The exhibition stand itself was fitted with energy-saving lighting.

Non-proliferation Treaty

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will give further details concerning paragraph 323 of the Annual Statement on the Defence Estimates vol. I, stating that a final consensus document on the fourth review conference of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty was blocked by the Mexican delegation.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have nothing further to add to the statement made at paragraph 323 of the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1991.

Territorial Army Volunteer Reserve

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to be able to announce the percentage changes in the TAVR in Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland and England.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Consultations with those concerned about the proposed restructuring of the Territorial Army were completed recently. Recommendations are being prepared as a result. It is hoped to make a further announcement on the future organisation and structure of the TA shortly.

Royal Naval Reserve

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what savings in actual and real terms have been produced by cuts in the Royal Naval Reserve in the last three years; and what savings he projects in the future by cuts that are now under consideration by the Admiralty board;

(2) what sum has been identified as the cost of the Royal Naval Reserve in each of the last 10 years, in actual and real terms;

(3) what he estimates will be the cost of the Royal Naval Reserve in the year ending 31 March 1992.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence will write to my hon. Friend.

Household Division

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the broad outline of his plan to cut the public duties of the Household Division.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have nothing to add to the answer I gave my hon. Friend on 14 October at columns *60-61*.

Armed Forces (Injuries Compensation)

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will bring forward proposals to amend the present legislation concerning injuries compensation for armed forces personnel so as to put the onus of proof for negligence upon the Ministry of Defence rather than on the injured personnel.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are no plans to introduce such legislation.

Pearl Harbour

Mr. Amos: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps his Department has taken to mark the 50th anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl harbour and to commemorate the allied service men and civilians killed in the war by the Japanese; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My Department has not been invited to participate in any activities organised by the United States to mark the Japanese attack on Pearl harbour. It is our usual practice to remember personnel killed in past conflicts at the annual Remembrance day ceremony at the Cenotaph.

HMS Revenge

Mr. Hind: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his plans for the future of HMS Revenge.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: HMS Revenge will be paid off at the end of her present commission.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Means-tested Benefits

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what number and proportion of his Department's work force, including its agencies, have recourse to means-tested benefit top-ups.

Mr. Jack: On 31 October 1991, the latest date for which figures are available, there were 684 families receiving family credit where the main earner or their partner was a member of staff of the Department of Social Security. Staff might have an entitlement to housing benefit and community charge benefit, but as these benefits are administered by local authorities, figures for the numbers of departmental staff receiving them are not available.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families with children will be brought into means-tested benefits in 1992-93 as a result of the benefit uprating statement of 21 October 1991.

Mr. Jack: Estimates of those unable to receive income-related benefits immediately before the uprating, but who could qualify for awards, often for very small amounts, as a result of the statement are as follows:

	Number
Income Support	15,000
Community Charge Benefit	25,000
Housing Benefit	5,000
Family Credit	70,000

These figures are rounded to the nearest 5,000 benefit units and are derived from modelling using data drawn from the 1986-87-88 family expenditure surveys.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans the Government have to publicise the changes to the cold weather payment system announced last June.

Mr. Scott: On 14 June we announced major improvements to the cold weather payments scheme including automatic payment, removal of the need to make a claim, abolition of the capital rule and introduction of a forward trigger. On 23 July we announced improvements to the weather station linkages. All these improvements were publicised again at the launch of the "Keep Warm Keep Well" campaign on 16 October. Each Benefits Agency district office will place announcements in the local press informing people when payments are to be made under the scheme.

Pensions

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what plans he has to enable the retirement pension to be paid from the date on which a person reaches pensionable age, rather than from the first payday; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what would be the additional expenditure incurred by paying the state pension from the date of retirement in terms of *(a)* payments of retirement pension and *(b)* additional costs of administration.

Miss Widdecombe: We have no plans to do so. Retirement pension is a regular weekly payment and is not paid for part weeks. The current provisions ensure that everyone is entitled to a full week's pension within a week of retirement. Having fixed pay days for different benefits enables the Post Office to spread the load over the week and ensure that it has the necessary cash available to provide a satisfactory service.

The additional expenditure incurred by paying the state pension for the odd days between the 60/65th birthday and the first pay day is estimated to be £9 million[1]. This figure does not include any corresponding savings in income support. The additional administration costs are estimated to be £10,000.

[1] Costs are at April 1992 benefit rate terms and are for 1992-93.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will conduct an inquiry into how much housing benefit has been paid to tenants towards the cost of their accommodation which has then not been paid to their landlords;

(2) what information he has as to the amount of money owing to private landlords as a result of the failure of tenants receiving housing benefit to pay their landlords for rent due.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department does not collect information relating to third parties, such as the level of debts owed to landlords. Representations received from landlords and their organisations indicate that the number of housing benefit recipients who persistently default on rent payments is relatively small. Regulations already give local authorities powers to pay benefit direct to a person's landlord, for example where rent arrears have accrued or where social or medical problems clearly indicate that help with budgeting is needed. We therefore have no plans to conduct an inquiry into the alleged misuse of housing benefit by private tenants.

Carer's Premium

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether details of the carer's premium have now been entered on to the mainframe computer system; and whether this information is available to all his Department's officers who consider income support claims.

Miss Widdecombe: The administration of income support is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Disability Benefits

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out the transitional arrangements for claimants currently in receipt of mobility and attendance allowance after April 1992 when the disability living allowance and disability working allowance benefits come into being.

Mr. Scott: The arrangements are set out in the Social Security (Introduction of Disability Living Allowance) Regulations 1991. All current beneficiaries will be sent a mailshot in January about the introduction of disability living allowance in April. People who are in receipt of either mobility allowance or attendance allowance or both will be automatically transferred to the comparable components and rates of disability living allowance. People who are in receipt of one or other of the current benefits will also be invited to claim the other component if they think they will be entitled to it. If they do wish to claim, they will be able to do so on a special "one component" claim form, rather than needing to request a general review of their benefit.

No transitional arrangements are needed for disability working allowance as it is an entirely new benefit.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many applications for invalid care allowance were received in 1988, 1989 and 1990; and how many people are currently in receipt of invalid care allowance.

Mr. Scott: The information requested is shown in the table.

Year	*Claims*	*Numbers in Receipt*
1988-89	53,000	112,000 (31 March 1989)
1989-90	53,000	123,000 (31 March 1990)
1990-91	63,000	136,000 (31 March 1991)
		155,000 (31 September 1991)

Family Credit

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families receiving family credit are *(a)* tenants or *(b)* homeowners.

Mr. Jack: This information is not available from family credit records. A survey by NOP for the National Audit Office report about support for low-income families published in January 1991 suggests that around two thirds of families receiving family credit are tenants and around one third are owner occupiers.

Algebra Group

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he last met the Algebra group; who attended; what was discussed; when he will next meet its members; and if he will make a statement.

Miss Widdecombe: The "Algebra" group comprises officials from several central Government Departments and representatives of local authority associations. Its discussions are part of the process of implementing the Government's community care reforms as set out in the White Paper "Caring for People". Meetings are held at official level only; Ministers do not attend. I understand the next meeting will take place on 12 December.

Income Support

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what savings have resulted from the abolition of income support for 16 and 17-year-olds in each year since 1988.

Mr. Jack: For the individual the value of training allowance at the time of the policy change was greater than the income support payable to the young people concerned. Expenditure on youth training amounted to £1 billion in the first full year. As a consequence this meant that benefit payments to 16 and 17-year-olds were reduced by £51 million in 1988-89, £88 million in 1989-90 and £83 million in 1990-91.

Young People (Benefits)

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the total income of an unemployed person aged 18 to 24 years through income support and housing benefit would be if he had taken a room at £40 per week.

Miss Widdecombe: The income support applicable amount for a single person aged between 18 and 24 years who is not entitled to any premiums is £31·40. A person in receipt of income support is usually entitled to maximum housing benefit, that is, 100 per cent. of eligible rent. The overall benefit entitlement of such a person with housing costs of £40 would therefore be £71·40. This assumes a rent of £40 which is fully eligible for housing benefit and is not considered unreasonably expensive by the local authority.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what were the findings of his Department's research into 16 and 17-year-olds, and their benefits about the means they used to survive;

(2) if he will review his decision to withdraw benefits from 16 and 17-year-olds who are unable to obtain a youth training place to take account of the findings of the fifth report of the Select Committee on Employment, 1990-91, about training and enterprise councils and the youth training guarantee;

(3) what plans he has to review severe hardship applications following the large increase in applications between July 1990 and September 1991;

(4) what plans he has to change the rules regarding severe hardship payments in response to his Department's research into 16 and 17-year-olds and their benefits with particular reference to young pregnant women;

(5) what his Department's research into 16 and 17-year-olds and their benefits found about the incidence of physical or sexual abuse they had suffered;

(6) whether his proposal to make a specific assistant manager in each of his Department's district offices responsible for services to 16 and 17-year-olds has been implemented.

Mr. Jack: The vast majority of the 1·4 million young people between the age of 16 and 17 are able to exercise their positive choices by remaining in full-time education, getting a job, or entering youth training. However, the Government recognise that a minority need particular help. Income support is available at any time to particular groups such as lone parents, couples with children, carers, or those incapable of work through disablement. Pregnant young women are also automatically entitled to income support during the 11 weeks immediately prior to their expected date of confinement as well as at any time during their pregnancy if they are incapable of work or attending YT. However, pregnancy is not itself an incapacity and training and enterprise councils are expected to provide suitable training to meet the needs of this group.

Additionally, help is also available to young people seeking a YT place but who are at risk of severe hardship. Of the 1·4 million 16 and 17-year-olds, fewer than 5,000 are in receipt of income support under the severe hardship provision at any one time. When this policy was introduced the Government agreed to monitor its operation and as part of the exercise commissioned research from the MORI organisation. The findings were detailed in their report "A Survey of 16 and 17 year old applicants for Severe Hardship Payments" and a copy of this work was placed in the Library in July. The study comprehensively analysed all aspects of this policy.

Also in July I announced in response to the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) on 16 July at columns *134-36* that the Benefits Agency would be taking a series of measures to make further improvements in the operation of the severe hardship provision, including the assignment of responsibility for 16 and 17-year-olds to a specific assistant manager in each district. Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, has informed me that all these changes have been put into effect. In addition the Benefits Agency is holding a series of conferences for the assistant managers concerned to share good practice and to encourage effective liaison with other agencies concerned, including the careers service, which was also represented. It is likely that these will generate further ideas for improvements in service to young people.

The Government remain committed to ensuring that the YT guarantee is met. A suitable youth training place remains the sensible and positive option for young people who have not had the opportunity of taking up a job. In the light of the foregoing, we have no plans to review the policy on 16 and 17-year-olds, although we continue to monitor the operation of the policy closely and seek administrative improvements wherever possible.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the entitlement to housing benefit of *(a)* a person aged 18 to 24 years with an income of £2,265 who had taken a room at £40 per week for accommodation and *(b)* a person in the same position with a debt of £580.

Miss Widdecombe: The housing benefit entitlement of a single person aged 18 to 24 years not entitled to any premiums, with an income of £2,265 and a rent liability of £40 would be £35·42. This calculation is based on the assumption that the income quoted is net earnings to which a disregard of £5 a week is appropriate. It also assumes that the amount of rent for which the person is liable is fully eligible for housing benefit and is not considered to be unreasonably expensive by the local authority. The benefit entitlement of a person in the same circumstances with a debt of £580 would be identical.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide details of the costs of administering the severe hardship payment scheme and the amount of severe hardship benefit paid out in the last year for which figures are available.

Mr. Jack: The information on these costs of income support paid to 16 and 17-year-olds under the severe hardship provisions is not separately identifiable.

Attendance Allowance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is Her Majesty's Government's policy towards the charges being levied on attendance allowance for local authority services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: No restrictions are placed upon the uses to which attendance allowance may be put once it is in

payment. Where extra costs are incurred because of a person's disability the allowance is intended to be available to help meet them.

Local authorities have discretionary powers to charge for domiciliary and day care services. If charges are made authorities must take into account what it is reasonably practicable for an individual to pay. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health proposes to issue guidance to authorities about the use of these powers. We would not expect local authorities to make charges which undermine the purpose of attendance allowance, and after April 1992 disability living allowance.

Social Fund Manual

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has for the future format of the social fund manual.

Mr. Scott: The revised social fund manual has been published today. In the new manual, the Secretary of State's directions and guidance to social fund officers have been separated from the purely procedural and administrative matters. The opportunity has also been taken to revise the style of English used, to make it simpler and easier to understand.

Three changes of substance have been made in the course of the revision. Social fund direction 4 has been revised to clarify the fact that people can apply for community care grants for the care of prisoners on home leave. Direction 16 has been revised so that full-time students will be eligible for crisis loans throughout the year only to alleviate the consequences of a disaster. This is in line with the Government policy to fund students through the educational maintenance system rather than through social security benefits. Finally, the guidance on suggested amounts to award for community care grants has been deleted.

Copies of the revised social fund manual, comprising the social fund officer's guide, the social fund administration guide, the funeral and maternity payments guide and the cold weather payments booklet, have been placed in both Libraries today. The new manual is effective from 16 December 1991.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 10 December 1991

TRANSPORT

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the precise alignment and siting of stations along the proposed high-speed rail link.

Mr. Freeman: As my right hon. and learned Friend explained in answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Crayford (Mr. Evennett) on 5 December at column *188*, work on defining the line should begin in the new year. That will include the location of stations. The proposals will be published for consultation when they have been developed in enough detail.

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what facilities will be constructed to connect the east coast line with passenger and freight traffic from the channel tunnel rail link.

Mr. Freeman: Both passenger and freight trains will be able to run initially from the channel tunnel on to the east coast main line via existing lines. British Rail plans to link the proposed new line between the tunnel and London to lines north of London, including the east coast main line, by constructing an international station at King's Cross. The Bill containing the powers for this station and the connecting lines is before Parliament.

London Underground Stations

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much London Underground Ltd. have spent on capital works at each of Bounds Green, Finsbury Park, Highgate, Manor House, Seven Sisters, Tottenham Hale, Turnpike Lane and Wood Green tube stations in the periods 1980-85, 1985-90, and 1990-91.

Mr. Freeman: The Government do not hold information on investment at individual underground stations.

Lane Rental Road Maintenance

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the economic savings from lane rental road maintenance.

Mr. Chope: We estimate that lane rental has resulted in traffic delay savings of some £70 million, at a cost in contractors' bonuses of some £13 million, from its introduction in 1984 to the end of 1990, the latest date for which figures are available.

Navigational Aids

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what information is available on the value of traffic and the degree of risk associated with navigational aids in United Kingdom waters in accordance with the obligations of the Salas convention 1974; and if he will publish it;

(2) what are his estimates of the number of users of navigational aids in the following categories *(a)* merchant ships calling at United Kingdom ports, *(b)* merchant ships not calling at United Kingdom ports, *(c)* fishing vessels, *(d)* leisure craft from United Kingdom ports, *(e)* leisure craft from foreign ports, *(f)* naval vessels and *(g)* other vessels; and the amount of financial contribution made by each category.

Mr. McLoughlin: The need for navigational aids in relation to the volume of traffic and the degree of risk is regularly reviewed by the general lighthouse authorities in consultation with the users and the Department of Transport. Estimates of user numbers by category are not available. In 1990-91, light dues collected in the United Kingdom from merchant shipping calling at United Kingdom ports were about £42 million; from fishing vessels £1·1 million; from tugs £65,000—United Kingdom —and £47,000—foreign; and from pleasure craft £23,000 —United Kingdom—and £1,000—foreign. Dues are not collected from ships which do not call at United Kingdom ports. The Ministry of Defence also contributed £1·4 million for use of the Decca service, of which £0·3 million related to 1990-91.

A45 (Traffic Flows)

Mr. Irvine: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what were the traffic flows along the A45 *(a)* between Stowmarket and Ipswich, *(b)* over the Orwell bridge and *(c)* between Ipswich and Felixstowe in 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990 and 1991, respectively.

Mr. Chope: The information is not available in exactly the format requested. The following figures are the average annual daily traffic—AADT—flows between each of the major junctions on these sections of the trunk road.

	1985	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*	*[1]1991*
(a) Stowmarket to A45/A140 junction	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	20,900	22,500
A45/A140 junction to A45/A1156 junction	29,400	29,500	29,600	32,600	33,400	33,200	35,000
A45/A1156 junction to A34/A12 junction	15,800	17,400	22,900	24,300	24,900	24,200	27,000

	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	[1]1991
(b) Orwell bridge	20,900	24,100	23,700	26,900	29,700	32,100	32,000
(c) A45/A12/A1156 junction to A45/A154 junction	21,700	23,200	23,700	24,400	25,600	25,700	24,800
A45/A154 junction to Felixstowe port	11,800	12,900	13,300	14,100	15,900	16,200	15,900

n/a = Not available.
[1] To end October.

Gisburn Bypass

Mr. Carr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when proposals to construct a bypass around the village of Gisburn in Lancashire will be announced; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: There are no proposals to bypass Gisburn in our current forward programme.

Copster Green (Traffic)

Mr. Carr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he intends to introduce a speed limit along the A59 through the village of Copster Green.

Mr. Chope: No.

Mr. Carr: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals he has for introducing traffic calming measures along the A59 through the village of Copster Green.

Mr. Chope: None, but we shall keep the needs of this road under review.

Trust Ports

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether he will ensure that the sale of the successor company by a trust port board will be subject to sufficient safeguards to prevent the subsequent reorganisation of the successful bidder's other business in such a manner as to allow any of their debt repayments to be funded by the revenue and profits of the successor company;

(2) what advice he has given to trust port boards to ensure that any successful bid for a trust port does not lead to revenue and reserves being used to fund debt payments for other trading enterprises;

(3) what steps he has taken to ensure that the subsequent actions of a successful bidder for a trust port do not lead to the assets, revenue or profits of the successor company being used to fund debt incurred in another company in which the successful bidder or his backers have a substantial stake;

(4) whether he will require any successful bidder for a trust port to demonstrate that any other company in which he or his backers have any stake does not contain repayment schedules for interest on debt which might in due course prejudice the successful operation of that company.

Mr. McLoughlin: The advice given to trust port boards makes it clear that, where trust ports intend to sell their undertakings to a single bidder, they are expected to prepare and agree with my right hon. and learned Friend a statement of objectives for the sale. These objectives will include the desirability of encouraging the disposal of the whole or a substantial part of the equity share capital of the successor company to managers or other employees of the company, and the obtaining of the best open market price for the port, taking into account any other agreed objectives, for example plans for the future of the port. In assessing complete bids, trust port boards will clearly wish to satisfy themselves that a bidder is both prepared and able to meet these objectives.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether, in relation to the privatisation of ports, he intends to operate a price preference in favour of bids from management and employee buy-out teams; what discussions have taken place, and are taking place, with potential management and buy-out teams; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what is meant by the term substantial employee share ownership in respect of the current trust ports privatisation programme; and if he will make a statement;

(3) whether it is his policy to support the principle of employee share ownership in the current trust ports privatisation programme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Under section 5(3) of the Ports Act 1991 my right hon. and learned Friend is obliged to

"have particular regard to the desirability of encouraging the disposal of the whole or a substantial part of the equity share capital of the successor company to—

(a) managers of other persons employed by the company; or

(b) another company the whole or a substantial part of whose equity share capital is owned by managers or other persons so employed."

It is for the trust port boards in the first instance to assess the bids for their ports, including those from management and employee buy-out teams, and to put their recommendation as to the successful bidder to my right hon. and learned Friend for his consent. The term "substantial" occurs frequently in legislation and falls to be interpreted in the particular context and circumstances of each case. Each trust port board will need to consider each bid against the overall objectives of sale agreed for its port, including those relating to employee share ownership. My right hon. and learned Friend has made it clear that he is prepared to consider a limited price preference for a management and employee buy-out team in individual cases and in the light of the particular circumstances of each case.

Plutonium

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he holds regarding the outcome of the recent study by the International Atomic Energy Authority into the need for more stringent tests on fire resistance and impact damage of packages used for the air transport of plutonium; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 9 December 1991]:* The IAEA review of the transport of radioactive materials by air is still taking place. Any proposals for a more stringent test regime for air transport will be submitted for inclusion in the comprehensive revision of the transport regulations, due for publication in 1996.

Ship Accident (Radioactive Materials)

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will obtain a copy for his departmental library of the study by the International Union of Marine Insurers on the financial impact of an accident in the southern sector of the North sea involving a ship carrying radioactive materials.

Mr. McLoughlin *[holding answer 9 December 1991]:* A copy of this study is on order.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Magistrates (Briefing)

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Attorney-General what information he has on the nature and extent of training or briefing for magistrates in the Coventry area in connection with the poll tax.

The Attorney-General: No training was provided centrally for magistrates. In the Coventry area the justices' clerk arranged a seminar for magistrates and a note was sent to those magistrates who were unable to attend.

Maxwell Companies

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Attorney-General if the Official Solicitor will use his powers on behalf of the beneficiaries of the pension funds of *(a)* Mirror Group Newspapers plc and *(b)* Maxwell Communication Corporation to obtain a Mareva injunction and an Anton Piller order to secure a freeze of all assets and bank accounts and documents of all companies, trusts and family members associated with the late Robert Maxwell.

The Attorney-General: The Official Solicitor has no general power to intervene on behalf of the beneficiaries of a trust. The primary duty of safeguarding and recovering assets lies with the trustees of the pension fund who have the right to take action for injunctive relief.

ENVIRONMENT

Property Services Agency

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those buildings held for occupation by the Property Services Agency which are vacant; and if he will indicate those premises that have been vacant for more than one year.

Mr. Yeo: The following vacant buildings are currently held for occupation by PSA Services:

(1) TCS Workshop, Poston Road, London
(2) TCS Workshop, Gypsey Lane, Keynsham
(3) TCS Workshop, London Road, Biggleswade
(4) TCS Workshop, Mitchell Way, Portsmouth
(5) TCS Stores, Milton Park, Didcot
(6) Lafone House, Leather Market Street, London
(7) 34/36 St. Leonards Road, Eastbourne
(8) 54/56 Compton Street, London EC1

Items (1) to (5) are vacant following the decision to close the Crown Suppliers. Items (6) to (8) are vacant following rationalisation of accommodation held by PSA Services.

Only item (8) has been vacant for more than 12 months.

Priority Homeless Statistics

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each local authority, and by region in England since 1979-80, the total number of priority homeless acceptances where there was a child or pregnant adult, and the total number of two-bedroom or larger dwellings available to local authorities for new permanent secure tenants, excluding transfers, but including nominations to housing associations.

Mr. Yeo: I have placed in the Library a table showing the information derived from local authorities' annual housing investment programme returns for 1989-90 and 1990-91, the only years for which it has been collected. The total number of two-bedroom or larger dwellings available has been taken as the number let in each year and does not include any dwellings kept vacant for repairs or for other reasons.

House Construction

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide his estimate of the current average construction cost for *(a)* a council house in each of his Department's regions and *(b)* a housing association house in each housing corporation region.

Mr. Yeo: The average construction costs, based on accepted tenders, of council houses and bungalows—excluding flats—in each of the Department's regions for the year July 1990 to June 1991 were:

	£
North	43,400
Yorkshire and Humberside	40,400
East Midlands	33,400
Eastern	43,300
Greater London	71,500
South East	47,900
South West	40,200
West Midlands	37,700
North West (including Cumbria)	54,900

The figures available for housing associations represent the total cost, including land acquisition and on-costs, and cover flats as well. They are not therefore directly comparable with those for council property. With that proviso, the average unit costs for housing association self-contained new build schemes approved under the Housing Corporation's approved development programme in the year April 1990 to March 1991 were:

	Average total unit cost £	Average public funded cost £
London and Home Counties (North East)	96,900	80,400
London and Home Counties (North West)	111,200	92,900
London and Home Counties (South)	89,700	73,500
West Region	62,900	49,400
East Midlands	54,900	41,100
West Midlands	54,600	39,500
North East	52,400	39,200
North West	54,000	40,700
Merseyside	55,300	42,300

Rents-to-Mortgages Scheme

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance he has issued to the Commission for the New Towns in Basildon about publicising the rents-to-mortgages scheme by advertising on local television.

Mr. Yeo: It has not been necessary to advertise on television: the Commission for the New Towns, whose responsibility it is to publicise the scheme in Basildon, is in direct contact with all the eligible households.

British Waterways Board

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has for the privatisation of the British Waterways Board.

Mr. Trippier: There are no such plans, but privatisation is always an option to be considered for public undertakings.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the chairman and the chief executive of the British Waterways Board commissioned management consultants to consider ways in which the board could be privatised; and what were the total fees paid to the consultants for this assignment.

Mr. Trippier: There has been no such commission.

Chlorofluorocarbons

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the chlorine loading potential of all CFCs and HCFCs for the time intervals of 10, 20 and 50 years.

Mr. Baldry: Chlorine loading potentials, calculated on a steady state emission basis, have been published in report No. 20 of the World Meteorological Organisation global ozone research and monitoring project, "Scientific Assessment of Stratospheric Ozone: 1989", as follows:

Species	Chlorine loading potentials
CFC-11	1·0
CFC-12	1·3
CFC-113	1·11
CFC-114	1·8
CFC-115	2·0
HCFC-22	0·14
HCFC-123	0·016
HCFC-124	0·04
HFC-125	0·0
HFC-134a	0·10
HFCF-142b	0·14
HFC-143a	0·0
HFC-152a	0·0
CCl_4	1·0
CH_3CCl_3	0·11

The Montreal protocol scientific assessment, due to be published early next year may provide some time dependent values for either chlorine loading potential or the related ozone depletion potential.

Ozone Depletion

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list all the studies he has undertaken or commissioned on the human and environmental effects of ozone depletion over the United Kingdom; and whether he has any plans for future research in this area.

Mr. Baldry: In 1989 my Department placed a research contract with the University of Lancaster, worth £220,000 over three years, to investigate the effect of increased UVB radiation on the ecophysiology of plants and to identify a range of sensitive UVB indicator species. A scientific meeting will be held in April 1992 on UVB effects on biota with support from my Department. Assessment of the effects of UVB on health or agriculture are matters for the Department of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food, respectively.

Sellafield

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will obtain for his Departmental library a copy of the transcript and videocassette of the "World in Action" programme on radioactive pollution from Sellafield broadcast on 2 December.

Mr. Heseltine: The Department has a videocassette of the programme.

Construction Products Regulations

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement on the implementation of the construction products directive; and what staffing and administrative resources are available for the supervision of the construction products regulations 1991, SI 1991, No. 1620, and circular 13/91 from his Department.

Mr. Yeo: The Construction Products Regulations 1991 —SI 1991 No. 1620—come into force in the United Kingdom on 27 December this year. The enforcement of these regulations is the responsibility of weights and measures authorities in Great Britain and of district councils in Northern Ireland.

The manpower and expenditure implications for enforcement authorities were taken into account in determining the 1991-92 provision for total standard spending by English and Welsh local authorities. For Scotland account was taken in the Scottish local authority aggregate external finance settlement for 1991-92. In Northern Ireland the Department of the Environment

(NI) has agreed to reimburse councils towards the 1991-92 costs of additional enforcement measures arising from the regulations.

The level of provision of staff and administrative resources in individual authorities is, of course, a matter for local determination.

In addition some central Government resources are being committed in support of the supervision of the regulations. In particular the Department of the Environment is required to inform the European Commission of action taken by enforcement authorities that restricts the free movement and marketing of construction products subject to the regulations.

Homelessness

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what studies he has made of homelessness in Leicester.

Mr. Yeo: The primary responsibility for dealing with homelessness in Leicester rests with Leicester city council. The hon. Member will recall that I met him on 24 July, together with a delegation from Leicester city council, to discuss homelessness in Leicester, and that my hon. Friend, the Minister for Housing and Planning visited the city on 25 September. On the question of people sleeping rough in the city, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 26 November at column *476*.

Building Regulations

Mr. Robert B. Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to implement the conclusions of his Department's review of the Building Regulations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has today laid regulations to revoke and replace the Building Regulations 1985 and to consolidate all subsequent amendments to those regulations.

The Building Regulations 1991 implement the final conclusions of a major review of both the technical and procedural requirements of the Building Regulations.

The main changes arising from the technical review relate to part A—structure, part B—fire safety, part C—site preparation and resistance to moisture, part E—resistance to the passage of sound, part G—hygiene, part K—stairs, ramps and guards and part M—access and facilities for disabled people and a new part N—glazing, materials and protection.

The fire safety requirements—part B—and their supporting guidance document have been revised to reflect changes in building form and fire protection technology. These requirements maintain, and in certain respects enhance, the existing level of life safety. The replacement of the mandatory rules on means of escape in case of fire by guidance which is much wider in scope will introduce flexibility in this important area of building control, as will changes to the guidance on structural fire precautions and the introduction of provisions for sprinklers. Guidance on the fitting of smoke detectors in all new dwellings is included, and there is a new requirement on the provision of access and facilities for the fire service which will assist firefighters in the protection of life.

New guidance on the requirements concerning contaminated land—part C—in conjunction with two new Building Research Establishment publications, gives advice on dealing with the risks associated with radon and landfill gas when building in those areas likely to be affected by these gases.

The provisions relating to access and facilities for disabled people—part M—have been extended to cover all floors of non-domestic buildings and most extensions, and now address some of the needs of people with hearing and sight impairments.

The introduction of a new requirement—part N—seeks to reduce the risks associated with glazing in buildings, and will apply to all conservatories and porches whether or not they are otherwise exempt from the regulations.

Other important changes include extending the requirement relating to large span roofs to shopping malls, the extension of sound insulation requirements to flat conversions, new guidance on stairs and the risks associated with young children, and the revision of provisions governing the installation of unvented hot water systems.

The procedural review resulted in a number of detailed changes, the most significant of which is the introduction of completion certificates. This new requirement will enable people undertaking building work to request that the local authority provide a compliance certificate on the satisfactory completion of the controlled work. Such certificates, which are already being issued by some local authorities on a voluntary basis, should provide reassurance to future building owners and to people buying and selling houses.

It is intended that the new regulations should come into force on 1 June 1992, to allow time for builders and others to familiarise themselves with the new requirements. Revised approved documents, which provide practical guidance on meeting the requirements, are being published today by HMSO. Copies of these documents have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

European Environment Commissioner

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many telephone conversations he has had with the European Environment Commissioner regarding EC directive 85/337; what were the dates of the conversations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heseltine *[holding answer 6 December 1991]:* There have been a number of exchanges between the Government and the Commissioner on this matter.

Greenhouse Effect

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the implications for the United Kingdom of the proposals in the 1990 report EUR-12707 on the European impact of the greenhouse effect; and what collaboration on research to mitigate the dangers of global warming has been undertaken by his Department.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 9 December 1991]:* In January this year, the Department's climate change impacts review group published its report, "The Potential Effects of Climate Change in the United Kingdom", copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House. The report dealt with twelve areas from agriculture and the natural environment to socio-economic issues. It used climate change scenarios very similar to those proposed in the report EUR-12707.

The principal focus of co-operation for research on all aspects of global warming is the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in which the United Kingdom leads the science assessment working group and makes strong contributions to the working group on impacts and response strategies.

Development Plans

Mr. Favell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he intends to commence the development plans provisions of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Sir George Young *[pursuant to his answer 6 November 1991, c. 160-61.]:* We have today made the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 (Commencement No. 5 and Transitional Provisions) Order 1991. This includes provisions to commence the new development plans system on 10 February 1992. The Department is today writing to all local planning authorities in England to confirm that date. The Welsh Office is writing similarly to authorities in Wales.

Heveningham Hall

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on his policy towards Heveningham Hall.

Mr. Heseltine *[pursuant to his answer 4 December 1991, c. 176-77]:* I have decided not to exercise my right to purchase Heveningham Hall. I fully recognise the outstanding importance of this grade I building, and the need to maintain the integrity of the house, its decorative scheme and the grounds, but I firmly believe that these objectives should be met, where possible, by responsible private ownership. It is for the receivers to explore this possibility. The hall will remain subject to the full rigour of planning and listed building controls; and the outstanding restoration work to the house and grounds should be well within the capacity of a new owner, with advice from English Heritage and the local planning authority.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Vehicle and Fuel Taxes

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was *(a)* the yield in 1990-91, *(b)* the estimated yield in 1991-92 and *(c)* the forecast yield in 1992-93 from (i) petrol duty, (ii) derv duty, (iii) vehicle excise duty, (iv) VAT on petrol and derv sales, (v) VAT on vehicle sales and (vi) car tax.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information is as follows:

	1990-91 Outturn £ billion	*1991-92 Estimate £ billion*
Petrol duty	7·0	8·2
Derv duty	2·5	2·7
Vehicle excise duty (total)	2·9	3·0
VAT on petrol and derv	1·3	n/a
VAT on vehicle sales	2·9	n/a
Car tax	1·4	1·2

Information on the outturn yield in 1990-91 and the estimated yield in 1991-92 is provided in the table. The forecast for receipts in 1992-93 will be published in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" for that year but will not be available before then.

No direct figures are available for the VAT spent on petrol and derv and on vehicle sales. The table contains estimates of the outturn on VAT yield that can be attributed to these items on the basis of national accounts data on expenditure. For petrol and derv the figure covers only consumer expenditure—the yield from business expenditure is highly uncertain because the majority of businesses can reclaim input tax. The relevant data are not available for 1991-92.

Taxation, Scotland

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what are the most recent figures available for the sums collected in Scotland in respect of *(a)* income tax, *(b)* national insurance, *(c)* value added tax, *(d)* capital gains tax, *(e)* capital transfer tax, *(f)* stamp duties, *(g)* inheritance tax, *(h)* road tax, *(i)* duties on alcohol, *(j)* duties on tobacco, *(k)* duties on petrol and *(l)* duties on new vehicles; and how much this represents in each instance as a percentage of the United Kingdom total tax take.

Mr. Maude: The details are as follows.

(a) No information is available on total income tax collected, but total income tax liabilities in 1988-89, the latest available year, are estimated to be £3·5 billion for taxpayers resident in Scotland, 7·5 per cent. of the total for the United Kingdom.

(b) No information is available on national insurance contributions collected in Scotland. However, total contributions for Great Britain were £34·2 billion in 1990-91. Our latest estimate is that 9 per cent. of the Great Britain figure relates to people resident in Scotland.

(d) No information on capital gains tax yields is available separately for Scotland.

(e) and *(g)* The amount of estate duty, capital transfer tax and inheritance tax collected in 1990-91 for Scotland was £71 million—5½ per cent. of the total for the United Kingdom.

(f) Stamp duty received by the Edinburgh stamp office in 1990-91 was £69 million—4 per cent. of the United Kingdom total. Virtually all of the receipts in Scotland arise from property transfers as almost all share transfers are accounted for through the London stock exchange.

(h) Vehicle excise duty revenue, net of repayments, collected in Scotland was £228 million in 1990-91—a little under 10 per cent. of the United Kingdom total.

Information on the tax collected in Scotland in respect of value added tax, car tax and alcohol, tobacco and petrol could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Public Sector Borrowing Requirement

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a table to show the public sector borrowing requirement in actual figures, and as a percentage of gross domestic product for each of the years 1978-79 until the latest available year indicating for each year the projections given in the autumn statements, the Budget and the actual outturn.

Mr. Maples: The figures requested are shown in the table.

PSBR	Forecast made in preceding budget		Forecast made in autumn statement		Outturn	
	£ billion	Per cent. of GDP	£ billion	Per cent. of GDP	£ billion	Per cent. of GDP
1978-79	8·5	5¼	7·9	4¾	9·2	5·4
1979-80	[1]8·3	4¾	8·2	[3]n.s.	9·8	4·8
1980-81	8·5	3¾	11·5	5	13·0	5·6
1981-82	10·6	4¼	10·4	4	8·8	3·4
1982-83	9·5	3½	9·0	3¼	9·2	3·3
[2]1983-84	8·2	2¾	10·2	3½	10·0	3·3
1984-85	7·2	2¼	8·5	2¾	10·1	3·1
1985-86	7·1	2	8·0	2¼	5·6	1·6
1986-87	7·1	1¾	7·1	1¾	3·6	0·9
1987-88	3·9	1	1·0	¼	−3·4	−0·8
1988-89	−3·2	−¾	−9·8	−2	−14·7	−3·1
1989-90	−13·8	−2¾	−12·6	−2½	−7·9	1·6
1990-91	−6·9	−1¼	−3·0	−½	−0·5	−0·1

[1]June 1979 Budget

[2]Data for the outturn and forecast up to and including 1983-84 are based on a definition of the PSBR which treats bank deposits and other liquid assets of the public sector as contributing to rather than financing the PSBR.

[3]Not stated in the Industry Act forecast.

Income Tax

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the proportion of the total sum raised in income tax which is paid by the lowest 10 per cent. of taxpayers *(a)* now and *(b)* in 1979-80.

Mr. Maude: It is estimated that, in 1991-92, the bottom 10 per cent. of taxpayers will be liable to pay less than 1 per cent. of the total yield of income tax. This is the same figure as in 1979-80.

Personal Savings

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his estimate of the current level of personal savings; and what were the comparable figures for each of the past 15 years.

Mr. Maples: During the first half of 1991 the personal sector is estimated to have saved at an annual rate of £42·3 billion, representing about 10½ per cent. of disposable income. Figures for the level of saving and personal disposable income for the past 15 years may be found in table 3.1 of the CSO Blue Book, 1991 edition.

Parliamentary Questions (Cost)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current average cost of preparing answers to written and oral parliamentary questions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maples: Following a survey conducted by Treasury in 1991 and spanning six Departments, the average cost of preparing an answer to a parliamentary question—PQ—is assessed as £87 for a written PQ and £202 for an oral PQ. These figures represent costs within the civil service only; the costs of Ministers and their offices are not included. These figures are not directly comparable with the costs increased by indexation from the 1972 survey which were previously published at £64 and £106 for written and oral PQs respectively, because the cost of staff accommodation was previously excluded. Accommodation costs account for around 15 per cent. of these 1991 costs. The substantial rise in the average cost of oral PQs mainly reflects the restriction in numbers introduced from the start of the 1990-91 Session. These are down from around 24,000 per Session to around 6,000 and the costs per unit reflect the fact that costs are no longer spread over the former large numbers. On the one hand there is a substantial saving in aggregate costs because replies are no longer given to the very large number of oral questions which were formerly tabled, not reached and answered as written PQs. On the other hand, there is no reduction in the briefing required for oral questions which are likely to be reached and full briefing for supplementary questions is still needed for these. However, the figures show a substantial cost saving overall because the numbers have fallen by 75 per cent. whereas costs per unit are less than twice their previously published level. In the light of the new figures, consideration is being given to the advisory level above which written PQs may fall into the disproportionate cost category and an announcement will be made in due course.

Industry (Net Added Value)

Mr. Denzil Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what was the net added value in industry, excluding services and agriculture, expressed in United States dollars of *(a)* the Federal Republic of Germany, *(b)* France, *(c)* Italy, *(d)* Spain and *(e)* the EC in total for each of the last three available years;

(2) what was the net added value in industry, excluding services and agriculture, expressed in United States dollars, of Japan, in each of the last three available years;

(3) what was the net added value in industry, excluding services and agriculture, expressed in United States dollars, of the United Kingdom for each of the last three available years.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Data for net value added in industry for the Federal Republic of Germany, France, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom and Japan are published by the OECD in "*National Accounts 1977-89*". The total for the European Community is not available.

Valuation Procedures

Mr. Ward: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what rights of entry district valuers and local estate agents have into people's homes for the purposes of valuation for the council tax.

Mr. Maude: None, but clause 26 of the Local Government Finance Bill, if enacted, would provide a power of entry for the valuation officer and any servant of the Crown authorised by him in writing.

Retail Prices Index

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the individual components of the retail prices index and the respective weightings given to each.

Mr. Norman Lamont *[holding answer 9 December 1991]:* The information requested was published on pages 351 to 353 of the June 1991 issue of "Employment Gazette", a copy of which is in the Library.

VAT

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what would be the estimated yield in 1991-92 of the imposition of VAT at *(a)* 5 per cent., *(b)* 17·5 per cent. and *(c)* 22 per cent. on (i) books, (ii) newspapers, (iii)

magazines, (iv) rent, (v) house purchase (new buildings), (vi) house purchase (second-hand buildings) and (vii) fares on passenger transport.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 9 December 1991]:* Information on the estimated revenue from standard rating zero rated goods in 1990-91 was published in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report", annex B table 4B.1 . Similar data for 1991-92 will be published in the 1992 FSBR when expenditure estimates for 1991-92 will be firmer. The following estimated yield is for 1990-91:

£ billion

Estimated yield from the imposition of VAT at:	*(a) 5 per cent.*	*(b) 17·5 per cent.*	*(c) 22 per cent.*
Books	0·1	0·3	0·3
Newspapers	0·1	0·4	0·5
Magazines	0·1	0·2	0·2
Rent[1]	0·5	1·9	2·4
House purchase[2]	0·5	1·8	2·2
Passenger transport	0·3	1·1	1·4

[1] Domestic rent is exempt rather than zero rated.
[2] Figures for expenditure on second hand houses are not available.

These figures have been rounded to the nearest £100 million. The items have been costed separately and cannot be added together to give a meaningful total.

The figures make no allowance for changes in behaviour and are likely to overstate the actual yield.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the total yield from VAT in 1978-79; and what is the expected total yield in 1991-92, in cash and in 1991-92 prices.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 9 December 1991]:* The relevant information is provided in the table.

£ billion

	Cash	*1991-92 prices*
1978-79 outturn	4·8	12·9
1991-92 estimate	36·2	36·2

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what, in the latest year for which information is available, is *(a)* the total number of people, *(b)* the number of people over state retirement age and *(c)* the number of one-parent families who pay (i) income tax and (ii) VAT.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 9 December 1991]:* It is estimated that, in 1991-92, 25·1 million individuals will be liable to income tax. Of these an estimated 2·5 million are aged 65 or over and 0·5 million are single parents.

VAT is chargeable on a wide range of consumer expenditure and it is likely that everybody has to pay some in the course of a year.

Tobacco

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what sum has been raised in taxation of tobacco and tobacco products for each year from 1964 to 1990 inclusive; and what proportion of turnover of the tobacco and tobacco products retailing industry this sum represents for each of those years.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer on 9 December 1991]:* The table shows the total estimated yield from indirect taxes on tobacco products, and the percentage this represents of consumers' expenditure on tobacco.

	Yield from tobacco taxation[1] *£ billion*	*Tax content of consumers' expenditure on tobacco Per cent.*
[1]1964	1·0	72
[1]1965	1·0	69
[1]1966	1·0	68
[1]1967	1·0	68
[1]1968	1·1	69
[1]1969	1·1	68
1970	1·2	67
1971	1·1	65
1972	1·2	65
1973	1·2	64
1974	1·5	66
1975	1·8	65
1976	2·0	66
1977	[3]2·5	[3]70
1978	[3]2·4	[3]63
1979	2·8	69
1980	3·3	69
1981	3·9	70
1982	4·3	73
1983	4·5	73
1984	4·9	74
1985	5·2	75
1986	5·5	74
1987	5·8	76
1988	6·0	76
1989	6·2	76
1990	6·6	75

[1] Financial years.
[2] Indirect taxes which from 1 April 1973 include estimated VAT.
[3] Receipts larger in 1977 than in 1978 because of forestalling of 1 January 1978 duty increase.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Assay Marks

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will take all necessary steps to protect the public with regard to its purchase of gold and silver by ensuring that British goldsmiths and silversmiths are able to continue the use of assay marks on articles for sale in the United Kingdom and exported for sale in the member countries of the European Community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: The Government have made it clear that they regard the British hallmarking system as the best means of ensuring that the public have adequate protection with regard to its purchase of precious metal articles. There are currently differences in member states' precious metals regimes. In any future negotiations to develop a common system the Government's objective will therefore be to retain as much as possible of the United Kingdom hallmarking system.

Maxwell Companies

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will appoint inspectors to examine the Maxwell Communication Corporation and related companies.

Mr. Lilley: My officials are in close consultation with the Serious Fraud Office over the progress of the SFO's inquiries.

I will not hesitate to use available powers to investigate any matter which may emerge from consultations as requiring separate inquiry, so long as that would not impede the work of the SFO.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) whether he will conduct an inquiry into the Mirror group pension fund;

(2) if he will appoint inspectors to inquire into the affairs of the Maxwell Communication Corporation and the Maxwell private companies.

Mr. Lilley *[holding answer 9 December 1991]:* My officials are in close consultation with the Serious Fraud Office over the progress of the SFO's inquiries.

I will not hesitate to use available powers to investigate any matter which may emerge from consultations as requiring separate inquiry, so long as that would not impede the work of the SFO.

Regional Aid

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list those companies in the Corby area which have qualified for regional selective assistance in the last five years, and the value of regional selective assistance for each year since 1985-86.

Mr. Leigh: In the period 1 April 1986 to 31 March 1991 the following companies in the Corby travel-to-work area accepted offers of regional selective assistance:

Advanced Textile Printers plc
Alfred Englemann Ltd.
Austin Productions Ltd.
Cheminex Laboratories Ltd.
Du Bois Ltd.
Ion Deposition Ltd.
Johnson and Jorgensen (Plastics) Ltd.
Lincolt Ltd.
NCT and S Ltd.
Oxford University Press
Sias Foods (UK) Ltd.
Solway Foods Ltd.
Taurostone Ltd.
Tradesource Ltd.
Weldon Stone Enterprises Ltd.

The list is limited to those companies where details of their projects were publicised in "British Business" until 29 September 1989 and thereafter in the "Employment Gazette".

The table shows the value of regional selective assistance—RSA—accepted by companies in the Corby travel-to-work area since 1985-86:

Year	*Value of RSA accepted £000*
1985-86	1,816
1986-87	1,007
1987-88	388
1988-89	750
1989-90	312
1990-91	50

Hackney Task Force

Mr. Norris: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the key benefits and objectives of the Hackney task force; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: The Hackney task force started work on 11 November, so it is too early to assess its achievements.

Like the Government's other inner city task forces, it will seek to secure jobs for local people, improve their employability through work related training, encourage and facilitate local enterprise, and support environmental and crime prevention initiatives where these can be linked to the reintegration of local people into mainstream economic activity.

It will support pump-priming collaborative projects to target the resources of main Government programmes on the most disadvantaged residents of that area, and lever in funding from the local authority and the private and voluntary sectors.

Textile Industry

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make it his policy to oppose a phase-out of the multi-fibre arrangement until the necessary strengthening of GATT rules and the ending of all barriers to British exports has been agreed.

Mr. Lilley: The Secretary General of GATT, Mr. Dunkel, has made clear that any final Uruguay round settlement must involve stronger GATT rules, a new framework for implementing results, a general opening of markets and specific commitments to return textiles to GATT.

Footwear Industry

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has made to the European Community concerning the level of duty for non-leather footwear categories in the GATT negotiations.

Mr. Lilley: We are aware of the concerns of the United Kingdom footwear industry about tariff barriers against non-leather footwear and have drawn them to the attention of the European Commission, which is taking them into account in the GATT Uruguay round negotiations.

Footwear Labelling

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received on the EC directive on footwear labelling; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: Representations on the EC directive on footwear labelling have been received from a number of bodies representing the interests of manufacturers, retailers and consumers and the comments made have been relayed to the Commission. The directive has undergone several revisions in the light of these comments. However, although there is general support for the aim of the directive, we regard certain of the provisions as unsatisfactory as currently drafted. My officials will continue to press for amendments to these provisions in Community discussions.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to support footwear consumer information labelling consisting of either lettering or symbols, instead of only symbols.

Mr. Leigh: The Government do not consider that the symbols which have been proposed by the Commission are satisfactory. We have indicated to the Commission that in our view the use of symbols should be optional and not obligatory and that it should be permissable to label footwear either text or symbols. We shall continue to press for an amendment to this effect.

Racal Electronics

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 29 November, *Official Report*, column *692-93*, if he will state the latest position over the Government's decision over the bid by Williams Holdings for Racal Electronics.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 4 December that he had accepted signed undertakings from Williams Holdings plc requiring the divestment of Racal Electronics plc's lock and safe businesses in the United Kingdom within 15 months should Williams gain control of Racal.

Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he intends to refer the operations of Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd. to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission.

Mr. Redwood: Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd.—HIAL—is one of the bodies subject to investigation by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission under section 11 of the Competition Act. The Secretary of State is considering whether to refer HIAL, among other eligible bodies, for investigation in due course.

"Bradford Task Force News"

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many issues of the "Bradford Task Force News" have been published; where they were printed; what is the total cost, to date, of design, production and printing; how many further issues are planned; and what is the estimated total cost.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 9 December 1991]:* Two issues of the "Bradford Task Force News" have been published to date. The first edition was printed in Bradford; the second, through HMSO, Norwich. The total cost to date, including distribution, is £9,952. Further issues will be considered as occasions demands. The total cost of future editions is therefore not known at this stage.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Tuesday 10 December.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is attending the European Council in Maastricht.

Nuclear Testing

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will obtain for the Library at 10 Downing street a copy of the book, "Radioactive Heaven and Earth", on the history and legacy of nuclear testing, published in August 1991 by International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War.

Mr. MacGregor: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has no plans to do so.

SOCIAL SECURITY

National Insurance

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* basic rate and *(b)* higher rate taxpayers would be affected in 1991-92 by extending national insurance contributions to all employee taxable benefits in kind, for employees who earn over £8,500; and if he will give the average annual cost per individual with gross incomes between *(a)* £10,000 and £20,000, *(b)* £20,000 and £30,000, *(c)* £30,000 and £40,000, *(d)* £40,000 and £50,000 and *(e)* over £50,000, respectively.

Mr. Jack: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 9 December, at columns *301-2*.

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects the invalid care allowance unit to become fully computerised; and when this is due to be linked to the disability benefits computer system.

Mr. Scott: The administration of invalid care allowance is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Destination Tables

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to publish with reference to the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Bill, the Social Security Administration Bill and the Social Security (Consequential Provisions) Bill, a destination table showing where current provisions can be found in the new legislation.

Miss Widdecombe: We are considering publication of a destination table.

Council Tax

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, further to his answer of 28 November, *Official Report*, columns *598-600*, on benefit arrangements under the proposed council tax, if he will make it his policy in the year's uprating that income support will rise by not less than the retail prices index in 1993-94.

Miss Widdecombe: The reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 28 November confirmed that the April 1993 uprating of income-related benefits will be based on the revised Rossi index, including water charges and miscellaneous housing costs, and that there will be no reduction in their value to reflect the fact that recipients of income support will no longer be expected to

meet their 20 per cent. liability for the community charge. This will mean that from April 1993, income support levels will be at least £1·40 a week higher for single people, and £2·80 a week higher for couples, than they might otherwise have been.

At the 1992 uprating income-related benefits will be increased by at least 7 per cent., nearly 3 per cent. more than the increase in the retail prices index over the period used to determine the uprating increase; over-80s and disabled pensioners will receive considerably more. It is impossible to predict at this stage how the actual uprating in April 1993 will compare with movements in the retail prices index in 1993-94.

Benefit Entitlement

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will specify the conditions for receipt without time limit of the following benefits during absence in another European Community country once entitlement has been established in the United Kingdom to *(a)* invalidity benefit, *(b)* severe disablement allowance, *(c)* mobility allowance, *(d)* attendance allowance and *(e)* invalid care allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: Payment of all these benefits may continue for recipients who are abroad temporarily. It is for the independent adjudicating authorities to determine whether or not a particular absence is temporary. Apart from invalid care allowance, all these benefits may continue indefinitely for those who move to another Community country, provided that they are covered by European Community regulations and are, or have been, subject to United Kingdom legislation as workers.

Occupational Diseases

Mr. Crowther: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the Government have completed their consideration of the European Commission recommendation of 22 May 1990 concerning the adoption of a European schedule of occupational diseases; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: We are still considering the recommendation. We are being assisted in our consideration by the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council, the independent body which advises the Secretary of State on occupational diseases. The council hopes to report back in late 1992.

HEALTH

Skin Cancers and Cataracts

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimates he has made of the financial impact on the health service of the increasing number of skin cancers and cataracts:

(2) what provisions he has made to deal with an increase in the number of people with skin cancer and cataracts; and whether he has any plans for public awareness or screening campaigns.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No specific assessment has been made of the financial impact of increasing numbers of skin cancers and cataracts. Since they currently account for a very small proportion of total NHS expenditure it is unlikely that even a considerable increase in numbers would impose a critical burden on the health service.

The Health Education Authority is committed to the 10-point European code against cancer which advises against excessive exposure to the sun. The HEA has also organised public awareness campaigns and produces leaflets both specifically on dangers from exposure to the sun and generally on how to avoid cancer.

Population screening for skin cancers is not regarded as cost effective even in countries such as Australia with a very high incidence of skin cancer.

Cot Deaths

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will assist with the funding of the leaflet, "Reduce the Risks of Cot Deaths" produced by the Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Government have today launched the "Back to Sleep" campaign, an information campaign aimed directly at parents and others who care for young babies. The campaign will centre on a Department of Health leaflet which will be promoted in the national and specialist press, and on television. People will be invited to obtain the leaflet which sets out the main steps to reduce the risks of cot death. The leaflet will also be available in ethnic languages.

The Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths has, separately, produced its own leaflet. We have no plans to assist directly with the funding of the foundation's leaflet but, as we anticipate that the foundation's advice and counselling helpline will face an increased demand during the period of the Government's campaign, we have decided to provide further section 64 funding to cover its additional costs.

Hospital Closures

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each regional health authority the capital sums raised by the closure and sale of hospitals for each year since 1979.

Mr. Dorrell: Total capital receipts, for each regional health authority, from all sales of land and buildings since 1979 are shown in the table.

Receipts from disposal of national health service land and buildings

Region	*£ million*[1]											
	1979-80	*1980-81*	*1981-82*	*1982-83*	*1983-84*	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	[2]*1990-91*
Northern	0·2	0·1	0·8	0·4	0·9	1·4	1·4	6·2	3·6	4·4	3·7	2·7
Yorkshire	0·8	0·7	1·0	1·8	0·8	0·8	1·3	4·1	5·3	9·8	11·5	5·0
Trent	0·5	1·6	1·7	1·6	2·3	3·9	4·7	6·2	7·6	13·8	18·2	25·6
East Anglian	0·3	0·2	0·4	0·7	0·9	8·1	3·4	3·7	3·6	10·4	4·5	1·3
North West Thames	1·2	1·3	4·4	2·7	6·1	6·7	5·5	21·2	49·4	43·7	45·2	17·2
North East Thames	1·8	1·4	1·0	1·1	3·8	2·7	6·2	13·0	28·2	51·4	22·0	14·0
South East Thames	0·3	0·8	1·2	2·2	1·6	2·5	9·2	19·4	24·9	30·3	21·0	7·6

Region	£ million[1] 1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	[2]1990-91
South West Thames	0·1	3·5	2·0	0·9	2·4	10·5	8·5	19·9	24·7	24·4	9·0	15·2
Wessex	1·3	0·8	0·4	0·5	1·2	1·9	4·7	10·4	5·2	17·6	15·5	5·8
Oxford	0·9	1·6	1·2	2·3	1·5	1·7	7·6	2·9	10·6	16·9	5·1	9·5
South Western	1·1	2·0	1·6	0·5	1·0	2·6	6·2	10·4	8·7	16·4	14·4	20·3
West Midlands	0·6	0·5	1·1	1·2	1·9	1·9	4·3	3·9	5·3	9·2	9·0	4·0
Mersey	0·3	0·6	0·7	1·6	1·5	1·1	2·5	4·0	6·7	7·2	15·0	14·9
North Western	0·3	0·3	1·4	0·6	1·0	2·0	2·7	8·8	4·1	8·5	7·9	16·3
BGs/SHAs	0·3	Nil	0·7	0·1	4·6	0·6	14·1	11·0	9·9	1·8	19·0	Nil
ENGLAND	9·9	15·2	19·4	18·0	31·5	48·4	82·3	145·1	197·8	265·8	221·0	159·4

[1] Figures shown to nearest £0·1 million.
[2] Estimate.

Trafalgar Medical Service, Sheffield

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if patients retain their rights under the national health service complaints procedure when being seen by consultants working for Trafalgar Medical Services in Sheffield.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), on 11 June at columns *498-99*.

Under the provisions of the patients charter all those receiving NHS-funded treatment, regardless of where that treatment is delivered, will have access from 1 April 1992 to the NHS, or similar, complaints procedures. Arrangements are currently being made to have suitable procedures in place for all providers of NHS-funded care.

Dental Services

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many anaesthetic extractions have been carried out on children over each quarterly period since the inception of the new dental contract.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 26 November 1991]:* The number of general anaesthetics or sedations administered in the general dental services in connection with extractions of teeth in children is shown in the table. Figures for similar treatment provided within capitation and for all such treatment provided by the community dental service are not available.

Treatment	December 1990	Quarter ending March 1991	June 1991	September 1991	Year ending September 1991
Children 24A1					
1-4 teeth	26,174	27,307	32,182	31,907	117,570
5-9 teeth	9,353	4,153	4,148	3,633	21,287
10-16 teeth	112	95	135	211	553
17 or more	18	0	0	19	37
Maximum	0	19	19	58	96
Child Occasional 54A1					
1-4 teeth	810	1,982	1,675	614	5,081
5-9 teeth	92	133	154	115	494
10-16 teeth	0	0	0	0	0
17 or more	0	19	0	0	19
Maximum	0	0	0	0	0
Total	36,559	33,708	38,313	36,557	145,137
Children Item 24B1					
Inhalation	2,045	1,367	1,375	1,671	6,458
Injection	116	110	212	193	631
Children Item 54B1					
Inhalation	92	191	115	96	494
Injection	0	19	38	58	115
Total	2,253	1,687	1,740	2,018	7,698
Grand Total	38,812	35,395	40,053	38,575	152,835

Source: Dental Practice Board; 5 per cent. sample of all treatments.

Computer Reimbursement Scheme

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding has been made available to the general practitioners' computer reimbursement scheme in Hampshire; what claims have been made against the scheme; and if he will make a statement about its operation.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 27 November 1991]:* The figures requested are not held centrally. My hon. Friend may wish to contact Sir Robin Buchanan, the chairman of Wessex regional health authority, for details.

ENERGY

Civil Nuclear Programme

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the last date that uranium originating from *(a)* South Africa and *(b)* Namibia was delivered to the United Kingdom, in any form, for use in the civil nuclear programme.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Uranium for the United Kingdom's civil nuclear programme has not been imported from South Africa since 1973. Imports of uranium from other countries, including Namibia, are a commercial matter for the industry.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the date upon which safeguards were first applied to uranium delivered to the United Kingdom for use in the civil nuclear programme.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Safeguards were applied under the Euratom treaty to imports of natural and enriched uranium from 1 January 1973.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the nature and function of the civil uranium procurement directorate; in what year it was established; what is its annual operating budget; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The British civil uranium procurement directorate—BCUPD—was formed in July 1979 by the Central Electricity Generating Board, the South of Scotland Electricity Board and British Nuclear Fuels Limited. The BCUPD was responsible to these organisations for ensuring that uranium was available to meet the needs of the civil nuclear programme. Its administration was handled by the CEGB. Following the changes in the organisation of the electricity supply industry, it was agreed by Nuclear Electric plc, Scottish Nuclear Limited and British Nuclear Fuels plc that the individual organisations would be responsible for their own procurement. The BCUPD was accordingly disbanded in March 1991.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy from which countries uranium is currently imported for use in the British civil nuclear programme.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: This is a commercial matter for Nuclear Electric plc, Scottish Nuclear Limited and other users of civil uranium.

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list all building works approved by his Department for *(a)* the Sellafield and Calder works and *(b)* Chapelcross since 1979, indicating which of these projects, once complete, would be subject to Euratom safeguards.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Building works at the sites mentioned by the hon. Member are operational matters for British Nuclear Fuels plc—BNFL—subject to planning and other consents. All civil nuclear material in British Nuclear Fuels plc facilities is subject to Euratom safeguards and to the terms of the UK-IAEA-Euratom safeguards agreement.

Nuclear Reprocessing Plant

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make it his policy to require British Nuclear Fuels plc to install a plant to remove radioactive krypton prior to the opening of the THORP reprocessing plant.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The question of discharges of radioactivity from the THORP plant is a matter for discussion between British Nuclear Fuels plc, the chief inspector of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in the context of authorisations required under the Radioactive Substances Act 1960.

Electricity

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) what consultations he has had with the Director-General of the Office of Electricity Regulation concerning the management of the generator-distributor pool and its rules concerning the withdrawal of declared capacity on the prior to generation day and its subsequent redeclaration on the day; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what consultations he has had with the Major Energy Users Council and the directors-general of OFFER and the Office of Fair Trading concerning the operation of the pool in September and October 1991 and its implications for electricity prices generally and for heavy users in particular; if he will use his powers regarding a reference to the Office of Fair Trading; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend and I meet the Director-General of Electricity Supply from time to time and we discuss a range of issues. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has offered to meet the Major Energy Users Council to discuss electricity prices. We have had no consultations with the Director-General of Fair Trading. The Director-General of Electricity Supply has initiated an inquiry into the recent behaviour of the pool prices. It would not be appropriate for me to prejudge the outcome of that inquiry.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what discussions he has had with the Director-General of OFFER concerning the operation of the electricity futures market since its inception on 1 November and the number of contracts traded; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend and I meet the Director-General of Electricity Supply from time to time and we discuss a range of issues.

Energy Efficiency Levy

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what consultations he has had with the Director-General of Gas Supply concerning his proposal for a three pence per week per gas consumer energy efficiency levy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: My right hon. Friend and I meet the Director-General of Gas Supply from time to time, I am aware of his proposed modifications to the tariff formula and his discussions with interested organisations, although I have not discussed these particular proposals with him.

Nuclear Generating Capacity

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his Department's current estimate of the installed nuclear generating capacity in England and Wales in the year 2000.

Mr. Wakeham: The principal operator of nuclear capacity in England and Wales is Nuclear Electric plc. Decisions regarding capacity are mainly a commercial matter for the company. Nuclear Electric will operate its existing portfolio of plant as long as it remains both safe and economic to do so.

Research Expenditure

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy further to his answer of 4 December, *Official Report*, column *141-43*, if he will give the figures for 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92 excluding technology transfer and dissemination expenditure.

Mr. Wakeham: Figures for the years requested are as follows:

	£ million Money terms	*£ million 1991-92 real terms*	*Percentage of total research and development expenditure*
Coal technology			
1989-90	1·7	2·0	1·0
1990-91	11·4	12·2	7·4
1991-92	2·6	2·6	2·2
Nuclear power			
1989-90	132·3	153·5	80·3
1990-91	111·7	119·5	72·4
1991-92	92·9	92·9	78·8
Energy efficiency			
1989-90	2·3	2·7	1·4
1990-91	2·3	2·5	1·5
1991-92	2·4	2·4	2·0
Renewables			
1989-90	16·3	18·9	9·9
1990-91	18·1	19·4	11·7
1991-92	21·0	21·0	17·8

Notes:

1. In addition to excluding technology transfer and dissemination expenditure from the above figures, the 1989-90 and 1990-91 figures for nuclear power exclude restructuring costs associated with R & D programmes.
2. 1989-90 and 1990-91 figures are final outturn.
3. 1991-92 figures are provisional.

Technology Transfer and Dissemination

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what items are covered by his Department's definition of technology transfer and dissemination

Mr. Wakeham: The Department's technology transfer and dissemination programmes are:

—the Offshore Supplies Office's publicity programme;
—the Renewables technology transfer programme;
—the Renewables publicity programme;
—the non-R and D aspects of the Energy Efficiency Office's (EEO) Best Practice programme (about two-thirds of expenditure in the current year);
—the non-R and D aspects of work done for the EEO by the Energy Technology Support Unit (ETSU) and the Building Research Energy Conservation Support Unit (BRECSU), relating mainly to demonstration and marketing;
—the EEO's Monitoring and Targeting programme;
—residual payments from the EEO's former Demonstration Scheme;
—non-R and D aspects of the Enhanced Oil Recovery programme;
—non-R and D aspects of the Reservoir Simulation programme.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Aid and Trade Provision

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many applications for money under the aid and trade provisions were received, and how many were granted, in 1989-90 and 1990-91; how much money was allocated, and to which companies, under the aid and trade provision in 1990-91; and what is the total sum of money available to United Kingdom companies under the aid and trade provision during the current financial year.

Mrs. Chalker: A total of 151 aid and trade provision —ATP—applications were received in 1989-90, and 111 in 1990-91. Forty-two ATP offers were made in 1989-90 and 33 in 1990-91 in respect both of these and of earlier ATP applications.

The ATP budget in the current financial year is £97 million.

In 1990-91 aid agreements were concluded with Governments of developing countries for projects involving the following lead United Kingdom contractors:

Aid and trade provision agreements concluded in 1990-91

Country	*Project*	*Lead United Kingdom company*	*Amount £ million*
Botswana	Flight Information Region	Siemens Plessey Radar	2·938
China	Beijing Subway	Balfour Beatty	7·070
China	Danyang Aluminium Plant	Davy McKee (Poole)	3·532
Colombia	San Andres Power	Hawker Siddeley Power Engineering	3·430
Indonesia	Citayam/Cibinong Railway	Foster Wheeler World Services	20·105
Indonesia	Radio Communication System for the Ministry of Forestry	Philips Radio Communication Systems	34·111
Indonesia	Shortwave Radio Transmitters	Marconi	26·911
Kenya	Distribution Transformers	NI Transformers	0·688
Malaysia	Connaught Bridge	NEI Parsons	23·485
Malaysia	Double Tracking	Transmark	0·798
Malaysia	Medamit 2 Hydro Electric	Sir William Halcrow and Partners	0·244
Malaysia	Nucleus Hospitals	John Laing International	13·159
Philippines	Small Islands Electrification	Dale Electric	2·065
Tunisia	Dump Trucks	Terex Equipment	0·949

Country	*Project*	*Lead United Kingdom company*	*Amount £ million*
Zimbabwe	Airfield Crash Tenders	Carmichael Fire	2·479
Zimbabwe	Fire Fighting Vehicles	Carmichael Fire	3·264
Zimbabwe	Harare Airport Radar	Siemens Plessey Radar	1·462
Zimbabwe	Supply of AWD Bedford Trucks	AWD (Export)	16·116
Zimbabwe	Supply of ERF Trucks	ERF	8·575

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to which United Kingdom companies during 1990-91 undertakings were given that money would be made available under the aid and trade provision for 1991-92.

Mrs. Chalker: Undertakings are not given in this way. Aid and trade provision offers are made to Governments of developing countries, not to United Kingdom companies. A list of companies involved in projects for which aid agreements were signed with Governments of developing countries in 1990-91 is given in my answer to my hon. Friend of 10 December.

Aid Budget

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is the planned level of total United Kingdom aid to *(a)* developing countries, *(b)* eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and *(c)* global environmental assistance, at constant prices, for the years 1991-92, 1992-93, 1993-94 and 1994-95.

Mrs. Chalker: The planned level of ODA expenditure, as provided for in the autumn statement and at constant 1991-92 prices, is as follows:

£ million

	1991-92	*1992-93*	*1993-94*	*1994-95*
Aid to developing countries	[1]1,721	1,750	1,750	1,770
Assistance to eastern Europe and the Soviet Union[2]	65	180	210	200
Global environment assistance	5	10	10	10

Notes:

1992-93 to 1994-95 figures are to the nearest £10 million.

[1] Since increased to £1,786 million, by a £65 million in-year addition from the reserve, mainly for disaster relief.

[2] Includes, from 1992-93, the United Kingdom's share of European Community assistance to eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, which is to be attributed to the ODA.

Indonesia

Mr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Basingstoke, *Official Report*, 29 November, column *671*, on aid and trade provision, he will set out the details of the investigation made into the proposed provision of a flight simulator by aeronautical systems designers to the Government of Indonesia to ensure that such technology could not be used to enhance the Indonesian military air force capability to pursue internal repression in *(a)* Indonesia and *(b)* in the occupied territories of East Timor.

Mrs. Chalker: The project concerned involves the supply and installation of a flight simulator for training pilots of the Indonesian domestic civil airline, Merpati, on a new short haul piston-engined passenger aircraft being manufactured in Indonesia under a joint venture in agreement with a Spanish company. The ODA engaged the United Kingdom Civil Aviation Authority as its technical adviser on the project.

The flight simulator, like all aircraft simulators currently produced, is designed to be aircraft-type specific. It would be impracticable to convert it for use on an alternative aircraft. Under the terms of the concessional loan which is providing finance for the project, the Indonesian Government have accepted that items purchased under the loan will not be used for military defence purposes.

Amazon Rain Forest

Mr. Summerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made on the proposals for collaboration with Brazil over the conservation of the Amazon rain forest since the London economic summit.

Mrs. Chalker: Since the London economic summit the Government of Brazil with the assistance of the World bank and the European Commission have further developed their proposals for a pilot programme to conserve the Brazilian tropical rain forest. These proposals were discussed at a meeting in Geneva on 7 and 8 December between representatives of the Government of Brazil, the World bank, the European Commission, the G7 countries and some other potential donors.

The British Government indicated their general approval of the revised programme and, as part of the broader G7 contributions, undertook to make available up to £18·8 million to the end of 1994. This is in addition to our share of the commitment of $15 million made by the European Commission on behalf of the Community. The British commitment is subject to the production by the World bank of detailed operational arrangements acceptable to the donors. These must provide for satisfactory co-ordination of activities in the overall programme and arrangements to assure good quality projects.

The British Government are making the second largest contribution, after Germany, to the $250 million pledged in total at the Geneva meeting. The funds will be used to promote sustainable development of the living standards of the people of the Amazon within the context of environmental conservation. Activities will include measures to safeguard biodiversity; demarcate and protect national parks, reserves and indigenous areas; strengthen both federal and state environmental agencies; promote the sustainable exploitation of forest resources; support scientific research and disseminate its results; promote environmental surveillance and monitoring; support ecological zoning; develop environmental education; and

support innovative, community-based initiatives concerned with the relationship between the environment and local communities.

The Government of Brazil representatives expressed their satisfaction with the outcome of the discussions at Geneva.

Contract Legal Personnel

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the ODA monitors the performance of contract legal personnel overseas.

Mrs. Chalker: The ODA monitors the performance of all aid-funded personnel overseas, through our own in-house or contract advisers, through overseas posts, and through reports from recipient institutions. Arrangements for legal personnel follow this pattern.

Baltic States

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much money has been allocated to date to the know-how funds for *(a)* Estonia, *(b)* Latvia and *(c)* Lithuania; how much is budgeted for each fund respectively for the coming financial year; and how much has been expended to date in each of those countries.

Mrs. Chalker: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania qualify for know-how fund assistance but no individual country allocation has been made. In financial year 1991-92 a total of £400,000 has so far been committed to projects in these countries. This will increase substantially in the coming financial year.

Aid Review

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was the cost of publishing the 1991 annual review of British overseas aid.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave to the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) on 9 December, at column *280*.

Somalia

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to assist non-governmental organisations in their efforts to deliver humanitarian aid to *(a)* Northern Somalia and *(b)* Mogadishu and other areas of the south.

Mrs. Chalker: We are providing humanitarian assistance to Somalia through United Nations and voluntary agencies. This calendar year we have committed a total of £3·47 million bilateral emergency aid to Somalia including £1·46 million for the north. Recent grants include £300,000 for an essential mine-clearing project in northern Somalia and £50,000 for emergency medical supplies for Mogadishu. We contribute towards the operational costs of non-governmental organisations' relief activities in both north and south Somalia.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Milk Deliveries

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether from 1992 milk delivery vehicles that supply small retail outlets will be required to have milk stored in refrigerated compartments on the vehicle during transit.

Mr. Curry: The European Commission's proposals for harmonised milk hygiene standards, which are intended to come into force on 1 January 1993, would require that the temperature of pasteurised milk must not exceed 6°C during transport. Member states would be permitted to derogate from this requirement only in relation to milk delivered to the doorstep.

NORTHERN IRELAND

National Insurance

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what would *(a)* the first year and *(b)* the full year revenue yield be from abolishing the national insurance upper earnings limit in Northern Ireland in (i) 1991-92 and (ii) 1992-93, for (1) both employees and the self-employed and (2) just employees, and giving figures separately for the number of men and women who would be affected in each case.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is set out in the table:

	Revenue yield = £ million		*Numbers of people affected*	
	First year	*Full year*	*Men*	*Women*
1991-92 (employees and self-employed)	25	30	45,000	5,000
1991-92 (employees only)	4	10	10,000	—
1992-93 (employees and self-employed)	30	35	50,000	5,000
1992-93 (employees only)	4	10	10,000	—

Ministerial Responsibilities

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what changes he has made to ministerial responsibilities in his Department.

Mr. Brooke: Further to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day) on 5 December 1990, *Official Report*, column *122*, the right hon. Lord Belstead, Her majesty's Paymaster General and deputy Secretary of State, is now responsible for the Department of Finance and Personnel and for the central community relations unit and has relinquished his responsibilities for law and order.

Dr. Brian Mawhinney MP, Minister of State, is now responsible for law and order and has relinquished his responsibilities for the Department of Finance and Personnel and for the central community relations unit.

These are the only changes in responsibilities from those set out in my earlier answer.

I will, of course, continue to have overall responsibility for the work of the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments.

National Criminal Intelligence System

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the Royal Ulster Constabulary will have direct access to the proposed integrated national criminal intelligence system.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 29 November 1991]:* Consultations are currently under way with the Royal Ulster Constabulary with regard to this matter.

Castlereagh Holding Centre

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will list in the *Official Report*. such information as he has available of the sums paid for alleged ill-treatment of inmates in the Castlereagh holding centre for each of the past two years to the earliest convenient date in the bands *(a)* £1 to £1,000, *(b)* £1,000 to £2,000, *(c)* £2,000 to £3,000, *(d)* £3,000 to £4,000, *(e)* £4,000 to £5,000 and *(f)* above £5,000, respectively.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 9 December 1991]:* Information in the form requested is not available from existing records.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Lockerbie

Mr. Stanbrook: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 29 November, *Official Report*, column *685-86*, if he will seek the extradition of Abdul Baset Ali Mohmed Al Megrahi and Al Amin Khalifa Fhimah through the alternative method of sending to the Libyan authorities the formal documents normally issued by British courts in such cases including copies of the evidence on which the Scottish court issued its arrest warrants.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We have provided the Libyan authorities with copies of the warrant containing the charges and a detailed statement of facts in support of the charges, sufficient to enable them to respond positively to the demand for surrender of the two accused persons.

Gibraltar

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, if he will make it his policy to secure a more effective form of representation for Gibraltar in the European Parliament.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No. Gibraltar is well served by the present arrangements.

EC Treaty of Union

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what consideration Her Majesty's Government has given to the establishing of European Union citizenship of the nationals of European Community member states, and for the determination of the rights and obligations of European citizens of the Council of Ministers on propositions by the European Commission as set out in the draft treaty of union dated 8 November 1991 Ref: 1845/91; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We support the concept of citizenship of the union. The draft treaty on European union under discussion at Maastricht lists existing rights which are subject to existing conditions and limitations, and establishes certain new rights. If these provisions are agreed, the Commission may make proposals to strengthen or add to these rights. Any such proposals would require the unanimous agreement of the Council and subsequent national ratification.

India

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the statement of the hon. Member for Watford, of 29 November, *Official Report*, column *1248*, if he will request from the Indian Government information on how many police officers and other ranks from the Punjab police force have been prosecuted for crimes up to 31 March 1991; and if he will list the types of crimes committed and the punishment made.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In response to our expressions of concern the Indian Government have told us that, up to 31 March 1991, a total of 157 police officers and other ranks have been punished for human rights violations in Punjab.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will request information from the Indian Government on how many *(a)* officers and *(b)* other ranks, serving in the army, police and other security forces in Indian Kashmir have been (i) discharged, (ii) prematurely retired or (iii) prosecuted for crimes; and if he will list the types of crimes committed and the punishment made.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: In response to our expressions of concern the Indian Government have provided us with the following information on 68 members of the security forces who have been punished for human rights violations in Kashmir:

(a) Army. Two officers have been given prison sentences of 10 and 11 years respectively, 11 officers severely reprimanded and two other ranks dismissed.

(b) Central Reserve Police Force. Twenty-three personnel have been suspended.

(c) Border Security Force. Fourteen personnel have been imprisoned, 10 suspended, and six others reprimanded.

Hong Kong

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Vietnamese migrants in Hong Kong.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: On 10 December, 28 Vietnamese illegal immigrants were repatriated from Hong Kong to Vietnam. This is the second repatriation since the announcement on 29 October of the signature by the British, Hong Kong and Vietnamese Governments of a statement of understanding on principles relating to the return of Vietnamese illegal immigrants from Hong Kong.

The group of 28 comprised 12 who arrived in Hong Kong after 29 October, and 16-double-backers—those who, having returned to Vietnam once, thereby benefiting from United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees —UNHCR—cash assistance, have entered Hong Kong illegally a second time. All the double-backers were rescreened. The 12 new arrivals also underwent the full screening and appeal procedure and were found not to be refugees and eventually volunteered to return to Vietnam. The repatriation was carried out in accordance with international practices and the internationally agreed comprehensive plan of action, in particular the provision that all those found not to be refugees should return to their country of origin.

More than 12,500 Vietnamese have returned to Vietnam from Hong Kong under the UNHCR run voluntary repatriation scheme. We hope that all Vietnamese illegal immigrants will volunteer to return but recognise that there will be some who will not. It will therefore be necessary from time to time for further repatriation flights to be arranged. There has not been a single substantiated case of persecution of any of the returnees.

Somalia

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to promote action in the international community to assist Somalia towards peace and reconstruction.

Mrs. Chalker: We maintain regular contact with partners in the EC and the UN regarding Somalia. On 28 November the EC and member states issued a statement urging the parties to seek peace and reconciliation.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is his current assessment of the situation in Somalia.

Mrs. Chalker: There is no government in Somalia commanding national acceptance. Factional fighting continues, and is particularly heavy in Mogadishu. The north of Somalia, which is relatively peaceful and stable has purported to declare independence. Local leaders have promised a referendum and elections in 1993. We have not recognised the north's purported secession.

DEFENCE

Crown Proceedings (Armed Forces) Act

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide figures showing the amount of money *(a)* budgeted for and *(b)* actually paid out for claims settled under the Crown Proceedings (Armed Forces) Act 1987 for each of the years since the Act came into force.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces will write to my hon. Friend.

Royal Air Force

Mr. Irvine: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what further changes are planned to the deployment of the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Since the measures announced in the "Statement on the Defence Estimates 1991"—SDE 91 —a number of further decisions have been taken as follows:

The move of the two Tornado squadrons from their present base at RAF Marham to RAF Lossiemouth will begin in early 1993 and the transition to a maritime Tornado force equipped with Sea Eagle missiles will be complete by the end of 1994. These two maritime Tornado squadrons will be designated Numbers 12 and 617 Squadrons.

The Tornado weapons conversion unit will redeploy from RAF Honington to RAF Lossiemouth from mid 1993. The groundcrew reconnaissance training facility and the Tornado electronic warfare maintenance school will transfer from RAF Honington to RAF Marham. Other RAF roles for RAF Honington are being considered.

No 55 Squadron, equipped with Victor tankers and now based at RAF Marham, will be disbanded by the end of 1993. The RAF's air-to-air refuelling capability will be provided by VC10 and Tristar aircraft. RAF Marham will continue as a base for two Tornado GR1a squadrons.

It is now planned to disband No. 42 Squadron (Nimrod maritime patrol aircraft) based at RAF St. Mawgan from October 1992, and to move the Nimrod operational training unit from RAF St. Mawgan to RAF Kinloss in mid 1992. RAF St. Mawgan will remain a forward operating base for Nimrods, and have other roles.

RAF Mount Batten will close at the end of 1992, when the school of combat survival and rescue and No. 3 maritime headquarters unit will move to RAF St. Mawgan.

SDE 91 announced that a reduced force of Puma and Chinook support helicopters would be redeployed from RAF Gutersloh to RAF Laarbruch. It has now been decided that this force will comprise a single mixed squadron.

RAF Wattisham will be closed as an active Royal Air Force flying station when the Phantom aircraft now based there are withdrawn from service, by the middle of 1993. Other defence uses for the station are being evaluated.

The US Army has decided to deactivate the 47th area support group (its headquarters in the United Kingdom), based at RAF Burtonwood, in July 1992. The US Army reserve storage depot at RAF Burtonwood will, however, remain.

It has been decided that the No. 60 Squadron (Andovers) currently based at RAF Wildenrath, will disband on 1 April 1992, when flying operations from RAF Wildenrath cease. Its air transport and communications aircraft and crews will deploy to Northolt as part of No. 32 Squadron which is currently based there.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Security Guards

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if Group 4 security guards, once licensed to work at The Wolds prison, will be allowed to work at all prisons.

Mrs. Rumbold: Under the Criminal Justice Act 1991, staff who have been certified by the Secretary of State as prisoner custody officers can undertake custodial duties only at a contracted-out prison.

Mr. George: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the contract payment made to Group 4 at The Wolds prison will be withheld if *(a)* operational capacity is not reached or *(b)* the standards outlined in the contract document are not met.

Mrs. Rumbold: All contracts between the Secretary of State and outside agencies are subject to commercial confidentiality and the commercial conditions of the Wolds contract with Group 4 cannot therefore be made public. However, the contract provides for variations to be

made in the service required of the contractor and for payment to be subject to fair and reasonable adjustment. Action to secure compliance with the contract can take a number of forms including the withholding of payment. The appropriate response in any one case would depend on the circumstances and nature of the default.

Departmental Relocation

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether he has any plans to relocate Home Office departments to sites in Scotland; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what proposals are currently being considered to move Home Office jobs out of Scotland to relocated sites in England;

(3) if he will make a statement on the future of the hearing section of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board currently located in Glasgow.

Mr. John Patten: There are no plans to relocate any Home Office departments to or from Scotland.

The future structure and staffing of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board is under consideration, in the first instance by the board, in the light of a recent wide-ranging management review by Government and private sector management consultants. This could have implications for work loads and staffing levels in both the London and Glasgow offices in due course, but no decisions have yet been taken.

EC Bail Schemes

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on bail schemes in other European Community countries which are seeking to reduce pressure on the prison system.

Mr. John Patten: No systematic information is available on this subject, although it is known that similar kinds of work are carried out by probation officers in France and the Netherlands, and by non-profit organisations and social workers in Germany.

Directorate of Telecommunications

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total annual cost to the taxpayer of grants or subsidies given to the Directorate of Telecommunications.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Provision for DTELS is made in the Government's public expenditure plans and, in common with other parts of the Home Office, the directorate is funded from moneys voted by Parliament. Since 1 April 1989, DTELS has charged for its services, including those provided to police forces and fire brigades. In the financial year 1990-91, these services generated income worth £16·4 million; the cost of operations was £19·2 million. It is expected that the trading activity will break even by 1995-96.

In addition to its trading activity, DTELS is responsible for the operation of the Home Office wireless rental scheme, under which radio equipment was supplied to police forces and fire brigades. Income from the scheme in 1990-91 was some £9 million.

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under what conditions the Directorate of Telecommunications had access to detailed drawings, designs and specifications of telecommunication equipment designed and manufactured by Sonic Communications of Castle Bromwich, Birmingham; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: In order to enable DTELS to install and maintain telecommunications equipment manufactured by Sonic Communications, the company has for many years provided DTELS with technical information and training under arrangements which are the normal commercial practice in the telecommunications services industry.

Police

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the police forces considered as *(a)* under provided and *(b)* over provided with police officers according to the calculations undertaken as part of the recent Home Office review of police manpower, together with (i) the number of officers plus or minus and (ii) the number shown as a percentage of that force's manpower;

(2) if he will list for each police force in England and Wales the figures used by the recent Home Office review of police manpower in respect of *(a)* crime and *(b)* road traffic injuries.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the anticipated crime figures for 1991 in each police force area in England and Wales, and of the percentage increase this represents in each case; and whether this was taken into account in the recent review of police manpower needs.

Mr. John Patten: No estimates have been made for 1991. Figures for the 12 months up to June 1991 are published in "Home Office Statistical Bulletin 18/91", a copy of which is in the Library.

Gaming

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what advice he has received from the Gaming Board of Great Britain on changes in the law that will stem from the recent proposals from the European Commission; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The European Commission is currently examining the gambling sector in the context of the single market, but has not so far produced any formal proposals. We are in touch with the Gaming Board about the progress of the Commission's study, and we would naturally seek the board's views if formal proposals requiring changes in the law are made in due course.

Brixton Prison

Mr. Archer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the decision was taken by the police liaison unit in the prison department and by officials in the directorate of custody not to pass on information about the February Brixton escape plan to *(a)* the Metropolitan police and *(b)* the anti-terrorist squad.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: The information about the prisoners' intention to escape was passed to the police

adviser attached to the directorate of custody by the Metropolitan police, of which the anti-terrorist branch is part.

Mr. Archer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he was given about the involvement of the Staffordshire police in the 7 July Brixton escape on *(a)* the day of the escape and *(b)* the following day.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: As I made clear in my statement on 5 August at the time of the report on the Brixton escape by Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons, information became available from the police in February 1991 that the prisoners Pearse McAuley and Nessan Quinlivan were seeking to escape, and that in particular they had identified the Sunday chapel service as an opportunity and were seeking to acquire a firearm. That information was reported to Prison Service headquarters and to the governor of Her Majesty's prison Brixton in February, but, as I have already made clear, it was not reported to Ministers until after the escape. I was given no information on the day of the escape, Sunday 7 July, about the alleged involvement of the Staffordshire police. On the morning of Monday 8 July I was given an oral report by the Director General of the Prison Service that information had come to light from a prison officer, said to have been collaborating with the Staffordshire police some months before, that the prisoners had at that point been interested in acquiring a firearm. The information given to me in this report was incomplete and unconfirmed. Serious questions remained about the way in which this information had been processed and why no action had been taken at that time to make it more difficult for the prisoners to escape. These questions fell to be considered as part of the inquiry by Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons.

On the afternoon of Monday 8 July I reported to the House the established facts relating to the escape and announced Judge Tumim's inquiry into the circumstances. It would have been wrong to speculate in my statement about unconfirmed information that was itself one of the matters for the inquiry to look into. Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons had access to all the available information in the context of this inquiry. On Thursday 1 August I received Judge Tumim's report setting out the circumstances of the escape and the events prior to it. He found that the information known to the police was made available to Prison Service headquarters and the governor of HM prison Brixton in February 1991, five months before the escape. This information was not reported to Ministers at any time prior to the escape. Judge Tumim advised me that for reasons of security he believed that much of his report could not be published, and that to publish it as it stood would endanger the remaining security at Brixton and the safety of individuals. I accepted that advice, and the information which could be published was made publicly available on Monday 5 August.

Mr. Archer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will publish the report compiled by the Governor of Brixton prison during February 1991 which dealt with the involvement of the Staffordshire police with that prison.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: No.

Sunday Trading

Sir Michael McNair-Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will issue guidelines to chief constables about the action they should take towards those alleged to be thieving from stores and shops unlawfully trading on Sundays.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No guidelines are necessary. The investigation of alleged criminal offences and the decision whether to initiate proceedings in a particular case are operational matters for the chief officer of the police force concerned. The Home Secretary has no authority to intervene. It is my understanding, however, that the legal status of the victim is unlikely to affect a chief officer's decision.

Police Cells

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what new action he intends to take to solve the problems of prisoners held in police cells.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend has described on a number of occasions action which has been taken recently to contain the numbers of prisoners in police cells both in the short and longer terms. He is continuing to monitor the position and will consider what further action might be taken if it proves necessary.

Bangladeshi Nationals

Mr. Shore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for political asylum he has had from Bangladeshi nationals in 1990 and so far in 1991; and how many *(a)* have been refused, *(b)* have been accepted, or *(c)* are awaiting decision.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information is given in the table.

Applications [1] [2] received for asylum in the United Kingdom by citizens of Bangladesh, and decisions[1] [2] 1990-91

	Applications received[3] [4]	*Decisions*[3] *Granted asylum*	*Granted exceptional leave*	*Refused asylum and exceptional leave*
1990	55	—	5	*
[5] [6]1991	480	—	5	105

[1] Excluding dependants.
[2] Provisional figures, rounded to the nearest 5 with * = 1 or 2.
[3] Decisions in a particular time period do not necessarily relate to applications in that period.
[4] At 31 October 1991, 430 applications were recorded as awaiting a decision. However, this figure may overstate because of under-recording of decisions.
[5] 1991 figures may understate because of delays in recording, particularly for decisions.
[6] January to October.

Prevention of Terrorism

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how observations from interested persons or organisations should be submitted for consideration by Lord Colville in his report on the operation in 1991 of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Written observations should be submitted to Lord Colville, c/o room 647, Home Office, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AT, no later than Monday 6 January 1992.

Animals (Scientific Procedures)

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has considered the evidence of possible breaches of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 by Professor Wilhelm Feldberg and Mr. John Stean at the National Institute of Medical Research; what action he proposes to take on this and other aspects of the report of the inquiry set up by the Medical Research Council; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: When the Medical Research Council inquiry's report was published, the Home Office accepted its finding that, as a result of failure by Professor Feldberg and Mr. Stean to maintain anaesthesia of sufficient depth, up to four rabbits were caused avoidable suffering.

In view of the responsibility placed on all holders of certificates of designation to ensure that the requirements of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 are properly observed at their establishments, officials discussed with the certificate holder for the National Institute for Medical Research a number of proposals for improving the management, control and monitoring of animal procedures following publication of the MRC report. The improvements agreed with the certificate holder have now been implemented. The chief inspector of the Home Office animals (scientific procedures) inspectorate has also written to all certificate holders reminding them of their responsibilities under the 1986 Act.

In its annual report for 1990, the Animal Procedures Committee recommended to the Home Secretary changes in policy on the issuing of personal and project licences under the 1986 Act to those who are past retirment age. The Home Secretary has accepted the recommendations. He has agreed that in future project licences should not be issued to those aged 70 or over, other than in exceptional circumstances, and that personal licences should be reviewed when it is known that the holder has retired. When personal or project licences are held by those over 70, they will be reviewed every 12 months. These revised arrangements, with which the Animal Procedures Committee agrees, will be introduced in April 1992.

We have now completed consideration of the evidence of possible breaches of the 1986 Act, including Professor Feldberg's notebooks, which the MRC forwarded to the Home Office.

We do not consider that, in all the circumstances of the case, there are grounds to justify referring the matter to the Director of Public Prosecutions. As soon as it was clear that avoidable suffering had been caused to animals, the Home Office took action to remove the personal and project licences held by Professor Feldberg and Mr. Stean, thus ensuring that they did no further scientific work involving the use of living animals. While there is prima facie evidence that there were breaches of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, we consider that, in the light of all the circumstances of the case, including the effective administrative action already taken, no further purpose would be served by asking the Director of Public Prosecutions to consider prosecution.

SCOTLAND

Police Statistics

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list by police authority *(a)* the population covered by that authority, *(b)* the police force establishment of that authority, *(c)* the total arrests made in that authority, *(d)* the number of arrests per officer, *(e)* the total number of reported crimes, *(f)* the number of crimes per officer, *(g)* the total number of crimes per 1,000 population and *(h)* the total number of unsolved crimes per 1,000 population in each of the past three years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested at *(a)*, *(b)*, *(e)*, *(f)* and *(g)* is set out in the tables 1 to 5. Information on arrests requested at *(c)* and *(d)* is not collected centrally. Neither is information on unsolved crimes collected centrally, but table 6 shows the total number of crimes cleared up per 1,000 population which may be compared with the number of crimes recorded.

Table 1

Population by police authority

Police authority	*Estimated population covered by each police authority as at*		
	30 June 1988	*30 June 1989*	*30 June 1990*
Central	271,526	271,400	272,100
Dumfries and Galloway	147,482	147,600	148,400
Fife	344,017	344,800	345,900
Grampian	501,394	503,500	506,100
Lothian and Borders	843,771	845,600	853,100
Northern	274,624	274,100	276,800
Strathclyde	2,316,739	2,311,200	2,306,000
Tayside	393,748	392,500	394,000
Total	5,094,001	5,090,700	5,102,400

Table 2

Police establishment by police authority

Police authority	*Authorised police establishment as at*			
	30 June 1988	*30 June 1989*	*30 June 1990*	*30 June 1991*
Central	589	638	638	643
Dumfries and Galloway	344	344	344	361
Fife	754	754	754	780
Grampian	1,069	1,116	1,116	1,158
Lothian and Borders	2,435	2,439	2,441	2,487
Northern	620	631	631	631
Strathclyde	6,954	6,954	6,954	6,954
Tayside	1,001	1,001	1,001	1,057
Total	13,766	13,877	13,879	14,071

Table 3

Total number of crimes recorded by the police

Police authority	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Central	19,379	21,066	22,957
Dumfries and Galloway	7,039	6,733	8,096
Fife	25,050	27,690	30,706
Grampian	33,567	34,034	37,070
Lothian and Borders	77,522	78,301	87,548
Northern	12,318	11,841	13,132
Strathclyde	259,666	275,134	293,655
Tayside	35,445	38,586	42,700
TOTAL	469,986	493,385	536,864

Table 4

Total number of crimes recorded per officer

Police authority	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Central	33	33	36
Dumfries and Galloway	20	20	24
Fife	33	37	41
Grampian	31	30	33
Lothian and Borders	32	32	36
Northern	20	19	21
Strathclyde	37	40	42
Tayside	35	39	43
TOTAL	34	36	39

Note: The number of officers is based on the force establishment.

Table 5

Total number of crimes recorded per 1,000 population

Police authority	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Central	71	78	84
Dumfries and Galloway	48	46	55
Fife	73	80	89
Grampian	67	68	73
Lothian and Borders	92	93	103
Northern	45	43	47
Strathclyde	112	119	127
Tayside	90	98	108
TOTAL	92	97	105

Table 6

Total number of crimes cleared up per 1,000 population

Police authority	*1988*	*1989*	*1990*
Central	34	36	39
Dumfries and Galloway	24	23	23
Fife	29	31	32
Grampian	23	24	24
Lothian and Borders	35	36	36
Northern	29	27	29
Strathclyde	31	33	34
Tayside	38	40	45
TOTAL	31	32	34

Note: Information is collected on the number of crimes cleared up each year. Crimes cleared up may have been committed in previous years.

Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration he is giving to the future operation of the airports currently within the control of Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd.; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Highlands and Islands Airports Limited—HIAL—is a subsidiary of the Civil Aviation Authority which is the responsibility of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. Initial consideration is being given to the possibility of a transfer of responsibility for HIAL from the CAA to the Scottish Office, but no decisions have been made. Any such transfer may require legislation.

Enterprise Allowance

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what are the success rates for businesses started on enterprise allowance for each year from 1987 to date, giving figures for *(a)* Greenock and Port Glasgow and *(b)* Strathclyde.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 9 December 1991]:* The information sought is not available in the form requested as it is possible to provide a breakdown only as a percentage of enterprise allowance scheme businesses which completed a full year on the scheme and only by the former Training Agency field office areas. Details for the financial years 1987-88 and 1990-91 are not available.

The information available for the Training Agency field office areas which encompass Greenock, Port Glasgow and Strathclyde is set out in the table below.

Enterprise Allowance businesses completing a full year on the scheme

Area	Financial years 1988-89 Per cent.	1989-90 Per cent.
Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway	81·22	81·52
Glasgow City	83·35	84·55
Renfrew, Dumbarton and Argyll	84·93	88·75
Lanarkshire	85·79	80·57

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people have been on the enterprise allowance scheme each year from 1987 to date giving figures for *(a)* Greenock and Port Glasgow and *(b)* Strathclyde.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 9 December 1991]:* The information sought is not available in the form requested as it is possible to provide a breakdown only by the former Training Agency field office areas. Details for the financial year 1991-92 are not available.

The information available for the Training Agency field office areas which encompass Greenock, Port Glasgow and Strathclyde is set out in the table.

Number of enterprise allowance participants

Area	Financial years 1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91	[1] 1991-92
Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway	981	990	888	701	266
Glasgow City	1,100	966	888	763	398
Renfrew, Dumbarton and Argyll	963	890	660	[2] 288	—
Renfrew[2]	—	—	—	168	136
Dumbarton and Argyll	—	—	—	103	147
Lanarkshire	764	755	707	564	232

[1] 1 April 1991 to 30 September 1991 only.
[2] The training field office area of Renfrew, Dumbarton and Argyll split into two areas in August 1990.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of business start-ups the enterprise allowance constitutes for each year from 1987 to date, for *(a)* Greenock and Port Glasgow and *(b)* Strathclyde.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 9 December 1991]:* The information requested is not available.

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what types of business have been created by enterprise allowance, broken down by standard industrial classification, or by manufacturing, construction, transport and distribution, retail, private services and others, giving details for *(a)* Greenock and Port Glasgow and *(b)* Strathclyde.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 9 December 1991]:* The information requested is not available at any level of disaggregation below Great Britain as a whole.

Self-employment

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people are self-employed in *(a)* Greenock and Port Glasgow and *(b)* Strathclyde, and if he will publish comparable figures from 1987 to date.

Mr. Allan Stewart *[holding answer 9 December 1991]:* Estimates of the number self-employed for areas within Scotland are available only from the censuses of population. At the time of the 1981 census there were 57,426 people recorded as self-employed in Strathclyde region and 904 recorded as self-employed in the Greenock and Port Glasgow constituency. Data from the 1991 census on the numbers self-employed in the Strathclyde region are expected to become available around 1992 and for the parliamentary constituency of Greenock and Port Glasgow in January 1993.

Health Boards

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will provide for each health board the total amount required for repairs and maintenance of health board property and equipment to bring it up to an overall condition which exhibits only minor deterioration.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 6 December 1991]:* The Government already provide significant resources for this purpose. In addition to substantial capital investment in new building and improvements health boards have spent a total of £210 million on the repair and maintenance of property and equipment since 1983-84. Future allocations will enable health boards to invest further capital in improving the physical condition of the existing estate.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Aluminium Can (Recycling)

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Lord President of the Council what decision was made by the Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee regarding the implementation of a policy of recycling aluminium cans within the Palace of Westminster.

Mr. MacGregor *[holding answer 9 December 1991]:* At the end of last Session, when the Accommodation and

Administration Sub-Committee ceased to exist, there had been no opportunity for it to consider the question of collecting aluminium cans for recycling. The authorities of the House are however investigating what arrangements could be made for that purpose in order that the matter can be considered in due course by the Accommodation and Works Committee.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Research Library

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, as representing the House of Commons Commission, how many persons currently work in the research Library of the House of Commons; of these how many are *(a)* British citizens, *(b)* citizens of other EC countries and *(c)* citizens of Commonwealth countries; and if he will make a statement on the policy of the Commission in making appointments to such posts.

Mr. Beith: There are 55 staff employed in the research division of the House of Commons Library. All are of British nationality.

Prior to 21 May 1991, in order to be eligible for appointment to the civil service and, in accordance with the provisions of the Race Relations (Prescribed Public Bodies) (Amendment) Regulations 1985, to the House of Commons Service, candidates had to be British citizens, Commonwealth citizens or citizens of the Republic of Ireland. The European Communities (Employment in the Civil Service) Order 1991, which took effect on 21 May 1991, allows nationals of other member states of the European Communities and certain members of their families to be employed in the civil service other than in the "public service" within the meaning of article 48(4) of the treaty of Rome.

By statute, conditions of service of staff of the House have to be kept broadly in line with those in the home civil service. Consequently, the Commission is considering the implications of the Order in Council for its own recruitment policy; and a survey of posts is being conducted to determine which may be classified as "public service" within the meaning of article 48(4) of the treaty of Rome.

WALES

Consultants (Waiting Lists)

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is *(a)* the highest, *(b)* the lowest and *(c)* the average of waiting lists for consultants with the health service in Wales, including where a consultant operates at more than one hospital or clinic; and what efforts are being made to transfer patients to consultants with shorter waiting lists.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This information is not held centrally at present. The most detailed data currently available are for the main specialties at hospital level, as published in the Welsh hospital waiting list bulletin. However, the recently published patients charter sets out the Government's plans to improve the quality and range of information on healthcare services in Wales. In that is the guarantee that health authorities will make more widely available to GPs and patients information in respect of waiting times by consultant as well as by hospital and specialty. Patients from anywhere in Wales who are suffering from cataracts, varicose veins and hernias or who need hip or knee joint replacements may be referred to one of the four treatment centres we have established if they have been waiting for in-patient treatment for more than four months. When I visited in May the five hospitals which then had the highest in-patient waiting lists I discussed the problem with a wide range of staff. It appeared that there are marked differences in the length of lists between consultants and locations. Also there are instances where a consultant has out-patient clinics at two different hospitals within the same vicinity yet where the lengths of the two out-patient lists are markedly different.

Set-aside Scheme

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many set-aside agreements are operative in Wales; and if he will list the numbers by county.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is as follows:

	Number
Gwynedd	4
Clwyd	4
Powys	5
Mid Glamorgan	—
South Glamorgan	1
West Glamorgan	3
Gwent	7
Dyfed	37
Total	61

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the operation of set-aside in Wales; what is the current amount of grant involved; and if he proposes to increase set-aside grants.

Mr. David Hunt: Payments under the set-aside scheme in 1991-92 are expected to be around £350,000. There are no plans to increase the grant rates at present.

Grant-aided Bodies (Deficits)

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales further to his answer of 29 November, *Official Report*, columns *687-88*, if he will list those non-departmental bodies, to which he offers a grant-in-aid, which are currently running operational deficits.

Mr. David Hunt: Grant in aid is paid to the following executive non-departmental public bodies:

Cardiff Bay Development Corporation
Countryside Council for Wales
Curriculum Council for Wales
Development Board for Rural Wales
Housing for Wales
National Library of Wales
National Museum of Wales
Sports Council for Wales
Welsh Development Agency
Wales Tourist Board

In all these cases grant in aid is provided to enable the bodies concerned to carry out those activities which cannot be financed from charges, rents and other sources of funding.

Rail Crossings

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many crossings of *(a)* footpaths and *(b)* bridleways there are in Wales over railway lines where the line speed is 100 mph or higher.

Sir Wyn Roberts: There are two crossings of footpaths and none of bridleways.

Bus Deregulation

Mr. Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the volume of mergers and concentration in the bus industry in Wales following deregulation.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Comprehensive information on the volume of mergers in the bus industry in Wales is not available centrally.

Training

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what standards of training, including provision for on-the-job training, will be required of employers who may take young people's training credits.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Young people with a training credit are free to work with any employer. Training credits operate in the broad framework of youth training, including the requirement that all participant providers of training who are funded through the training and enterprise council should satisfy criteria at least equivalent to those for approved training organisations.

Schools Inspectorate

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many people are employed in Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools in Wales; and what increase or decrease is being proposed.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The number of HMI currently employed in Wales is 59. Until my right hon. Friend has completed his consideration of the future role and structure of HMI in Wales, I am not in a position to say whether there will be any change in numbers. We hope to announce our conclusions shortly.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what consultations have been held with local education authorities and parents about the proposed changes to Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools in Wales;

(2) whether he will list those organisations in Wales which have advocated the proposed changed role and status of Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools.

Sir Wyn Roberts: In May this year my right hon. Friend announced his intention to conduct a review of the role and structure of HMI in Wales. That review has involved work by an external consultant who, in addition to inviting written evidence from teachers' unions, held discussions with head teachers, principals of colleges, a number of directors of education and local authority advisers, representatives of other interested organisations and the committee and officers of the HMI association.

The Education (Schools) Bill now before the House makes provision for a new statutory post of Her Majesty's chief inspector—HMCI—of schools for Wales to oversee arrangements for the new system of regular school inspections referred to in "Education: A Charter for Parents in Wales" which was published at the end of September. The HMCI will also be charged with providing advice to my right hon. Friend on the quality of education provided by schools in Wales and the educational standards achieved by them.

My right hon. Friend has not yet taken decisions on other aspects of HMI's current function in Wales, to which the report by the external consultant is relevant. My right hon. Friend hopes to announce his conclusions shortly.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he next intends to meet Her Majesty's inspector of schools in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend and I meet the chief inspector as appropriate to discuss aspects of his work and the work of his staff.

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has of the number of local education authority inspectors/advisers employed by each of the authorities in Wales.

Sir Wyn Roberts: This information is not normally collected centrally. However, I understand that the numbers are as follows:

Authority	*Number advisers/ inspectors*
Powys	16
South Glamorgan	24
Mid Glamorgan	29
West Glamorgan	22
Dyfed	22
Gwent	30
Gwynedd	19
Clwyd	20
TOTAL	182

Roads

Mr. Grist: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales why there is an unused carriageway between the two carriageways in use of the A48(M) west of its junction with the M4; how long has it been there; what was the cost; what was its purpose; what is now intended; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The unused carriageway between the two A48(M) carriageways at Castleton—M4/A48(M) junction 29—was constructed when the carriageway resurfacing and strengthening work to the A48(M) were carried out in 1989. It was provided to enable westbound traffic—M4 to A48(M)—to be transferred to the eastbound carriageway, in contraflow, while works to the westbound carriageway were carried out. Because of the split between the two A48(M) carriageways at Castleton, junction 29, this contraflow arrangement would not otherwise have been possible.

On completion of the A48(M) works in 1989, the ends of this additional length of carriageway were stopped up using landscaped mounds. The carriageway has not been removed because it may, at some time in the future, be useful again should a contraflow arrangement be necessary to carry out further works.

The cost of the carriageway was £250,000.

Crime Prevention

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what assessment he has made of the needs of each community or district in Wales in terms of crime prevention, and what initiatives he has taken as a consequence terms of the responsibilities of his Department.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Public law and order and matters of policy relating to crime prevention are the responsibilities of the Home Office. However, the Welsh Office supports a number of social projects which contribute to crime prevention or alleviate its effects.

Under the urban programme the Welsh Office invites applications for projects to help overcome economic, environmental and social deprivation in urban Wales. Support of over £500,000 has been approved for crime prevention initiatives during the current financial year, including £270,000 for 11 new projects. The Department has also assisted with the appointments of crime prevention co-ordinators in six of the eight Welsh counties.

As part of the funding of the voluntary sector, the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders—NACRO—is receiving some £180,000 over a three-year period to establish a juvenile crime prevention unit. The unit works with local authorities and other agencies in south-east Wales to develop strategies that combat juvenile crime.

The Welsh Office has also played a role in the widely acclaimed partnership approach to crime prevention, and has been associated with the launch of several successful initiatives in the Principality. These have included: the Cynon Valley crime prevention bureau on 14 February; an auto crime Project in north Wales on 15 April; the major campaign "Secured by Design", in Caernarvon castle on 18 June; "Vehicle Watch Wales" in Crossyceiliog on 11 September; and the Dyfed crime reduction initiative at Pembroke dock on 9 December.

The Department has also supported a youth crime seminar organised by NACRO in Cardiff on 5 July.

Partnership schemes bring together various agencies such as local authorities, the police, probation and social services, the youth services, NACRO and the commercial sector in order to develop carefully targeted and co-ordinated responses to specific problems.

On 1 October the Department also took part in an open day arranged by the Home Office in Cardiff which again highlighted the attention being given to crime prevention matters in Wales.

Needs and Deprivation

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales at what dates during the last 12 years his Department has reviewed the factors taken into account in assessing need or deprivation in communities and districts in Wales *(a)* in general and *(b)* in regard to eligibility for urban programme; and what changes have been made as a result of each review.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Since 1979 the factors used to assess deprivation in Wales for general purposes and to determine eligibility for urban programme assistance have been reviewed and recalculated in 1980, 1982, 1984, 1986, 1988 and 1990. Since 1988 the index based upon these factors has been calculated for all electoral wards in Wales. Following the 1984 review three districts were added to the original five designated under the Inner Urban Areas Act 1978; following the review in 1986, two more districts were designated; and following the 1990 review all districts in Wales containing at least one deprived electoral ward became eligible to apply for urban programme assistance.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the factors which are taken into account by his Department in assessing need or deprivation in communities and districts in Wales *(a)* in general and *(b)* in regard to eligibility for urban programme.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The factors which are used to indicate deprivation for general purposes and for eligibility to the urban programme are high levels of unemployment, low levels of economically active population, high levels of low socio-economic groups in a population; high loss of population in the 20 and 59 years age group, high levels of permanent sickness in a population; high levels of overcrowding in housing, low levels of basic housing amenities, and an above average standard mortality rate.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he will announce the names of the hospitals and other health service units who are to be invited to proced to draw up applications to become opt-out national health service trusts.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: No hospitals or other health service units will be opting out of the national health service—a fact which the hon. Gentleman knows well. An announcement will be made soon on those health service units invited to prepare applications to become national health service trusts in 1993.

EMPLOYMENT

Tourism

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information his Department holds on the total Government expenditure on tourism in each year since 1986-87.

Mr. Jackson: The Department's best estimates of the total tourism related expenditure by Government-funded bodies for Great Britain between 1 April 1987 and 31 March 1992 are as follows:

	£ million
1987-88	404·7
1988-89	478·3
1989-90	486·0
1990-91	570·2
[1]1991-92	576·3

[1] Estimate.

It is not possible to give comparable figures for 1986-87 because of organisational changes. The above figures comprise Government provision to statutory tourist bodies, to English Heritage, to royal parks and palaces, to museums and galleries, to the Countryside Commission, to the Nature Conservancy Council, to the Rural

Development Commission, to the Sports Council and analogous expenditure in Scotland and Wales. It is not possible to isolate the tourism element of spending for bodies with a remit wider than tourism, except for Highlands and Islands Enterprise, formerly the Highlands and Islands Development Board, where this has been done.

Earnings

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the proportion of *(a)* male, *(b)* female and *(c)* all employees working (i) 40 to 48 hours per week, (ii) 49 to 60 hours per week or (iii) over 60 hours per week for (1) manual employment, (2) non-manual employment and (3) all employment, with weekly earnings below £100, from £100 to £130, from £130 to £140, from £140 to £180, from £180 to £190, from £190 to £200, from £200 to £300, from £300 to £400, from £400 to £500, from £500 to £600 and from £600 to £700 respectively.

Mr. Jackson: The information available closest to that requested is published in part F tables 159-160 of the new earnings survey 1991, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Training

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will state the total inputs into training *(a)* by the Government and *(b)* by employers, in Britain, for the year 1986-87, and for the latest year for which figures are available on the same basis as the Department of Employment press notice of 30 October 1991.

Mr. Jackson: It is estimated that the financial input, including earnings forgone by individuals, into vocational education and training in Britain in 1986-87 was £33 billion. Of this, £7 billion was attributable to the government and £18 billion to employers. Comparable figures for later years are not available, although evidence suggests that employers' expenditure has risen and now exceeds £20 billion a year.

Footwear Industry

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when he received proposals for national vocational qualifications from the British Footwear Manufacturers Federation; and when he intends to approve them.

Mr. Jackson: Submissions for accreditation of qualifications as national vocational qualifications—NVQs—are received by the National Council for Vocational Qualifications—NCVQ. The British Footwear Manufacturers Federation is in discussion with NCVQ and Employment Department officials and it is hoped that it will soon be able to make a successful submission to the NCVQ for accreditation of NVQs.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Local Management of Schools

11. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many local education authorities have already delegated 85 per cent. of their funds to schools.

Mr. Fallon: Forty-one out of 97. This represents an update on the figures I gave in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mr. Norris) on 14 October, *Official Report* columns *67-72*. The revised figures are as follows:

Table one: The extent of LEAs' delegation to schools (1991-92)

(1) *Local education authority*	*(2)* *PSB delegated to schools* *(per cent.)*	*(per cent.)*	*(3)* *PSB not delegated per pupil 1991-92* *(£)*	*(4)* *Central administration as proportion of PSB* *(per cent.)*	*(per cent.)*
1. Stockport	88·69	(—)	200	3·15	(—)
2. Rochdale	88·46	(85·74)	180	2·37	(2·55)
3. Sunderland	88·40	(86·86)	190	2·15	(3·10)
4. Bolton	88·31	(89·10)	200	2·06	(2·02)
5. Northumberland	88·16	(86·54)	170	2·37	(3·10)
6. Manchester	88·03	(—)	210	3·54	(—)
7. Sefton	87·86	(87·44)	210	2·71	(4·45)
8. Berkshire	87·68	(87·68)	210	2·78	(2·71)
9. West Sussex	87·67	(87·49)	190	2·09	(1·95)
10. Suffolk	87·56	(85·66)	220	0·78	(2·75)
11. Cambridgeshire	87·45	(80·75)	200	2·03	(4·82)
12. Cheshire	87·35	(84·31)	210	1·71	(5·15)
13. Devon	87·14	(83·11)	210	2·53	(3·06)
14. Warwickshire	86·72	(85·24	210	3·19	(3·90)
15. Bradford	86·68	(86·04)	230	3·55	(3·87)
16. Buckinghamshire	86·58	(84·88)	220	3·55	(4·58)
17. Leeds	86·26	(86·12)	250	4·22	(3·87)
18. Hertfordshire	86·19	(—)	240	3·81	(—)
19. Hampshire	86·11	(85·78)	240	3·16	(3·34)
20. Shropshire	86·09	(84·60)	250	2·00	(2·48)
21. Salford	86·03	(84·37)	230	2·64	(3·19)
22. Northamptonshire	86·01	(84·74)	240	2·23	(3·69)
23. South Tyneside	85·94	(83·76)	230	2·06	(4·20)
24. Sheffield	85·92	(82·61)	250	3·26	(3·49)
25. Barnsley	85·91	(83·38)	220	2·88	(2·86)
26. Kent	85·84	(84·87)	230	4·61	(3·79)
27. Wirral	85·73	(—)	230	2·59	(—)
28. Solihull	85·59	(85·31)	250	1·93	(2·49)
29. Walsall	85·50	(85·72)	250	3·40	(3·37)

(1) Local education authority	(2) PSB delegated to schools (per cent.)	(per cent.)	(3) PSB not delegated per pupil 1991-92 (£)	(4) Central administration as proportion of PSB (per cent.)	(per cent.)
30. Somerset	85·48	(82·91)	260	2·69	(3·58)
31. Calderdale	85·46	(81·86)	230	2·39	(4·84)
32. Lincolnshire	85·46	(85·13)	250	2·21	(2·68)
33. Rotherham	85·43	(86·13)	250	3·76	(3·74)
34. Cumbria	85·41	(82·53)	250	3·02	(4·04)
35. East Sussex	85·37	(84·09)	240	2·20	(2·42)
36. Bury	85·31	(81·92)	250	2·00	(4·70)
37. Barking	85·20	(87·01)	270	3·27	(3·34)
38. Dorset	85·16	(81·85)	240	3·72	(4·71)
39. Sutton	85·15	(83·44)	260	3·84	(4·05)
40. Havering	85·09	(83·87)	280	1·93	(2·28)
41. Essex	85·08	(84·03)	250	3·52	(4·11)
See footnote 2					
42. Kirklees	84·96	(83·38)	250	3·65	(3·98)
43. Bromley	84·88	(80·70)	290	5·70	(4·49)
44. Westminster	84·88	(77·96)	370	5·59	(8·20)
45. Merton	84·86	(79·79)	300	3·33	(7·86)
46. Staffordshire	84·84	(84·61)	250	4·10	(4·51)
47. Enfield	84·68	(81·50)	290	3·69	(5·56)
48. Oxfordshire	84·68	(81·37)	290	2·85	(5·46)
49. Surrey	84·61	(85·57)	270	4·85	(6·17)
50. Humberside	84·60	(81·71)	270	3·01	(3·57)
51. North Tyneside	84·55	(82·30)	270	3·99	(5·03)
52. St. Helens	84·53	(83·27)	260	3·65	(3·69)
53. Gloucestershire	84·47	(86·78)	240	3·37	(3·65)
54. Dudley	84·47	(83·98)	260	3·64	(3·62)
55. Norfolk	84·37	(83·62)	270	3·35	(4·05)
56. Kingston	84·35	(78·46)	310	4·11	(7·09)
57. Wakefield	84·28	(82·27)	260	1·49	(2·98)
58. Leicestershire	84·28	(—)	280	2·89	(—)
59. North Yorkshire	84·16	(82·62)	270	2·37	(4·15)
60. Doncaster	84·00	(85·45)	280	2·29	(2·29)
61. Hereford/Worcester	83·99	(—)	270	3·18	(—)
62. Derbyshire	83·97	(83·37)	270	3·04	(2·96)
63. Nottinghamshire	83·96	(82·72)	270	3·41	(5·24)
64. Cornwall	83·95	(83·57)	240	3·52	(3·72)
65. Trafford	83·94	(84·38)	250	3·68	(3·49)
66. Gateshead	83·92	(83·29)	280	2·99	(3·01)
67. Hillingdon	83·91	(—)	290	6·17	(—)
68. Tameside	83·80	(84·40)	270	2·16	(2·47)
69. Haringey	83·77	(79·36)	350	4·78	(6·04)
70. Isle of Wight	83·75	(82·48)	280	1·92	(4·68)
71. Barnet	83·68	(84·36)	310	4·96	(5·07)
72. Brent	83·51	(83·63)	360	4·26	(4·82)
73. Birmingham	83·41	(83·04)	280	3·85	(4·36)
74. Cleveland	83·37	(83·63)	280	4·64	(5·56)
75. Bedfordshire	83·29	(84·02)	300	3·66	(3·91)
76. Wiltshire	83·26	(82·35)	280	3·18	(3·92)
77. Hounslow	83·26	(81·59)	330	4·46	(5·19)
78. Knowsley	83·24	(81·91)	300	4·99	(5·07)
79. Isles of Scilly	83·17	(—)	550	6·41	(—)
80. Oldham	83·14	(81·64)	280	4·53	(4·98)
81. Redbridge	83·13	(82·71)	280	5·10	(4·91)
82. Wigan	83·03	(83·28)	300	4·18	(3·70)
83. Ealing	82·92	(81·66)	340	5·86	(6·33)
84. Liverpool	82·92	(84·91)	320	4·65	(4·07)
85. Avon	82·78	(82·30)	300	3·87	(3·40)
86. Coventry	82·76	(80·93)	300	4·37	(6·00)
87. Sandwell	82·74	(83·24)	320	4·51	(3·75)
88. Lancashire	82·74	(82·66)	300	3·46	(3·65)
89. Richmond	82·58	(79·98)	330	4·82	(6·91)
90. Harrow	82·45	(81·52)	320	5·05	(5·76)
91. Newcastle	82·38	(79·76)	320	5·09	(6·12)
92. Durham	82·16	(83·13)	310	4·79	(4·35)
93. Wolverhampton	81·55	(81·77)	350	5·33	(5·26)
94. Bexley	81·32	(81·33)	330	5·06	(4·61)
95. Croydon	81·00	(—)	380	4·15	(—)
96. Waltham Forest	80·22	(79·65)	400	6·60	(7·02)
97. Newham	79·46	(—)	450	5·94	(—)
National averages	84·89	(83·76)	260	3·44	(4·06)

Footnotes to table showing the extent of delegation.

1. 97 local education authorities (LEAs) currently have LMS schemes in operation, and are required to publish budget statements under section 42 of the Education Reform Act. The LEAs are ranked according to the percentage of funds delegated to schools, with those delegating more at the top of the ranking order. Schemes for 12 inner London LEAs other than Westminster are due to be submitted by 30 September and are due to come into operation on 1 April 1992.
2. The *potential schools budget* (PSB) consists of the major part of the general schools budget (GSB)—ie the GSB less expenditure on certain excepted items: capital expenditure; expenditure supported by central government grants; and expenditure on school meals, home to school transport and transitional exceptions (eg grounds maintenance). The amount which the schools themselves decide how to spend, as a proportion of the PSB, is a percentage used as an indicator of the extent to which LEAs have delegated resources to their schools. A new requirement from 1993 (1995 for inner London authorities) is that this percentage should be a minimum of 85 per cent. The percentage for last year 1990-91 is given in brackets. Where a figure is not given in brackets the LMS scheme was not in operation last year.
3. The proportion of the PSB held back by each LEA (ie not delegated to schools) expressed as a cash amount per pupil—rounded to the nearest £10. Pupil numbers have in most cases been taken from LEA's section 42 statements. Where pupil numbers are not provided in the section 42 statement they are taken from the latest statistical information available to the Department, ie the January 1990 form 7 returns.
4. Expenditure on central administration—one of the discretionary exceptions included in the PSB—expressed as a percentage of the PSB. Last year's percentage is given in brackets.

Note:

The percentages stated may differ from the percentages calculated by individual LEAs because of the effects of rounding.

Dyslexia

15. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what programmes are being considered to help pupils suffering from dyslexia.

Mr. Fallon: It is for local education authorities to make suitable provision for dyslexic pupils. The Government have also invested £250,000 to research how information technology and its software can assist dyslexic pupils, in a project based at the Harris CTC. My right hon. and learned Friend has also asked the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education to report on how trainee teachers are taught to identify and help dyslexic pupils.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many *(a)* primary and *(b)* post primary schools in England and Wales have a specialist teacher for pupils suffering from dyslexia.

Mr. Fallon: I regret that this information is not collected centrally.

Polytechnics

16. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many polytechnics have indicated a desire to adopt the title universities; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The polytechnics have welcomed our policy to allow flexibility over the university title. Those that wish to take advantage of this flexibility will shortly be invited to propose new titles to the Privy Council Office.

Youth Work

17. **Mr. Callaghan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received regarding the future of youth work and the youth service.

Mr. Atkins: I have recently received representations from the National Youth Agency on a number of issues relating to the youth service.

Teacher Appraisal

18. **Mr. David Porter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on teacher appraisal.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Regulations requiring the appraisal of school teachers in England and Wales were made in July. All teachers now in service must complete the first year of their appraisal cycle by August 1995.

Higher Education

19. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received on the White Paper "Higher Education—A New Framework"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The Government have received a number of representations on the higher education White Paper. They generally welcome the Government's proposals.

Primary Schools

20. **Sir Michael Neubert:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what scope he sees for the setting or streaming of pupils in primary schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: In the statement I issued last week, I encouraged primary teachers to explore a range of approaches to improve primary teaching, including grouping pupils according to their achievements in a particular subject, so that their individual needs can better be met.

Foundation for Sport and the Arts

21. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he last met representatives of the Foundation for Sport and the Arts to discuss assistance to sport.

Mr. Atkins: I met the foundation's trustees on 3 December 1991.

Grant-maintained Schools

22. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received about the level of annual maintenance grants for grant-maintained schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: We have received more than 50 responses to the consultation paper we issued on 17 October about the funding of grant-maintained schools in 1992-93. We are considering carefully the detailed comments we have received and will announce final decisions in due course.

Capital Spending

23. **Mr. O'Hara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he proposes to announce the allocations made to each local education authority for capital spending, 1992-93.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend intends to announce his annual capital guidelines and voluntary aided school capital allocations for 1992-93 to local education authorities shortly.

School Buildings

24. **Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proposals he has to enable local education authorities to improve the fabric of school buildings.

Mr. Fallon: Local education authorities and school governors are responsible for the state of their school buildings, and for deciding expenditure levels and priorities.

We are making substantial resources available to local education authorities for capital spending on school buildings. A total of £524 million will be allocated for schools for 1992-93, an increase of 11 per cent. over the £472 million allocated in 1991-92. Building grants for voluntary aided schools will also increase to £151 million, a rise of over 15 per cent. on the current year.

25. **Mr. Beaumont-Dark:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make additional moneys available to the city of Birmingham for major repairs for school buildings.

Mr. Fallon: Annual capital guidelines for local authority capital expenditure on schools will rise by 11 per cent. in 1992-93, to £524 million. In addition, grants to voluntary aided schools will rise by 15 per cent. to £150 million. We expect to announce the distribution of these totals between education authorities shortly before Christmas.

26. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will approve an additional allocation of funds to Bradford local education authority to enable school building and renovation to take place in the current year.

Mr. Fallon: I hope to respond to Bradford's request for a supplementary credit approval shortly.

Student Grants

27. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the current level of the maximum student grant; and what change there has been since 1978-79 in real terms.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The maximum basic maintenance grant is for students in London, as defined in the Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations 1991, and stands at £2,845. This represents 82 per cent. of the comparable rate for the 1978-79 academic year—£1,315—after adjusting for retail price changes only. The maximum full-year London student loan—£660—brings the resources per student to slightly more in real terms now than in 1978-79. These comparisons take no account of changes in the composition of the mandatory award.

Examination Results

28. **Mr. Page:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the relationship between spending by local education authorities and examination results.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Bournmouth, West (Mr. Butterfill).

Parental Choice

29. **Mr. Arbuthnot:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the workings of Government policies on parental choice in central London.

Mr. Fallon: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Hughes) on 12 November, *Official Report*, columns *492-93*.

Teachers' Pay

30. **Mr. Knapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the proposed independent pay review body for teachers.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave today to my hon. Friend the Member for Berkshire, East (Mr. MacKay).

European Football Championship

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what support his Department is giving to the bid to hold the European nations football championship in England; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The Government have welcomed the Football Association's bid. Officials in my Department are working closely with the Football Association on a number of matters relating to the bid and have provided the guarantees requested by UEFA.

AIDS/HIV Classes

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received in favour of a Christian conscience clause which would permit parents with deeply held religious beliefs to withdraw their children from classes dealing with AIDS/HIV.

Mr. Atkins: My right hon. Friend has received a large number of representations from minority religious groups, seeking a right for parents to withdraw their children from the proposed new requirement of national curriculum science that pupils aged 11 to 14 shall extend their study of the way in which the healthy functioning of the human body may be affected by the human immunodeficiency virus.

Free School Meals

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish the latest figures for the number and proportion of children in families on income support who are not taking up their entitlement to free school meals *(a)* in primary schools, *(b)* in secondary schools and *(c)* in special schools.

Mr. Fallon: This information is not available in the form requested. In May 1990, a total of 1,010,815 children aged between five and 16 were in families in England receiving income support. A total of 764,611 free meals were taken in maintained primary—including nursery—secondary and special schools in England on the school meal census date in January 1990.

Seven-year-olds (Testing)

Mrs. Heal: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the total cost of introducing testing for seven-year-olds in 1991; and what is the estimated cost of testing for 1992.

Mr. Eggar: The total cost of writing, printing and distributing the tests for seven-year-olds for England and Wales in English, Welsh, maths and science was £1·1 million for 1991, and is estimated at £2 million for 1992. The associated essential development work, including trials and evaluation, cost £4·3 million.

The Department also supports expenditure by LEAs on implementing the assessment arrangements through its grants for education support and training programme, to fund a total of £35 million in 1991-92 and £45 million in 1992-93.

School Transport

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what consideration he has now given to the Audit Commission report "Home to School Transport, A System at the Crossroads"; what plans he has to implement the commission's proposal contained in its conclusion that targeting of benefit is necessary to ensure that the benefit of free or assisted travel is enjoyed by those who need it; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. and learned Friend has not yet completed his consideration of the commission's report.

Hearnville School, Balham

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make an official visit to Hearnville school, Balham, SW12, to meet parents of children attending this school to hear their views before any decision as to the future of the school is decided by him; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: If Wandsworth council wishes to close a school, it is required to publish proposals under section 12 of the 1980 Act. Parents will have the opportunity to make their views known during the two-month objection period following publication. My right hon. and learned Friend will take those objections into account in making his decisions on proposals which come before him.

Grant-maintained Schools

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science, further to his oral answer of 12 November, *Official Report*, columns 891-92, what progress he has made in obtaining undertakings from Hampshire county council that it will present a more detached account of the case to parents when grant-maintained options are on the table.

Mr. Eggar: I have been in correspondence recently with the chairman of Hampshire education committee on the subject of Hampshire's conduct during a GM ballot.

Sports Council

Mr. Gregory: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has yet reached a decision on the application for funding of the relocation of the Sports Council to York; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: Relocation is a matter for the Sports Council. I understand that at present it has no plans to relocate its headquarters out of London.

Medical Research Council

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he has received the annual report of the Medical Research Council for 1990-91; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: As required by the Science and Technology Act 1965, the council has submitted its annual report for 1990-91 to the Secretary of State, and we are placing a copy before the House today.

I have read the report with interest, and was encouraged to note how much of the council's recent research will be of rapid and practical benefit to the nation's health needs. Examples of such research include the discovery of the underlying cause of the commonest inherited disposition to heart disease; the discovery of a direct relation between impaired growth in the womb and high blood pressure in adult life; and the results of the largest-ever trial of surgery, which showed that an operation to clear the carotid arteries could halve the risk of serious strokes in high-risk patients.

The MRC also attaches great importance to continuing research in the basic biological sciences, and I congratulate it on its discovery, in collaboration with the Imperial Cancer Research Fund, of the gene responsible for maleness. I also applaud the news of continuing successful collaboration with industry which has led to increased income for the MRC and a Queen's award.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 11 December 1991

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Fees Taxation

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Attorney-General what is the current average period between trial and taxation of counsel's fees in cases where the taxation is carried out by the central taxing unit; and if he will make a statment.

The Attorney-General: The information is not available in the form requested. Under the regulations, legal aid claims may be submitted by solicitors or counsel up to three months after the trial has been concluded. Central taxing teams deal with heavy and complex cases, which often involve a number of claims. The cases are not treated as ready to tax until all those claims have been received.

The table related to claims by counsel and solicitors determined by the central taxing teams during November 1991. It shows the proportion of those claims falling into age bands from the date when they became ready to tax and that over 50 per cent. were determined between 16 and 20 weeks from the date when they were ready to tax.

The Lord Chancellor is keeping the progress of the teams under close review and has recently increased the number of determining officers available to the central taxing teams by almost 40 per cent. This is expected significantly to reduce the delays in determinations.

Age since ready to tax	*Percentage of total claims determined in November 1991*
Weeks	
0–4	9·3
4–8	9·6
8–12	14·7
12–16	12·7
16–20	8·3
over 20	45·4

Stipendiary Magistrates

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Attorney-General how many metropolitan stipendiary magistrates were in office on 1 December 1989, 1990 and 1991, respectively; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The number of metropolitan stipendiary magistrates in office on 1 December in each of the following years was:

Year	*Number*
1989	45
1990	48
1991	50

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Attorney-General how many provincial stipendiary magistrates were in office on 1 December 1989, 1990 and 1991, respectively; and if he will make as statement.

The Attorney-General: The number of provincial stipendiary magistrates in office on 1 December in each of the following years was:

Year	*Number*
1989	17
1990	18
1991	26

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on his assessment of the cost-effectiveness of the stipendiary magistracy.

The Attorney-General: Stipendiary magistrates are appointed primarily to support the lay magistracy in dealing with heavy workloads and in reducing or avoiding delays. Their cost-effectiveness arises from the generally greater speed with which they deal with cases, particularly complex ones, as compared with a purely lay bench in the circumstances in which it is appropriate to appoint them.

Crown Prosecution Service

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Attorney-General how many *(a)* solicitors and *(b)* barristers were employed by the Crown prosecution service on 1 October 1989, 1990 and 1991, respectively; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: On 1 October 1989 the Crown prosecution service employed 1,018 solicitors and 514·5 barristers. On 1 October 1990 those numbers had risen to 1,134 solicitors and 521 barristers, and on 1 October 1991 to 1,278·5 solicitors and 596 barristers.

Negligence

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Attorney-General if he has any proposals for the reform of the law of negligence, in the light of the decision in Murphy *v.* Brentwood (1990) 3WLR414; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: The Government have no proposals to reform the law of negligence in the light of the decision in Murphy *v.* Brentwood District Council (1990 3 WLR 414).

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Baltic States

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the progress of relations between the United Kingdom and Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia respectively.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are making good progress in developing our close and friendly relations with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Since the re-establishment of diplomatic relations with the three states in September, we have set up an embassy in each capital and each of the three states has established an embassy in London. Several projects in the three states have received help from the know-how fund, and other projects are being considered for assistance.

Disarmament

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will obtain for his departmental library the "Pugwash Monograph-Verification: Monitoring Disarmament", edited by Calogero, Goldberger and Kapitza, published in 1990 by Westview Press.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Yes. A copy has been ordered and will be added to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office departmental library in due course.

International Conference on Plutonium

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the speakers' appeal produced at the international conference on plutonium, held in Omiya, Japan, on 2 to 4 November.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office departmental library already has access to the text of the appeal through online news sources.

Turkey

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response Her Majesty's Government have made to the announcement by the new coalition Government in Turkey that major progress is to be achieved in the areas of human rights, freedom of the press, access to education, and constitutional and legal reform; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We welcome the new Turkish Government's commitment to full democracy and human rights. Our views on the importance of achieving real progress are being made clear in contacts with the Turkish authorities.

Somalia

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contracts have been made with his Department by the administration in northern Somalia, operating under the title of the Republic of Somaliland; and what requests for aid or recognition his Department has received.

Mrs. Chalker: My officials maintain regular contact with the Somalia National Movement, the main party in northern Somalia. We have made clear that whilst we do not recognise the purported secession, humanitarian aid will continue. In response to requests from voluntary and multilateral agencies we have this year provided bilateral humanitarian aid worth £3·47 million to Somalia, including £1·46 million for the north.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make it his policy to have a diplomatic presence or an informal presence in northern Somalia in order to *(a)* maintain contact with the de-facto administration, *(b)* assist the families and dependants of members of the Somali community in the United Kingdom and *(c)* assist non-governmental organisations in the delivery of humanitarian aid.

Mrs. Chalker: We have no plans to establish any form of resident representation in northern Somalia. We maintain informal contacts with representatives of northern Somalia.

Maxwell Companies

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Swiss Government for assistance in recovering any moneys belonging to *(a)* Mirror Group pensioners and *(b)* Maxwell Communication Corporation pensioners held or controlled by Maxwell family trusts or companies in either Switzerland or Liechtenstein.

Mr. Lilly: I have been asked to reply.

The Serious Fraud Office is conducting an investigation into the Maxwell companies. Action is being taken to secure and recover assets by IMRO, the provisional liquidator, administrators and receivers appointed to a number of Maxwell private companies. I have instructed my officials to maintain the closest consultation with the Serious Fraud Office and IMRO. I will also want to hear from the administrators, receivers and the provisional liquidator if they consider that the exercise of my investigative powers or other action is warranted.

I will not hesitate to use powers available to me to investigate any matter which may emerge from these consultations as requiring separate enquiry or to take any other action, so long as that would not impede work of the Serious Fraud Office or other action which is being taken.

TRANSPORT

Nuclear Waste (Transport)

Mr. Harry Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will meet Scottish chief constables to discuss arrangements for advising the public when nuclear waste material is being transported through their area.

Mr. McLoughlin: No. The safety regulations for the transport of all radioactive materials in this country are based on stringent internationally agreed standards laid down by the International Atomic Energy Agency. These require safety to be "built in" to the design of the container used for transport so that the contents would not present a significant radiological hazard even in the event of a severe accident. Safety of the containers is not therefore dependent on routing considerations. I do not therefore believe that prior notification of the kind suggested would serve any practical purpose as, in addition to the above, suitable emergency arrangements exist to provide a rapid expert radiological response to any incident involving readioactivity whatever its scale or location.

British Railways (Restructuring)

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will now publish the Stedeford report on the proposed restructuring of British Railways.

Mr. Freeman: I understand that papers on the recommendations by the special advisory group on the British Transport Commission, chaired by Sir Ivan Stedeford in 1960, are available for inspection at the Public Record Office in Kew, but that there was no formal report.

ENERGY

Electricity Generation

Mr. Rost: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he expects to make a decision on the works programmes concerning on-site generation and the electricity pool; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: I have today announced my decision on the issue of the application of pool charges to on-site demand. The decision, in favour of the works programme submitted by the Office of Electricity Regulation and PowerGen with specified amendments, is contained in my letter to the chairman of the pool executive committee, copies of which I have placed in the Library.

ENVIRONMENT

Housing Capital Expenditure

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been, at 1991-92 prices, the total capital expenditure undertaken by local authorities and housing associations in England each year on housing since 1961, giving separately expenditure by local authorities and housing associations up to and including the estimated outturn expenditure for 1991-92 and 1992-93, specifying the price increase assumed between 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Mr. Yeo: The available information relates to gross capital expenditure on housing in England funded by local authorities and, since 1974-75, the Housing Corporation. Comparable information for spending by housing associations in earlier years is not available.

£ million at 1991-92 prices

	Local authorities[1]	*Housing Corporation*	*Total*
1974-75	12,393	573	12,966
1975-76	9,861	723	10,584
1976-77	8,338	877	9,215
1977-78	6,960	874	7,834
1978-79	6,643	887	7,530
1979-80	6328	859	7,187
1980-81	4,952	922	5,874
1981-82	4,355	861	5,216
1982-83	4,997	1,167	6,164
1983-84	5,274	1,083	6,357
1984-85	4,920	979	5,899
1985-86	4,361	1,026	5,387
1986-87	4,215	998	5,213
1987-88	4,334	[2]1,070	5,404
1988-89	4,455	[2]1,093	5,548
1989-90	5,947	[2]1,260	7,207
[3]1990-91	3,361	[2]1,269	4,630
[4]1991-92	2,991	[2]1,930	4,921

[1] Includes local authority funding of housing associations.
[2] Includes estimates of additional private finance on an approvals basis.
[3] Provisional.
[4] Estimated.

The Government do not plan local authority gross expenditure and no forecast is yet available for 1992-93. The plan for local authority capital expenditure, excluding authorities' self-financed expenditure, is £1,877 million for 1992-93 at 1991-92 prices while Housing Corporation gross capital expenditure, excluding any additional private finance, is forecast at £1,633 million for 1992-93 at 1991-92 prices. This assumes a 4·5 per cent. increase in prices between 1991-92 and 1992-93.

Housing Statistics

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been the number of all completions and starts for each year in England since 1979-80 by local authorities and by registered housing associations, including those not funded by the Housing Corporation, of additional housing including new build and dwellings resulting from conversion or renovation.

Mr. Yeo: The information for 1979 to 1990 is published in the annual volume of "Housing and Construction Statistics: Great Britain", 1979 in the 1979-1989 edition, and the rest in the 1980-1990 edition—tables 6.1(a) and 7.1. Figures for the first and second quarters of 1991 appear in the Department's housebuilding and renovations information bulletin No. 604 published on 4 October 1991, tables 2, 4 and 5. Copies are in the Library.

Housing Investment Programme

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many dwellings have been provided by the private sector with financial or other assistance from the local authorities as defined in section E of the HIP2 returns by local authorities, for each year since 1979-80 up to 1991-92 broken down by his Department's regions.

Mr. Yeo: The total numbers of dwellings provided by private sector bodies, including registered housing associations, with financial or other assistance are as follows. They include the expected number of dwellings to be built on land sold to private developers.

	1987-88	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Northern	1,240	1,440	2,330	2,120
Yorkshire and Humberside	1,430	2,200	2,830	2,670
East Midlands	2,330	1,370	1,610	790
Eastern	800	660	1,840	1,150
London	1,030	1,830	2,860	1,360
South East	1,020	930	820	1,300
South West	1,200	620	1,060	980
West Midlands	2,090	1,860	1,720	1,750
North West	4,430	3,010	4,260	3,470
England	15,570	13,920	19,330	15,590

These are local authorities' estimates of dwellings resulting from transactions that have taken place, as reported on their housing investment programme returns. Information in this form was not collected prior to 1987-88 and outturn estimates for 1991-92 are not yet available.

Council Housing

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list *(a)* the total number of households on council house waiting lists and *(b)* the total number of households on council house waiting lists and in need, for each local authority in England and Wales for 1979-80, 1989-90 and 1990-91;

(2) if he will list for each local authority in England and Wales, the number of households *(a)* with more than 1 but less than 1·5 persons per room and *(b)* with more than 1·5 persons per room in 1979-80, 1989-90 and 1990-91.

Mr. Yeo: Local authorities provide estimates in their annual housing investment programme returns. The figures for 1 April 1990 and 1 April 1991 are in columns B5l—B5, 1991—B6d, B1a1 and B1b1, respectively, of the "HIP1 All Items Print" for those years. Information on waiting list numbers in 1980 is not available centrally for all authorities. The 1980 "HIP1 All Items Print" has figures for numbers of households at one below the bedroom standard, column C1a1, and at two or more below the bedroom standard, column C1b1, both at 1 April 1980. Copies of all these documents are in the Library.

For information about Wales I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Priority Homeless Statistics

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each local authority and by his Department's regions in England and Wales, in 1979-80, 1989-90 and 1990-91, the total number of households accepted as homeless and in priority need.

Mr. Yeo: Local authorities report the number of households they accept as homeless and in priority need in their annual housing investment programme—HIP1—returns. The available figures for individual authorities for 1989-90 and 1990-91 are in column C2d1 of the "HIP1 All Items Print" for 1990 and 1991, respectively. For 1979-80 the available information relates to the total number of acceptances, including those not in priority need, which is at column C5 of the 1980 "HIP1 all Items Print". The corresponding total acceptances for the two later years are at column C11 of the documents. Regional totals are in the "HIP1 Regional Grossing" for each year. All of these documents are in the Library.

For information about Wales I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Homelessness

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number of households in temporary accommodation for the years 1979-80, 1989-90 and 1990-91, in each local authority in England and Wales.

Mr. Yeo: Information on homeless households for whom local authorities have accepted responsibility to secure permanent accommodation under the provisions of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 and part III of the Housing Act 1985 is reported quarterly to the Department.

The available information on the numbers of such households who were resident in temporary accommodation, including some on whom homelessness inquiries had not yet been completed, can be found in the following publications:-

"Local Housing Statistics: England and Wales", Edition no 54 (Table 14), position at 31 December 1979 (England only);

"Local Housing Statistics: England and Wales", Edition no 94 (Table 9(a)), position at 31 March 1990;

"Households found accommodation under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 Housing Act: England. Results for the first quarter 1991. Supplementary Tables" (Table 7), position at 31 March 1991.

Copies are in the Library.

For further information about Welsh local authorities I refer the hon. Member to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales.

Public Rights of Way

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how he proposes to apply the principles of the citizens charter to the way his Department handles opposed public path orders and definitive map modification orders.

Mr. Baldry: Opposed public path orders and definitive map orders are subject to statutory procedures which lead to consideration of objections by inspectors through a written representations procedure or more commonly at public inquiries. To a very large measure these procedures already reflect the principles of the citizens charter. However, if there is an identified conflict between the current procedures and the principles of the citizens charter the planning inspectorate will be pleased to address it.

London Docklands Development Corporation

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will state, for each year since its establishment, the area of land that has been disposed of by the London Docklands development corporation to public and private bodies respectively, together with the related income with annual and other totals.

Mr. Key: The information is as follows:

Financial year	*Land Disposed (acres)*	*Income[1] £ million*
1981-82	—	2
1982-83	33	
1983-84	54	—
1984-85	178	5
1985-86	185	13
1986-87	85	22
1987-88	43	41
1988-89	22	133
1989-90	25	32
1990-91	36	27
Total	661	275

[1] Income from disposals are generally phased over a number of years. The totals shown in column 3 may not therefore relate directly to the acreage disposed of in column 2.

It is not possible to disaggregate disposals between public and private sector bodies.

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will state for each year since its establishment the area of land acquired by the London Docklands development corporation by vesting orders, compulsory purchase orders, by agreement or other methods respectively, with appropriate annual category and grand totals.

Mr. Key: This information can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

London Docklands Development Corporation

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will state, for each year since its establishment, the amount spent by the London Docklands development corporation on *(a)* land acquisition and *(b)* land improvement and reclamation, together with respective totals.

Mr. Key: The information is as follows:

Financial year	*(a) £ million Land acquired*	*(b) £ million Improvements to land/ reclamation*
1981-82 } 1982-83 }	35	13
1983-84	17	16
1984-85	4	20
1985-86	5	21
1986-87	13	29
1987-88	23	33
1988-89	16	51
1989-90	30	47
1990-91	12	25
Total	155	255

Coventry City Council

Mr. Butcher: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the percentage change in the total external support for Coventry city council between financial years 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr. Key: The total external support for Coventry city council has increased by 26·2 per cent. between the years 1990-91 and 1991-92.

In 1990-91 total external support consisted of revenue support grant, after safety net adjustment, non-domestic rate income, specific grants inside aggregate external finance, community charge benefit grant and transitional relief grant.

In 1991-92 total external support consisted of revenue support grant, non-domestic rate income, specific grants inside aggregate external finance, community charge benefit grant, community charge reduction scheme grant and community charge grant.

Chemicals

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what are the latest production and consumption figures for the United Kingdom for *(a)* chlorofluorocarbons, *(b)* carbon tetrachloride, *(c)* halons, *(d)* HCFCs, *(e)* methyl chloroform and *(f)* HFCs.

Mr. Baldry: The production figures for these chemicals are commercially confidential as there are one or two United Kingdom manufacturers. The latest estimated consumption figures available are:

	Tonnes
Chlorofluorocarbons	33,000 (1989)
Carbon tetrachloride	40-50,000 (1989)
Methyl chloroform	30-35,000 (1989)
Halons	1,500 (1990)

Estimates of United Kingdom HCFC and HFC consumption are not currently available.

Ozone Depletion

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had in the last year with representatives of ICI in relation to ozone depletion; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had a number of discussions with Sir Denys Henderson and other ICI board members on a wide range of environmental issues. Earlier this year the possibility was discussed of his opening the world's first commercial plant for the ozone friendly refrigerant HFC 134a at ICI's Runcorn site. In the event, the plant was opened by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on current scientific knowledge regarding ozone depletion over the United Kingdom; and whether his Department is taking any extra measures in the light of recent scientific findings.

Mr. Baldry: The fourth report of my Department's stratospheric ozone review group, published in July 1991, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House, reported satellite evidence for ozone column depletion at the latitudes of the United Kingdom and Europe of up to 8 per cent. over the past decade during the late winter and early spring. Further satellite data presented in the Montreal protocol scientific assessment report, due to be published early next year, suggest that for the period 1978 to 1990, the trend in average annual total ozone over the United Kingdom was between −4 and −6 per cent. per decade, consistent with a recent re-analysis of Dobson Spectrophotometer measurements made at Bracknell and Lerwick by the Meteorological Office.

In the forthcoming international negotiations towards the revision of the Montreal protocol, the United Kingdom will be pressing for the earliest possible phase out for all ozone depleting substances.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many staff in his Department are currently working full-time on stratospheric ozone issues; and at what grades they are employed.

Mr. Baldry: Six staff work full time on ozone layer policy issues; one each at grade 7, senior executive officer, higher executive officer, executive officer, administrative officer and administrative assistant level. Management of the stratospheric ozone component of my Department's research programme will amount to approximately two man years in 1991-92. It is led at grade 6.

Local Government Finance

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the total of usable capital receipts held by each local authority in Northamptonshire on 31 March 1991.

Mr. Key: The usable capital receipts held on 31 March 1991 for all local authorities in Northamptonshire are given in the table.

Authority	*Total Usable Receipts as at 31 March 1991 £'000s*
Northamptonshire	12,131
Corby	1
Daventry	8,728
East Northampton	3,144
Kettering	2,543
Northampton	20,874
South Northampton	2,729
Wellingborough	14,075

Source: Departmental Returns.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has had over the Standard Community Charge and Non-Domestic Rating (Definition of Domestic Property) (Amendment) Order 1991 (S.I., 1991, No. 474); and if he will review the order.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 9 December 1991]:* We have had a number of representations about the six-person test of exemption from rates for small bed-and-breakfast properties set out in the order. Most have come from the occupiers of properties which do not qualify for exemption under the new test. We remain of the view that small properties used for bed and breakfast should not be liable for rates when the main use of the property is domestic. The six-person test is a practicable compromise and we have decided to retain it.

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will give details of the total expenditure on *(a)* the preparation of the community charge prior to April 1990, *(b)* collection of the community charge (i) in 1990-91 and (ii) 1991-92, *(c)* expected cost of collection of the community charge in 1992-93, and if he will give details of *(d)* how much has already been spent, or budgeted for, on council tax before 1992 and *(e)* his estimate of expenditure on council tax in 1992-93.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 10 December 1991]:* Local authorities in England have reported that in 1988-89 they spent £101 million on the capital and revenue costs of preparing for the introduction of the community charge and a further £261 million in 1989-90. Local authorities have estimated that the cost of collecting the community charge in 1990-91 was £444 million and in 1991-92 £498 million. We expect collection costs in 1992-93 to be of a similar order in real terms. The Government commissioned CSL Group Ltd. Management Consultants to estimate the additional costs to local authorities of preparing for the council tax. They estimate that local authorities would need to spend £156 million broken down as follows:

	1991-92 £ million	*1992-93 £ million*	*Total £ million*
Revenue	4·8	109·8	114·6
Capital	0·3	41·2	41·5
Total	5·1	151·0	156·1

Global Warming

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what discussions he has had with the telecommunications industry regarding naturally occurring holes in the ozone layer.

Mr. Baldry: None.

Community Charge

Mr. Butler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing for each local authority the maximum possible increase in community charge from 1991-92 to 1992-93 before capping is applied.

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend announced his provisional capping criteria for 1992-93 on 26 November. Once authorities have set their budgets he will take his capping decisions having regard to all appropriate considerations, including those budgets. On the basis of our proposed settlement the community charge for standard spending will be about £257, but efficient authorities should be able to set charges which are even lower.

Incineration Plants

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what assessment he has made of the expected impact of the three large-scale incineration plants within the east Thames corridor on the proposed linear town in east London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: Proposals for all three applications are accompanied by environmental assessment statements. Cory Environmental Ltd's proposal for a waste-to-energy incinerator at Belvedere is at present being considered by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy. Thames Water's planning applications for two sludge incinerators at Beckton and Crossness are being considered by the councils of the London boroughs of Newham and Bexley respectively.

Rent Arrears

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what proportion of rent on local authority domestic properties in the Chelmsford local authority area remained unpaid in financial years *(a)* 1989-90, *(b)* 1990-91, *(c)* April to September 1990 and *(d)* April to September 1991, in money terms and as a percentage of the total amount due.

Mr. Yeo: The information available to the Department relates only to the position at the end of the financial year, as reported on authorities' housing subsidy claim returns. Chelmsford borough Council reported rent arrears of £199,000 at the end of 1989-90—2·2 per cent of rent roll —and £273,000 at the end of 1990-91—2·4 per cent of rent roll.

Burley-on-the-Hill

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps are being taken by his Department and by English Heritage to ensure a sympathetic restoration or conversion scheme for Burley-on-the-Hill, Rutland, a grade listed building.

Mr. Yeo: On 14 March 1991 the Secretary of State called in for his own determination the two planning applications for Burley and the associated applications for listed building consent. The appropriateness of the proposals for a grade I listed building will be an important factor in the Secretary of State's consideration of the case. English Heritage has had close involvement with the local authority in assessing the proposals and their views, as made available to the inquiry, will be taken into account.

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement on the progress of his consideration of the outcome of the public inquiry relating to Burley-on-the-Hill, Rutland.

Mr. Yeo: The inspector is currently completing his report. The Secretary of State will consider it as soon as it is submitted to him.

Water Quality

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will make a statement about the National Rivers Authority's 1990 river quality survey;

(2) if he will make a statement about statutory water quality objectives.

Mr. Trippier: I am pleased to say that the National Rivers Authority has today published its report of the 1990 river quality survey. The NRA has also published today a consultation paper setting out proposals for introducing statutory water quality objectives under sections 82 and 83 of the Water Resources Act 1991. I am placing copies of the documents in the Library of both Houses.

Mr. Latham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will make a statement on the action taken by his Department in respect of British manufacturing interests following the announcement by European Community Commissioner Bangemann to the European Parliament on 14 March 1991 that a mandate had been given to draw up 300 standards relating to the water sector; and what guidance he intends to give to local authorities and water companies about the implication of this programme for public procurement compliance.

Mr. Baldry *[holding answer 10 December 1991]:* The European Commission gave a mandate in 1988 to the European standards organisation—CEN—to create a work programme in the field of water supply, drainage and sewerage. In 1990 CEN forwarded a programme to the Commission covering some 300 standards for the water cycle. The commission gave CEN an additional mandate in this field earlier this year and a second work programme is now under examination by the Commission.

The DOE's interest in the standardisation programme relates to the quality of drinking water, the effect of sewage effluent on the environment and ensuring the interests of the British construction industry are taken into account. The interests of British manufacturers are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. Co-ordination of manufacturers' and users' interests is effected through the British Standards Institute, which appoints representatives to the relevant CEN technical committees and working groups.

We have issued general guidance to local authorities about the public procurement directives, and we shall issue further guidance shortly about the statutory instruments formally implementing the first batch of these directives. Guidance will be given to water companies when the utilities directives are similarly implemented.

Wildlife Trade

Mr. Ken Hargreaves: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he will now make available the report by the royal botanic gardens, Kew, on the wildlife trade.

Mr. Baldry: Copies of the report are available in the Library of the House. It emphasises the importance of the convention on international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora as the principal tool for monitoring international trade in all wildlife, including plants. It also commends the part that the United Kingdom has played, acknowledging that we have been at the forefront of implementing and enforcing the convention for plants. The report urges that other countries should follow our example and makes a number of detailed recommendations for tightening the present controls throughout the European Community and beyond.

I have therefore written to the European Commission today, commending the report to it. I have urged it to propose, in addition to the measures on the wildlife trade which I advocated in October, that the Community takes steps to overcome the relative neglect of trade in plants.

In order to ensure that action is taken, my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside will be circulating both this report and that prepared by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee on the trade in animals at the EC Environment Council tomorrow. He will urge all member states to work towards the speedy introduction of tighter controls on the wildlife trade.

River Quality

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he first received a draft of the report of the river quality survey 1990.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 9 December 1991]:* In the course of the regular contacts between my officials and the staff of the National Rivers Authority the first of a number of drafts of the report was sent to the Department last August.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Magistrates Courts

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement concerning the adequacy of Government funding to meet the reasonable needs and requirements of magistrates courts in rural Wales.

Mr. John Patten: Account has been taken of the concerns expressed during extensive consultations this

year on the cash limits arrangements about the special needs of magistrates courts committees with courts in rural areas. The arrangements were revised following the consultations so that in each year a proportion of total grant available for the service is allocated using a sparsity factor. In 1992-93 £0·1 million is reserved for magistrates courts in Wales in this way. The 1992-93 cash limit on current grant support for the Powys magistrate courts provides for expenditure of £573,385, including a sparsity allocation of £43,832, as against forecast equivalent 1991-92 expenditure of £491,770 an increase of 16·6 per cent.

Murder

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any proposals to amend the law on provocation in cases of murder; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: We are always ready to consider proposals for improving the law, but we have no proposals of our own for amending it on provocation as a defence to murder.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to remove the mandatory life sentence for murder, so as to enable sentence to be in the discretion of the trial judge; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: We remain of the view, accepted by Parliament during the passage of the Criminal Justice Act 1991, that life should be mandatory for murder to mark the particular heinousness of deliberately taking another person's life.

Police Manpower

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will give the specific figures for *(a)* total population, *(b)* urban population and *(c)* rural population which were used in respect of (i) the South Wales police area and (ii) the other Welsh police areas as part of the calculation of police manpower needs in the course of the recent review;

(2) if he will list, for each police force in England and Wales, the figures for *(a)* total establishment, *(b)* traffic establishment, *(c)* patrol establishment, *(d)* crime establishment and *(e)* the index figure for special needs, which were used in the course of calculating police manpower needs according to the manpower allocation model used in his Department's recent review of police manpower;

(3) if he will give the figure, percentage and date of the unemployment figures for each police authority area in England and Wales which was used in the recent review of police manpower needs.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I will write to the hon. Member.

Magistrates (Information)

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines are given to magistrates about placing on bail people with records of previous offences.

Mr. John Patten: It is not for the Government to issue such guidelines. Decisions on bail in individual cases are for the magistrates concerned in the light of the circumstances of those cases; and it is not for the Government to issue guidelines about the way in which they should exercise their responsibilities under the Bail Act 1976 in those cases.

Offensive Weapons (Amnesties)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy on local amnesties for knives and other offensive weapons.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: It is for chief officers of police to consider whether offering opportunities for disposing of offensive weapons would be a worthwhile crime prevention initiative in their own force area.

Radio, Electrical and Television Retailers Association

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met representatives of the Radio, Electrical and Television Retailers Association; what consideration he has given to the adoption of a legal constraint which would prevent the BBC's commercial use of the licence database; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I met representatives of RETRA on 29 October to discuss the BBC's use of television licensing information. I invited RETRA to contribute to the forthcoming debate preceding the expiry of the BBC's charter in 1996, and to discussion of the draft EC directive on data protection. We have no proposals meanwhile to introduce legal restraints beyond the present Data Protection Act.

DNA Profiling

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to bring forward proposals to give the police greater powers in the use of DNA profiling for solving crimes, especially with regard to sexual offences.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We have no immediate plans to increase police powers in this area. My right hon. Friend has asked the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice to consider the issue and we await its recommendation, but we are most anxious to harness scientific developments effectively in the fight against serious crimes.

Directorate of Telecommunications

Mr. Mills: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what indirect subsidies are enjoyed by the Directorate of Telecommunications in the use of publicly funded premises.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Installation and maintenance services are carried out by DTELS at eight regional service centres which are owned by the Home Office and at 50 local workshops owned by police forces or fire brigades. DTELS' charges for these services are set so as to recover the running costs of the regional centres. To date, no police or fire authority has proposed that DTELS should pay for the use of workshops on its premises as these workshops enable DTELS to provide a more effective service.

CIVIL SERVICE

Equal Opportunities

Mr. Hind: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if he will make a statement on progress under the programme for action to achieve equal opportunity in the civil service for people of ethnic minority origin.

Mr. Renton: A good start has been made. A report on progress in the first year will be published on 12 December. Copies will be placed in the Library of the House.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Executive Agencies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what was the first degree obtained by the chief executive of each of his Department's executive agencies; and from which university or polytechnic it was awarded;

(2) how many staff were in post on the date that each of his Department's executive agencies were established; and how many staff are in post now in each case;

(3) whether a group bonus scheme is in operation in each of his Department's executive agencies;

(4) how much was spent on events and publicity surrounding the launch of each of his Department's executive agencies; and whether the cost was borne by the parent department or the new agency;

(5) if he will list those new facilities for staff including nurseries and health care schemes which have been introduced in each of his Department's executive agencies since their establishment;

(6) when the last annual report for each of his Department's executive agencies was published and when the next one is due;

(7) if he will list the post, grade and maximum salary payable including performance-related elements in each case where appointments from the private sector have been made to his Department's executive agencies at grade 7 or above since their establishment;

(8) if he will list the new forms of alternative working patterns introduced into each of his Department's executive agencies since their establishment and provide a breakdown by grade of the numbers of staff taking up each new working pattern for each new agency.

Mr. Maples: Questions on operational matters in the agencies concerned—the Central Office of Information, the Central Statistical Office, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, the Royal Mint and the Valuation Office—are the responsibility of the chief executives, who will be writing to the hon. Member. Chief executives may answer questions seeking personal information at their discretion.

Copies of the letters will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Departmental Recruitment (Travel Expenses)

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in what circumstances Government Departments are willing to pay reasonable travelling expenses for applicants to attend job or recruitment board interviews; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maples: Individual Departments and agencies are responsible for over 90 per cent. of all civil service recruitment, and they determine their own policies regarding the reimbursement of candidates' travel expenses in such cases. For centrally administered recruitment, allowable expenses in excess of £5 are refundable, provided the total cost exceeds £6—that is, refunds of less than £1 are not payable.

VAT

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has put forward any proposals to permit lower VAT rates within the EC on environmentally friendly products; and whether he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 6 December 1991]:* In European Community discussions we have suggested that the possibility of applying a reduced rate of VAT to environmentally friendly goods should be kept open. This would allow member states to consider that option should it prove desirable in the light of further thinking about environmental taxation in the Community. The Government have no present intention of introducing a reduced rate of VAT.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his most recent estimate of how much VAT is paid per annum by *(a)* an average family and *(b)* a married couple on average income; and how much they paid in 1978-79.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 9 December 1991]:* A married couple with two children on average male earnings would pay about 5·4 per cent. of their earnings in VAT in 1991-92 compared with 2·7 per cent. in 1978-79. The comparable figures for a married couple with no children would be approximately 5·2 per cent. for 1991-92 and 2·6 per cent. for 1978-79.

WALES

Road Improvements

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish information on the improvement schemes undertaken to the A470 and A483 since 1979.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Improvements undertaken along the whole lengths of the A470 and the A483 since 1979 are:

A470		*£ million*
1	Abercynon-Pentrebach	65·8
2	Storey Arms–Pont-ar-daf	0·7
3	Cantref Water Treatment Works	0·5
4	Brecon By-Pass	13·8
5	Erwood	0·3
6	South of Dan Henallt Wood	1·6
7	Bend at Gwern-y-Bwlch	0·5
8	Cemmaes Road	1·1
9	Dolcorsllwyn–Dolysgallog	1·2
10	Cleifion Bridge	0·9
11	White Hut–Maes yr Helmau	0·9
12	Dolgellau By-Pass	6·8
13	Pont Dolgefeliau Stages I and II	1·2
14	Hendre Fawr–Cefn Gallt y Cwm I and II	0·8
15	Coed Cau Ddu	0·9
16	Bwlch y Gwynt	0·2
17	Minffordd–Dolwyddelan	1·2
18	Maenan Abbey	0·9
19	Carno Railway Bridge	0·6
20	Longwood Drive	1·3
21	Hillfield Junction	0·2

A470		£ million
22	Brecon By-Pass–Felinfach By-Pass	1·5
23	Junction Improvements South of Llangurig	1·9
24	Llanidloes By-Pass	7·5
25	Carno Scheme B	0·5
26	North of Pont Dolgefeiliau Phase I	0·7
27	North of Pont Dolgefeiliau Phase 2	0·7
28	Black Bridge, Llandinam	0·6
29	RAC Box Storey Arms Stage I	0·2
Total		115·0

A483		£ million
1	Rhiw Bridge	0·6
2	Llanbadarn Fawr	0·3
3	Llandewi By-Pass	1·1
4	Arddleen By-Pass	0·7
5	Ruabon By-Pass	15·3
6	Gresford–Pulford	21·9
7	Newbridge By-Pass	13·7
8	Dolfor Road Junction Improvement	0·2
9	Ridgebourne–Kimberley	0·4
10	Chirk By-Pass	11·6
11	Ridgebourne	0·3
12	Maeslan Bends, Llanbister	0·6
13	High Rock, Llanbister	0·4
14	Erw Beili–Sugar Loaf	0·5
15	South West of Beulah	0·3
16	Cynghordy Side Support	0·2
17	Hollybank Bends	0·2
Total		68·3

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish detailed information on which improvements will be undertaken to the A470 and A483 roads as a direct result of the £120 million investment package for north-south road links recently announced by his Department.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Improvements to be undertaken to the A470 and to the A483 north of Builth Wells are:

	November 1989 prices £ million
A470	
1 Pentre Bach-Cefn Coed	25·9
2 Crew Pitch	1·0
3 Storey Arms Phase II	0·3
4 Storey Arms Phase III	0·8
5 Felinfach By-Pass	1·3
6 Builth Wells By-Pass/Llanelwedd Junction (is also part A483)	9·9
7 Smithfields Bends	1·3
8 Diversion East of Llangurig—Wern Villa	1·6
9 Carno Road Caersws	0·3
10 Commins Coch By-Pass	3·7
11 Improvements at Bwlch Oer Ddrws	1·8
12 Maes yr Helmau—Cross Foxes Phase I and II	2·2
13 Gelligemlyn—Llanelltyd Diversion Phase I and II	1·8
14 Ty nant—Maentwrog Road Railway Station	1·1
15 Salem Place—Ty Mawr	1·0
16 Lledr Valley Improvements	32·6
17 Llanrwst By-Pass	6·5
18 Penloyn—Tanlan	1·3
19 Pentrefelin—Crosau	1·1
20 Llanbrynmair	0·2
21 Ffridd Fawr	0·8
22 Pentre Mawr	0·5
23 Tanyard Pitch	0·2
24 Irfon Bridge Bends (South of Newbridge on Wye)	0·6
25 Llandinam Village	0·2
26 Clatter Village	0·2
TOTAL	98·2

	November 1989 prices £ million
A483	
1 Brynsadwrn Bends and Bridge	1·3
2 Maes yr Abad—Wern Bridge	0·2
3 Welshpool Relief Road	14·5
4 Croesfoel Roundabout—Grade Separation	2·3
5 Newtown By-Pass	5·0
6 Pant—Llanymynach By-Pass (Welsh Section)	1·8
7 Side support, Llythddu	0·5
8 Glascoed and Bends	0·5
9 Howey Village By-Pass	0·2
TOTAL	26·3

East Merthyr Reclamation Scheme

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the net expenditure incurred by his Department and the Welsh Development Agency in the east Merthyr reclamation scheme.

Mr. David Hunt: Expenditure to date by the Welsh Development Agency on preparatory works relating to the east Merthyr land reclamation scheme totals £2·2 million. My Department has not given any assistance towards the scheme.

Schools Inspectorate

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when he received the report on the review of Her Majesty's schools inspectorate; and when he intends to publish the reports.

Sir Wyn Roberts: This internal report on the role and organisation of Her Majesty's inspectorate in Wales was received in October. The report is being studied as part of my right hon. Friend's wider consideration of the future role and structure of HMI in Wales. There are at present no plans to publish it.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales in what way the granting of trust status of a hospital in Wales affects the purchasing arrangements of that hospital.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: All provider units in Wales, including national health service trusts, will receive their income from the contracts they negotiate with purchasing health authorities.

Dyfed Family Health Services Authority

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what arrangements have been made for FHSA provision within the Pembroke trust hospital area.

Mr. David Hunt: The establishment of the Pembrokeshire national health service trust does not affect the statutory responsibilities of the Dyfed family health services authority. However, both Pembrokeshire and East Dyfed DHAs, together with Dyfed FHSA, have indicated that they are examining how they can work more closely together to ensure that local health care needs can be met more responsively and effectively.

Motorways and Trunk Roads (Contractors)

Mr. Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the 10 contractors who have received the largest share of motorway and trunk road construction contracts in Wales in the last three years, giving for each contractor, the total value of the contracts received.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information covering the award of contracts during the period 1 January 1989 to 2 December 1991 is as follows:

£

Contractor	*Value of contracts awarded*
John Laing Construction Ltd	51,452,506
Kier/Hochtief Joint Venture	37,833,903
Amey Construction Ltd	37,322,926
Costain Civil Engineering Ltd	31,319,738
Trafalgar House Ltd	21,702,209
Shand Construction Ltd	16,652,609
A McAlpine Construction	11,800,814
Christiani and Nielsen Ltd	10,978,825
Davies, Middleton and Davies Ltd	8,572,854
A McFadden Ltd	2,292,901

Wolverhampton-Aberystwyth Rail Line

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will hold a meeting with the chairman of British Rail to discuss the type of trains and services on the Wolverhampton to Aberystwyth line, the facilities at intermediate stations, and the provision of information to travellers; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: My right hon. Friend and I regularly meet Sir Bob Reid to discuss a wide range of Welsh rail issues. I understand that British Rail is continuing to make a number of improvements to the service on the Aberystwyth line, including the recently introduced new class 158 express units.

Community Care

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will meet with directors of social services in Wales to discuss with them the adequacy of day care provision and work experience for former patients who have moved to care in the community; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The Welsh Office is in regular contact with directors of social services and their staffs to ensure the successful development of community care. The Welsh Office leads a systematic review of performance under our all-Wales mental handicap and mental illness strategies. Under the mental handicap strategy we are providing a record £34 million this year, of which some £7 million is supporting resettlement from hospitals and hostels, including all the necessary day opportunities. This is intended to have made possible by March 1992 the resettlement of some 350 people.

In the second year of the mental illness strategy we have more than doubled our commitment to £4·6 million, on top of the recurrent £13 million we provided under earlier initiatives. This has made possible a 25 per cent. reduction of in-patients between 1981-90 and the development of more flexible local services. We are supporting an independent research project to ensure that those resettled from hospital care in north Wales are able to lead better lives in their new homes.

Bryn Estyn Home, Wrexham

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will institute an inquiry into the management and functioning of Bryn Estyn community home, Wrexham, in the 10 years prior to its closure; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: This is a matter for Clwyd county council as the local authority. Acting on the recommendations of an independent review of Cartrefle children's home, the local authority has asked North Wales police to investigate allegations of child abuse at Bryn Estyn. Additionally, it has set up a free telephone helpline for former residents. I understand that they will consider the need for an independent inquiry when the police have completed their investigation.

My officials have been in touch with the social services department and advised them of my concerns about this matter.

Crematoria

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make it his policy to ensure the adequate provision of crematoria within Wales to meet Welsh requirements; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: It is for burial authorities, which are usually district councils, to decide whether, in the exercise of their discretionary power, to provide crematoria within their areas. I have no power to direct their provision.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what financial assistance is available to local authorities in Wales towards the funding of new crematoria; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: There is no source of financial assistance to local authorities specifically for the provision of crematoria. It is for the authorities themselves to determine their own priorities on how the resources made available to them are spent.

Fine Art Courses

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many places in higher education in Wales were available on degree courses in fine art (painting) and fine art (sculpture), respectively, in each of the years from 1979 to date; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: This information is not collected centrally. The number of places which an institution may choose to provide is decided locally according to its aims and available resources.

Homelessness

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he has any proposals to provide emergency accommodation for homeless people sleeping rough in Wales between December and March 1992; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Local housing authorities are responsible for assessing housing needs within their areas. Working in partnership with other housing providers and voluntary bodies, it is for them to plan for the strategic needs of all single vulnerable homeless people and secure appropriate accommodation. The Department has already made additional resources available this year through the homelessness reserve, grants to voluntary bodies and the urban programme.

HIV and AIDS

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement as to the resources and materials available to secondary schools in Wales for teaching pupils about the dangers of HIV/AIDS infection, and how to avoid it.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Updated guidance has just been published in the booklet, "HIV and Aids: A guide for the Education Service" which will be available to all schools in Wales very shortly. A video teaching pack for 14 to 16-year-olds was also issued to schools in 1987.

Training and Enterprise Councils

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the amount in cash designated for TECs in Wales, by each county, in March 1990 and March 1991.

Mr. David Hunt: There were no operational TECs in Wales in March 1990. Information on funding is not available by county. The table sets out the budgets for 1990-91 for each TEC in Wales. These budgets are for the period of TEC operation only.

TEC	*Operational Start Date*	*1990-91 Budgets £ million*
Mid Glamorgan	23 July 1990	14·9
West Wales	23 July 1990	20·4
North East Wales	17 September 1990	6·2
North West Wales	4 February 1991	1·8
Gwent	4 February 1991	2·4
South Glamorgan	4 February 1991	3·4
Powys	2 April 1991	N/A

National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many NACRO *(a)* training centres and *(b)* places there were in each of the counties of Wales in 1989 and 1990; and what were the budgets for NACRO in each of these two years.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The information requested is not available.

HEALTH

Hearing Aids

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make provision to ensure that the needs of spectacle wearers are taken into account when decisions are taken on the type and design of hearing aids provided under the national health service.

Mr. Dorrell: A range of hearing aid models are already available which can be adapted in a variety of ways to meet the needs of users who also wear spectacles.

Life Insurance Proposal Forms

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has now obtained an undertaking from life insurance companies that they will no longer ask questions of proposers that have the effect of putting people off taking the HIV test.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: People who believe themselves to be at risk of HIV infection should not be deterred from having a test because of the questions asked by insurance companies. Discussions with the Association of British Insurers are continuing with the aim of finding ways in which the insurance industry can obtain the information they require for risk assessment, but which do not deter people from coming forward for testing or help.

Perinatal Mortality and Handicap

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the decline in perinatal mortality in the last 10 years for which figures are available; what is his estimate of the decline in the number of babies surviving with a significant handicap during the same period; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The rates of perinatal mortality per 1,000 total live and still births in England and Wales from 1981 to 1990 are as follows:

Year	*Rate*
1981	11·8
1982	11·3
1983	10·4
1984	10·1
1985	9·8
1986	9·6
1987	8·9
1988	8·7
1989	8·3
1990	8·1

We welcome the steady decline in the perinatal mortality rate over this period.

Information on the number of babies surviving with a significant handicap is not collected centrally.

North East Thames Regional Health Authority

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on waiting lists in the North East Thames regional health authority broken down by area; and what proposals there are to reduce the waiting lists.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information for each district in the region is given in the table. It is waiting time that matters and numbers of long wait patients continue to fall in North East Thames. Since March 1991, provisional figures show that the number waiting over one year in the region has fallen by 11 per cent. to 16,836 and the number waiting over two years has fallen by 16 per cent. to 5,586. North East Thames regional health authority have plans that, by March 1992, there will be no patients waiting over two years and no more than 10,800 waiting over one year for in-patient and day case treatment.

Waiting lists/times for in-patient and day case admission to NHS hospitals in North East Thames RHA at 31 March 1991

	In-patients plus day—March 1991						*Inpatients plus day cases—Percentage change M90-M91*			
	Gross demand	*Gross less self-def*	*Number > a year*	*Percentage > a year*	*Number > 2 years*	*Percentage > 2 years*	*Gross demand*	*Gross less self-def*	*Number > a year*	*Number > 2 years*
F01 Basildon and Thurrock	5,514	4,362	1,417	25·7	805	14·6	−26·0	−38·1	−54·1	−62·1
F02 Mid Essex	6,196	5,715	1,588	25·6	556	9·0	−6·7	−4·1	−7·7	−14·6
F03 North East Essex	4,231	4,159	1,111	26·3	521	12·3	−31·7	−31·6	−44·9	−48·5
F04 West Essex	6,099	5,675	1,555	25·5	462	7·6	13·3	9·3	−13·4	−49·9
F05 Southend	6,001	5,372	670	11·2	129	2·1	14·0	11·6	−17·7	−61·7
F06 Barking and Havering	8,138	7,885	1,767	21·7	629	7·7	−13·3	−15·6	−43·1	−50·4
F07 Hampstead	4,118	4,110	1,032	25·1	245	5·9	21·3	22·0	77·0	1·2
F08 Bloomsbury	10,702	10,051	2,147	20·1	895	8·4	−16·3	−15·2	−44·9	−52·6
F09 Islington	2,582	2,306	558	21·6	211	8·2	−29·1	−31·0	−62·4	−72·3
F10 City and Hackney	7,880	5,344	2,374	30·1	787	10·0	−3·3	−12·4	−1·5	−9·6
F11 Newham	1,794	1,440	77	4·3	12	0·7	−9·4	−6·7	−51·3	−81·0
F12 Tower Hamlets	5,324	4,261	1,421	26·7	668	12·5	−35·0	−34·9	−53·3	−63·9
F13 Enfield	3,159	3,159	606	19·2	106	3·4	−12·6	−12·5	−33·3	−67·9
F14 Haringey	2,819	2,819	616	21·9	172	6·1	0·7	0·7	−6·9	52·2
F15 Redbridge	2,193	2,001	252	11·5	70	3·2	4·7	4·8	−36·4	−39·7
F16 Waltham Forest	6,910	6,897	1,681	24·3	375	5·4	8·4	9·0	−4·5	−42·1
North East Thames	83,660	75,556	18,872	22·6	6,643	7·9	−10·4	−12·0	−32·2	−49·7

Martin House Hospice

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding was available from his Department to the Martin House hospice in Boston Spa in the years 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92; and what the sum will be for 1992-93.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Support from national health service funds was as follows:

	1989-90 £	1990-91 £	1991-92 £
From local health authorities	40,000	50,765	55,000
From a central allocation for services for the terminally ill	—	40,000	40,000
Total	40,000	90,765	95,000

Note: Arrangements for 1992-93 have yet to be decided.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will publish the estimated asset value of each of the first wave NHS trusts;

(2) whether agreement has been reached between his Department and each of the first wave NHS trusts on the value of their originating debt.

Mr. Dorrell: Health authorities and NHS trusts are responsible for agreeing the transfer of such property, rights and liabilities as are necessary for trusts to perform their functions. Agreement has now been reached in the majority of cases. We shall publish the originating capital debt for each first wave NHS trust when figures have been finalised.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the cost nationally of lunches and dinners provided by trust hospitals and those who have applied for trust status with general practitioners who have applied for or obtained control of their own budgets.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not collected centrally.

Capital Charging

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the operation of capital charging.

Mr. Dorrell: The capital charging arrangements came into operation on 1 April 1991. For the first time, the full costs of capital in the national health service are being taken into account when setting contract prices and making decisions on use of assets.

Correspondence

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to reply to the letter dated 20 November from Nasrullah Khan Niazi of Folkestone street, Bradford 3.

Mr. Dorrell: The letter addressed to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has been transferred to the Department of Health and we shall be replying shortly.

Hospital Closures

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list by national health service region for each of the last five years *(a)* the number and *(b)* the names of national health service maternity hospitals which have been approved for closure by him;

(2) if he will list by national health service region for each of the last five years the hospitals which have been approved for closure by him and if he will list for each *(a)* the total number of beds involved and *(b)* the number of maternity beds involved.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 5 November 1991]:* It has not proved possible to produce a reliable picture from the data available centrally.

RNIB Needs Survey

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration he has given to the report "Blind and Partially Sighted Adults in Britain—The RNIB Needs Survey"; what action he will be taking in relation to its findings; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 12 November 1991]:* The report of the RNIB survey is being considered. It provides a very useful supplement to the information contained in the surveys of disability published in 1988 by the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys. We anticipate that agencies in both the statutory and voluntary sectors will find it a useful additional resource in planning and developing services for blind and partially sighted people.

NHS Operations

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the total number of operations carried out under the NHS in 1978 and in the latest year for which figures are available.

Mr. Dorrell *[holding answer 2 December 1991]:* The available information is given in the table.

All non-maternity operations and procedures

	Number
1978	2,263,756
[1]1989-90	3,256,300

[1] Provisional.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Teachers' Superannuation Scheme

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether the equal retirement age of 65 years for the teachers' superannuation scheme applies to female teachers for service after 5 April 1988 or for service between 1 April 1972 and 5 April 1988; and whether male and female contributor contributions to the teachers' superannuation scheme were equal during the period 1 April 1972 to 5 April 1988.

Mr. Fallon: The Teachers' Superannuation Regulations provide for retirement on the ground of age at or at any time after age 60 for both male and female teachers irrespective of the periods when they were in pensionable employment. Male and female members of the scheme have paid the same rate of ordinary contributions since 1 April 1972. These were 6·75 per cent. of contributable salary between 1 April 1972 and 1 December 1973 and 6 per cent. for the remainder of the period.

Dyslexia

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what training teachers receive in *(a)* recognising symptoms of dyslexia in pupils and *(b)* how to assist children who show symptoms of dyslexia.

Mr. Fallon: All initial teacher training—ITT—courses must include a general introduction to special educational

needs issues. The Secretary of State's criteria for the approval of courses of ITT require that, on completion of their course, students should have developed the capacity to identify pupils with special educational needs or with learning difficulties; and to understand the ways in which the potential of such pupils can be developed. More extensive specialist support is available through in-service teacher training courses, some of which specialise in dyslexia.

Some of the more common teaching methods used to help dyslexic pupils learn to read include phonics, or multi-sensory techniques which involve touch and other stimuli. Such specialist teaching provision is often provided on a peripatetic basis. This minimises the disruption to the child's normal school programme which may be caused when he or she is withdrawn for extra help.

School Meals (Durham)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give the results of the January 1991 school meals census for the Durham area and the 1990 statistics.

Mr. Fallon: The table shows school meals information for maintained schools within Durham local education authority, as at the census dates in January 1990 and 1991 —provisional.

School meal arrangements

Durham LEA	*Paid meals*	*Free meals*	*Own food*	*Other arrangements*	*Total*
1990					
Primary	28,222	10,115	10,020	9,005	57,362
Secondary	11,392	3,672	4,325	17,030	36,419
Special	422	323	50	103	898
Total	40,036	14,110	14,395	26,138	94,679
1991					
Primary	26,814	10,276	10,681	9,607	57,378
Secondary	11,987	3,556	4,661	16,182	36,386
Special	388	352	50	127	917
Total	39,189	14,184	15,392	25,916	94,681

Education Expenditure

Mrs. Heal: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proportion of gross national product is spent on education; and what are the comparable figures for other European countries.

Mr. Eggar: International comparisons of educational expenditure are complex, because the ways in which this expenditure is allocated to the different sectors varies both between countries and within countries over time.

The readily available information is as follows:

Total Public Expenditure[1] on education as a Percentage of Gross National product, Calendar year 1988.

	Per cent.
Belgium[2]	4·9
Denmark	7·8
France[3]	5·3
Germany	4·2
Greece	[4]2·7
Ireland	[4]7·0
Italy	[4]4·8
Luxembourg	4·6
Netherlands	6·8
Portugal	4·8
Spain	4·3
United Kingdom	4·6

Sources:
UNESCO Statistical Yearbook, 1991
Education Statistics for the United Kingdom 1990

[1] Includes subsidies to the private sector.
[2] Ministry of Education expenditure only.
[3] Metropolitan France
[4] 1987 data

Higher Education

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish figures showing the proportion of people aged between 16 and 19 years in part-time and full-time education or training in the United Kingdom and comparable figures for other countries in the European Community; if he will make a statement outlining his plans for increasing the levels of participation in all areas of post-16 years education and training; and what representations he has received from the British Youth Council on this subject.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The available information is given in the table.

Participation Rates in Education and Training[1] of 16 to 18-year-olds

Country	*Percentages* *Full-time*	*Part-time*	*All*
Belgium	82	4	87
Denmark	73	6	79
France	69	8	77
Germany[3]	49	43	92
Italy[2]	47	18	65
Netherlands[3]	77	9	86
Spain[4]	50	—	50
United Kingdom[5]			
1988	35	34	69
1989	36	33	69

Notes:
[1] Includes apprenticeships, YTS and similar schemes
[2] 1985 for Sweden and 1982 for Italy
[3] Includes compulsory part-time participation for 16 and 17-year-olds in Germany and Netherlands
[4] Excludes estimates for 18-year-olds in universities
[5] Includes estimates for those studying only in the evening and for private sector further and higher education, including training courses with employers.
Source: Table BB from draft "Education Statistics for the United Kingdom 1991"

Fine Art Courses

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many places in higher education in England were available on degree courses in fine art (painting) and fine art (sculpture), respectively, in each of the years from 1979 to date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Information is not held centrally on the number of places which, within the total resources at their disposal, institutions decide to make available.

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proportion of undergraduate places in degree courses in fine art (painting) and fine art (sculpture) were taken up by fee-paying students from overseas in each academic year since 1983; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Information is not held centrally on the number of places which, within the total resources at their disposal, institutions divide to make available to fee-paying students from overseas.

Zidovudine

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many participants are now enrolled in the Medical Research Council/INSERM trial of zidovudine; and if he will make a statement on the progress of the trial.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The number of participants enrolled in the Medical Research Council/INSERM trial of zidovudine is 833 in the United Kingdom, 60 in the Republic of Ireland, and 848 in France. Recruitment has now closed, and the follow-up is continuing with a view to further analysis of the data in the summer of 1992.

School Examinations

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether agencies associated with publishers are eligible to tender for the development, piloting and writing of tests for 14-year-olds in history and geography at key stage 3 as advertised by the Schools Examinations Assessment Council; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Any competent agency may tender for this work, including agencies associated with publishers. The tests, which form part of the statutory assessment arrangements, will however be published on behalf of the Secretary of State by HMSO.

Science and Technology

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when the Government will respond to the Advisory Council on Science and Technology's report "Science and Technology: Education and Employment".

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The Government's response has now been sent to ACOST. It is being published today and copies have been placed in the Library.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Pensions

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what would be *(a)* the first year and *(b)* the full year cost of raising the retirement pension by £5 per week for a single person and by £8 per week for a married person (i) in 1991-92 and (ii) 1992-93, including increases in means-tested and national insurance benefits for Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the statutory instrument which links benefits to the category A basic retirement pension; and what would be *(a)* the first year and *(b)* the full year cost, net of tax, of raising by £5 per week for a single person and by £8 per week for a married person the retirement pension and (i) each linked benefit, (ii) each linked and means-tested benefit so that all of the people on linked benefits receive the increase, (iii) each of the linked benefits at the same level as the retirement pension, (iv) each of the linked benefits at the same level as the retirement pension and means-tested benefits to that all of the people on these linked benefits receive the increase, (1) for 1991-92, and (2) 1992-93, in each case including and excluding those below retirement age.

Mr. Hanley: I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what would be the numbers of people affected above and below retirement age by raising by £5 per week for a single person and by £8 per week for a married person the retirement pension and *(a)* each benefit linked by statute to the category A basic retirement pension, *(b)* each linked and means-tested benefit so that all of the people on linked benefits receive the increase, *(c)* each of the linked benefits at the same level as the retirement pension, and *(d)* each of the linked benefits at the same level as the retirement pension and means-tested benefits so that all of the people on these linked benefits receive the increase, for Northern Ireland in 1991-92, listing separately the numbers on each benefit, including and excluding those below the retirement age.

Mr. Hanley *[holding answer 3 December 1991]:* I shall write to the hon. Member as soon as possible and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Water Fowl

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has as to the number of *(a)* herons and *(b)* cormorants there are in Northern Ireland or in the coastal waters of Northern Ireland; and what the figures were five and 10 years ago.

Mr. Needham: No information on the heron population in Northern Ireland is available for the years in question.

A winter survey of the cormorant carried out at main locations in 1989-90 indicated that the wintering population was at least 2,150 individuals. A full survey in 1985-86 estimated the wintering population at 2,600. Data for 1980-81 are not available.

Comprehensive figures for the breeding population of cormorant have never been collected. In 1991, however, there were 299 pairs on Sheep Island, Co. Antrim, the main colony, where in 1977 there had been 340.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has as to the number of fish-eating ducks there are in Northern Ireland; and what the numbers were five and 10 years ago, respectively.

Mr. Needham: The only regularly occurring species of duck in Northern Ireland which is mainly fish eating is the red-breasted merganser.

The wintering population of this species in 1989-90 was estimated at 875 individuals and in 1985-86 at 845 individuals. Data for 1980-81 is not available.

No comprehensive breeding data have ever been assembled.

Maydown Incinerator

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has regarding pyrolysis experiments carried out by Du Pont on the waste to be incinerated at the proposed hazardous waste incinerator at Maydown, Londonderry to determine the products; at what temperature these experiments were carried out; and what products resulted.

Mr. Needham: The Government have no information on any such experiments.

Education Expenditure

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will review the ceiling levels imposed on secondary and grammar schools in each of the education and library boards in Northern Ireland in relation to intake numbers.

Dr. Mawhinney: Intake numbers are based on the assessed capacity of each secondary intermediate and grammar school and are reviewed only on request or when there is any change in a school's accommodation.

Fine Art Courses

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many places in higher education in Northern Ireland were available on degree courses in fine art (painting) and fine art (sculpture), respectively, in each of the years from 1979 to date; and if he will make a statement.

Dr. Mawhinney: Separate degree courses in painting and sculpture are not provided in Northern Ireland, but both subjects are included in a full-time fine art degree course at the University of Ulster. A full-time masters degree course is also available. The number of places provided is as follows

Academic Year	*Primary Degree*	*Masters Degree*
[1]1979-80	86	5
[1]1980-81	93	4
[1]1981-82	89	6
[1]1982-83	91	6
[1]1983-84	88	6
1984-85	90	6
1985-86	92	7
1986-87	101	8
1987-88	103	10
1988-89	113	9
1989-90	102	9
1990-91	108	11
1991-92	[2]114	[2]9

[1] Prior to the creation of the University of Ulster in October 1984 the course was run by the Ulster Polytechnic.
[2] Provisional figures

RUC

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) if he will give the number of authorised posts and the number of posts filled in the press and public relations office of the RUC in each year since 1979;

(2) if he will give the total cost incurred by the force control and information centre of the Royal Ulster Constabulary in each year since 1979;

(3) if he will give the total amount spent by the Royal Ulster Constabulary on *(a)* press and public relations and *(b)* advertising for each year since 1979;

(4) if he will give the number of authorised posts, and the number of posts filled in the force control and information centre of the Royal Ulster Constabulary for each year since 1979.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 9 December 1991]:* The RUC press office and the RUC force control centre were amalgamated on 4 October 1982 to form the force control and information centre. Press functions and other services provided by the centre are interrelated, with many of the staff performing duties relating to both functions.

Details of the number of authorised posts and of the number of posts filled, prior to 1985, are no longer available. However, since 1985, the staffing levels in the RUC force control and information centre are as follows:

	Authorised posts (RUC)	*Posts filled (RUC)*	*Authorised posts Civilian staff*	*Posts filled Civilian staff*
1985	59	58	7	7
1986	58	55	7	7
1987	58	58	7	7
1988	58	63	7	7
1989	56	61	[1]7·5	[1]7·5
1990	56	61	[1]7·5	[1]7·5
1991[2]	46	51	13·5	13·5

[1] Includes one part-time staff.
[2] 3 November 1991.

Financial information is not readily available in the form requested because expenditure on the force control and information centre is subsumed in overall central costs. However, the estimated costs[1] incurred by the force control and information centre, since 1985, are as follows:

Year	*Estimated Total Costs Incurred*
1985	1,500,000
1986	1,550,000
1987	1,840,000
1988	2,230,000

Year	Estimated Total Costs Incurred
1989	2,380,000
1990	2,630,000
1991	not yet available

[1]Prepared in accordance with established ready reckoner figures.

Details of the amount spent by the RUC on advertising are not available prior to the financial year 1987-88. However, since then the amount spent by the RUC, on advertising during the period 1987-88 to 1990-91 is as follows:

Year	Amount Spent on Advertising
1987-88	47,000
1988-89	37,000
1989-90	22,000
1990-91	49,000

SCOTLAND

Parliamentary Seats

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans there are to review the number of parliamentary seats in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. Friend has no present plans to review the number of parliamentary seats in Scotland, which are set by the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986.

Manufacturing Output

21. **Mr. Cran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the increase in manufacturing output in Scotland since 1978.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Manufacturing output in Scotland has increased by over 11·5 per cent. in the 12 years between 1978 and 1990.

Voluntary Organisations

22. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the value of grants from his Department to voluntary organisations in each of the past three years.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The value of direct grants made by the Scottish Office to voluntary organisations in each of the last three years for which figures are published are as follows:

	£
1987-88	9,790,137
1988-89	14,771,542
1989-90	16,339,277

In addition to grants made directly, the Scottish Office gives grants to local authorities under the urban programme. Some local authorities in turn giving grants to urban programme projects involve voluntary organisations. Non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Scottish Office departments also give grants to voluntary organisations. Further details were given in answers by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and his predecessor on 16 May 1989, 11 May 1990 and 22 March 1991, columns *122-23*, *254-56* and *235-36* respectively.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest

23. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had with Scottish Natural Heritage on the subject of sites of special scientific interest.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My officials are in regular contact with the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland and various issues relating to SSSIs are discussed.

Land Conservation

24. **Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has to finance land conservation measures in Caithness and Sutherland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: It is for the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland to finance such measures as it considers appropriate from within the resources made available to it.

Constitutional Change

25. **Mr. McAllion:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he next intends to meet representatives of the Scottish Constitutional Convention to discuss the future government of Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: My right hon. Friend has no plans to meet the convention.

32. **Sir Nicholas Fairbairn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representation he has received concerning the government of Scotland.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Representations have been received on the government of Scotland covering a wide spectrum of views.

29. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received concerning the government of Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: A range of representations has been received on the government of Scotland. They put forward a wide variety of views.

New Towns

26. **Mr. Ingram:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the wind-up of the Scottish new towns.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Consultation on proposals to wind up East Kilbride and Glenrothes development corporations took place between September and November. The responses from the corporations and other consultees are currently under consideration, and I hope to take decisions shortly.

A92

27. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what information he has on traffic usage and accidents for each of the past five years on the A92; and if he will institute a programme for re-trunking and improving this road.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Traffic growth on the A92 between Dundee and Stonehaven is well below that for the key, strategic inter-urban trunk roads. The overall accident rate on this route has fallen by over 15 per cent. in the period between 1985 and 1990. Scotland presently has a very extensive trunk road network. Proposals for changes to the network will be considered following analysis off the findings of the major review, which is nearing completion, of the trunk and key principal road network. The A92 is however already designated as a primary route and retrunking is unlikely. It is for Tayside regional council as the roads authority to consider any upgrading or improvements necessary.

NHS Trusts

28. **Mr. Eadie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he last consulted chairmen of health boards in Scotland on national health service trust status.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The subject of NHS reforms, of which NHS trusts are an important part, was discussed at a meeting which I had with board chairmen on 29 November, 1991.

School Boards

30. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will carry out a review of the operation of school boards; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The Scottish Office Education Department has continuously monitored the implementation of the school boards legislation and the operation of school boards since their establishment in 1989. My right hon. Friend proposes to issue shortly a consultation paper about the role of boards in school management and about their functions and responsibilities generally.

Heart Bypass Operations

31. **Mr. Michael J. Martin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to reduce the national health service waiting lists for patients awaiting heart bypass operations in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: An additional 90 open-heart cardiac surgery operations are to be performed by Greater Glasgow health board in 1991-92. These additional operations will bring the annual number of cardiac surgery operations in Glasgow to 1,930 and to a record level of more than 3,050 in Scotland. This expansion raises total expenditure on this programme to £19·93 million. This increase in the number of operations to be performed will bring a welcome reduction in waiting times for patients.

Economic Regeneration

33. **Mr. McMaster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will now take steps to regenerate the local economy of Paisley, Johnstone and Ederslie.

Mr. Allan Stewart: The Government's sound fiscal policies will provide the platform for regeneration. Renfrewshire Enterprise, which has a broad remit and substantial public funding through Scottish Enterprise, is taking the lead in ensuring that the area benefits fully from investment and other development opportunities.

Emigration

34. **Mrs. Margaret Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the net emigration of people from Scotland over the past 10 years, giving a breakdown by age groups.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Over the ten years to mid-1990, the net civilian migration loss from Scotland is estimated to have been 126,000. The annual report of the Registrar General for Scotland gives annual totals in table 01.1 and a summary age distribution in table 02.2.

Borders Economy

35. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will pay an official visit to the Borders region to discuss the future of the local regional economy with specific reference to agriculture and textiles.

Mr. Allan Stewart: I am very much aware of the problems which the economy in Borders region is experiencing, in the agricultural and textile sectors in particular. The Secretary of State and my noble Friend the Scottish Office Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, met representatives of the Borders branches of the Scottish National Farmers Union on 24 October 1991 to hear of their concerns at first hand. In addition, I met the hon. Member and the right hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Launderdale (Sir D. Steel) to discuss the current state of the textile industry in the Borders on 15 October 1991. Notwithstanding the current difficulties, the economy of the region as a whole remains strong with unemployment at 5·3 per cent. which is well below the national average of 8·9 per cent. Scottish Enterprise has recently completed a review of the textile industry in Scotland with a view to developing a strategy for the industry. Scottish Borders Enterprise has established a Borders textile initiative specifically to address the difficulties being experienced by the industry in the region. Like other farmers throughout the less-favoured areas of the United Kingdom, those in the Borders benefited from a 14 per cent. increase in hill livestock compensatory allowances this year.

My right hon. Friend has no immediate plans to visit Borders region.

Whisky

36. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what is his estimate of the volume and value of Scotch whisky production for the calendar year 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Figures provided to the Scotch Whisky Association by its members indicate that for the first six months of 1991 malt whisky output amounted to some 106·4 million litres of alcohol. Grain whisky output for the same period was 110·7 million litres of alcohol. No estimates can be made of the value of that production at this stage.

AIDS

37. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the spread of AIDS in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Seventy-five new cases of AIDS were reported in Scotland between 1 January and 31 October 1991, bringing the cumulative total to 270, of whom 169 have died. The annual figures of reported AIDS cases show a rising trend from seven in 1986 to 63 in 1990. The incidence of HIV infection is also increasing. At 30 September 1991, a total of 1,906 people in Scotland had been identified and reported as HIV antibody positive. Of this number, approximately 52 per cent. had a history of injecting drug use. Twenty-six per cent. were women.

These figures demonstrate the need for continuing action to prevent the spread of HIV infection, and the AIDS task force which was set up under my chairmanship in July is considering what further measures might be taken. Since 1988-89 the Government have given additional allocations to health boards in Scotland of more than £51 million as a contribution towards the cost of measures to curb the spread of HIV infection and of providing treatment, counselling and support for those affected by HIV and AIDS.

Rail Services

38. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what has been the total amount paid to Strathclyde regional council by the Scottish Office in respect of section 20 payments for rail services in each of the past five years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Payments for rail services in Strathclyde under section 20 of the Transport Act 1968 are the responsibility of the Strathclyde passenger transport executive under an agreement made with British Rail. Although payments to Strathclyde regional council are not made specifically in respect of rail services, Scottish Office support to the council through aggregate external finance takes full account of the passenger transport executive's section 20 expenditure.

Planting Grants

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recommendations were made by the relevant Forestry Commission regional advisory committee in respect of applications for planting grants to afforest at *(a)* Glen Lochay in 1987, *(b)* Inverlochlarig in 1988, *(c)* Glen Dye in 1990 and *(d)* Muirhill, by Loch Carron in 1991.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The views of the regional advisory committees were treated as confidential at the time that the Glen Lochay and Inverlochlarig applications were considered. The regional advisory committee for north Scotland considered that the application for Glen Dye, as amended, should be approved. The regional advisory committee for mid-Scotland considered that the application for Muirhill should also be approved.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list, in each case, the members of the Forestry Commission regional advisory committee which considered *(a)* an application for planting grants to afforest Glen Lochay in 1987, *(b)* an application for planting grants to afforest at Inverlochlarig in 1988, *(c)* an application for planting grants to afforest an area of Glen Dye in 1990 and *(d)* an application to afforest at Muirhill, by Loch Carron, in 1991.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is as follows:

Glen Lochay
- Mr. W. Wolfe
- Captain J. N. B. Baillie-Hamilton
- Mr. D. Brierton
- Mr. B. S. Brookes
- Mr. J. D. Hutchison
- Mr. J. McNaughton
- Mr. G. Morton
- Mr. T. Smith

Inverlochlarig
- Dr. J. Balfour
- Mr. B. S. Brookes
- Mr. P. Fairweather
- Mr. J. D. Hutchison
- Mr. C. R. Langton
- Mr. G. Morton
- Mr. P. S. Murray
- Councillor T. Rae

Glen Dye
- Mr. J. Evans
- Mr. E. J. Brodie
- Mr. B. E. Crabtree
- Mr. A. D. M. Farquharson
- Professor C. Gimmingham
- Councillor N. J. O. Graham
- Mr. W. W. McAskill
- Mr. M. Pottinger

Muirhill
- Dr. J. Balfour
- Mr. A. W. Barbour
- Mr. P. Fairweather
- Mr. J. A. Fell
- Mr. J. McNaughton
- Mr. P. S. Murray
- Mr. P. Wormell

Roads

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the 10 contractors who have received the largest share of motorway and trunk road construction contracts in Scotland in the last three years, giving for each contractor the total value of the contracts received.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The names of the 10 contractors and the totals of the values of the contracts awarded to them over the three years from December 1988 to November 1991 are as follows:

	£ million
Balfour Beatty	[1]61·3
Shanks McEwan (Contractors) Ltd	46·0
Tarmac Construction Scotland	[2]24·5
Morrison Construction Ltd	20·7
Nuttall-Levack Consortium	13·2
R. J. McLeod (Contractors) Ltd	13·0
W. J. Barr & Sons (Scotland) Ltd	11·9
Tractor Shovels Tawse Ltd	7·4
Miller Construction Ltd	7·0
Harbour & General Works Ltd	6·4

[1]Includes £27·5 million as the full contract sum for the M8 St. James' Interchange—jointly funded with Strathclyde Regional Council.

[2]This £24·5 million full contract sum was for the M80 Stepps Bypass—jointly funded with Strathclyde Regional Council.

Mr. McAvoy: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will show total expenditure by all Scottish local highway authorities from 1980-81 to 1991-92 on *(a)* new construction and improvement, *(b)* structural maintenance and *(c)* current maintenance.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The information requested, as far as it is available, is set out in the table. Expenditure by Scottish local authorities on structural road maintenance is not recorded separately but is included within new construction and improvement.

£ million

	New construction and improvement (incl structural maintenance)	*Current maintenance*
1980-81	77	120
1981-82	99	130
1982-83	110	141
1983-84	112	149
1984-85	106	127
1985-86	128	129
1986-87	125	133
1987-88	114	139
1988-89	116	152
1989-90	143	172
1990-91	144	n/a
1991-92	n/a	n/a

Ferries

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make representations to the European Community to ensure that the Larne to Stranraer/ Cairnryan ferry routes remain recognised ferry routes between Northern Ireland and Scotland; and if he will oppose action by the European Community to promote rail and road transport developments to make Holyhead to the Irish Republic the main sea ferry route for the island of Ireland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The European Commission's proposals for the development of a high speed rail network and a combined transport network should not be taken as implying any intention to make the port of Holyhead the main route to the island of Ireland. My right hon. Friend's joint statement with the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland and for Transport on 2 December 1991 also made it clear that speculation that the Stranraer to Larne ferry route was under threat of downgrading, or that traffic could be discouraged from using the route as a result of the EC proposals, was without foundation. I have arranged for a copy of the joint statement to be placed in the Library of the House.

Publicity Costs

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish a breakdown of the costs involved in the patients charter for *(a)* the initial launch and promotion, *(b)* the provision to each health board employee of a copy of Framework for Action and the patients charter and *(c)* subsequent promotional videos and other exercises within health boards concerning the patients charter and Framework for Action.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: A breakdown in the form requested is not available centrally.

Fine Art Courses

Mr. Alex Carlile: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many places in higher education in Scotland were available on degree courses in fine art (painting) and fine art (sculpture) respectively in each of the years from 1979 to date; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is not held centrally. It is for institutions to determine, in the light of demand and their overall resources, how many places on courses may be made available.

Speech Therapy

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many speech therapists are employed by the Argyl and Clyde health board; and what information he has concerning their location within the board's area.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Argyll and Clyde health board currently employs 41 speech therapists. The location of these staff is as follows.

Location[1]	*Whole time equivalent*	*Number*
Royal Alexandria Hospital, Paisley	3·30	4
Merchiston Hospital	1·00	1
Inverclyde Royal Hospital, Greenock	1·00	1
New Sneddon Street Clinic, Paisley	10·05	12
Renfrew	1·00	1
Greenock	7·70	9
Dumbarton	5·65	7
Lochgilphead and Oban	2·20	3
Campbeltown	1·00	1
Dunoon	1.00	1
Gourock	0.22	1
	34·12	41

[1]The location is taken from the payroll and indicates the main base of employment—it may not reflect the exact place of work.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Members' Visitors

Mr. Michael: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will increase to 48 the present limit on hon. Members' parties visiting the House of Commons admitted under one permit, while maintaining the limit of 16 on each escorted group shown round the House.

Mr. MacGregor: The present system has evolved over a number of years and allows 50 individual Members' parties in groups of up to 16 to tour the Line of Route in reasonable comfort. The effects on congestion and demand from Members would have to be carefully balanced against the advantages of any change in the present arrangements. However, I will ask the Administration Committee to consider the hon. Member's proposal.

Parliament Street (Residential Accommodation)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Lord President of the Council what residential accommodation has been provided in the new buildings in Parliament street; who occupies these; and what has been the cost.

Mr. MacGregor: In accordance with the recommendations of the Services Committee (Third Report 1983-84) five separate units of accommodation have been provided in the phase I building allocated to the Serjeant at Arms, the Deputy Serjeant at Arms, the Speaker's Secretary and two office keepers. There is also overnight accommodation for the Libary and Clerks Department. It is not possible readily to separate the cost of providing this accommodation from the total cost of the project.

The Committee took the decision to use the central section of the building for residential purposes because of its character and limited structural capacity, provided that there was a benefit to Members in terms of accommodation vacated in the Palace. When the work to convert the Serjeants' and the Speaker's Secretary's former residences is completed in the new year the House will have gained a further 32 offices for Members in the Palace.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

EC Lifejacket Proposals

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will set out the representations his Department has made on the European Commission's lifejacket proposals.

Mr. Leigh: I take it that my hon. Friend is referring to the Community Directive on Personal Protective Equipment (89/686/EEC) which was adopted in December 1989 and which applies inter alia to lifejackets designed for continuous use rather than in emergencies only.

During the negotiations on the draft directive, my Department put forward proposals to amplify the basic safety requirements on lifejackets and buoyancy aids, which were largely accepted.

Ozone-depleting Substances

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on current policy with regard to exports of all ozone-depleting chemicals to developing countries.

Mr. Leigh: United Kingdom policy with regard to export of ozone-depleting substances is in line with the terms of the Montreal protocol, which states that exports of such substances to non-parties shall be prohibited as of 1 January 1993.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on measures he has undertaken, and any future planned activities, in assisting British industry to switch from the use of ozone-depleting substances.

Mr. Leigh: DTI, jointly with DoE, holds regular meetings with United Kingdom producers and users of ozone-depleting substances to discuss progress towards phase-out of these substances, including latest developments on replacement technologies. Other DTI activities include organising and speaking at seminars, funding research into the feasibility of alternatives, providing financial support to private sector research, and an awareness campaign targeted at all potential users of the substances.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is his current policy in respect of advice to industry regarding HCFCs; and what advice has been given to industry on the toxicity of HCFC 123.

Mr. Leigh: The DTI leaflet "Protecting the Ozone Layer", advises industry that HCFCs "should be used only where necessary and recovered for re-use, recycling or proper disposal wherever possible".

Toxicity testing HCFC 123 is not yet complete. However early results give some cause for concern. Producers have therefore advised the competent authorities and user industries of potential problems, and application development is proceeding with caution.

British and Commonwealth Group

Mr. Gordon Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what is the current position of his Department's investigation into the collapse of British and Commonwealth; when the report will be completed; when the report will be published; and what use his Department has made of the investigation financed by shareholders in Atlantic.

Mr. Lilley: Inspectors were appointed on 15 June 1990 under section 432 of the Companies Act 1985 to investigate and report on the affairs of Atlantic Computers plc and Atlantic Computer Systems plc, companies in the British and Commonwealth group. The inspectors are making good progress, but I cannot say when they will complete their report; it is the general practice to publish reports by inspectors under section 432 relating to the affairs of public companies.

The inspectors are aware of the inquiries made on behalf of shareholders of British and Commonwealth and will take into account that information.

Maxwell Companies

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if he will commence an inquiry under the Companies Acts and Financial Services Act into *(a)* Bishopsgate Investment Management Ltd. and *(b)* London and Bishopsgate International Investment Management plc;

(2) what steps he is taking to ensure that moneys belonging to *(a)* Mirror Group pensioners and *(b)* Maxwell Communication Corporation pensioners are recovered from those Gibraltar-based trusts or companies under the control or influence of the Maxwell family or companies or trusts associated with them;

(3) if he will use his powers under the Companies Acts to wind up on just and equitable grounds *(a)* Maxwell Communication Corporation plc and *(b)* Mirror Group Newspapers plc;

(4) if he will use his powers under the Companies Acts to wind up on just and equitable grounds *(a)* Bishopsgate Investment Management Ltd. and *(b)* London and Bishopsgate International Investment Management plc;

(5) if he will use his powers under the Financial Services Act to trace and recover moneys belonging to pensioners associated with *(a)* Mirror Group plc and *(b)* Maxwell Communication Corporation plc;

(6) if he will list his powers, if he will take steps, under the Companies Acts, the Insolvency Act and the Financial Services Act to secure the assets and businesses of *(a)*

Mirror Group Newspapers plc and *(b)* Maxwell Communication Corporation plc for the benefit of the pensioners of these companies;

(7) if he will use his powers under the Financial Services Act to trace moneys belonging to *(a)* Bishopsgate Investment Management Ltd. and *(b)* London and Bishopsgate International Investment Management plc and their clients.

Mr. Lilley: The Serious Fraud Office is conducting an investigation into the Maxwell companies. Action is being taken to secure and recover assets by IMRO, the provisional liquidator, administrators and receivers appointed to a number of Maxwell private companies. I have instructed my officials to maintain the closest consultation with the Serious Fraud Office and IMRO. I will also want to hear from the administrators, receivers and the provisional liquidator if they consider that the exercise of my investigative powers or other action is warranted.

I will not hesitate to use powers available to me to investigate any matter which may emerge from these consultations as requiring separate inquiry or to take any other action, so long as that would not impede the work of the Serious Fraud Office or other action which is being taken.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the directors and the financial period of the most recent accounts to be filed of *(a)* London and Bishopsgate International Investment Management plc and *(b)* Bishopsgate Investment Management Ltd.

Mr. Lilley: *(a)* There is currently no company registered in England and Wales with the name London and Bishopsgate International Investment Management plc. However, until 19 November 1991 that was the name of the company now known as Maxwell and East European Partners. The directors notified to the Registrar of Companies are:

Robert Henry Bunn
Stuart Crosbie Carson
Jonathan Howard Ford
Kevin Francis Herbert Maxwell
Andrew Porter Smith
Larry Steven Trachtenberg

The last accounts filed at Companies House are those for the period ending 31 December 1990.

(b) The directors of Bishopsgate Investment Management Limited notified to the Registrar of Companies are:

Trevor Cook
Ian Robert Charles Maxwell
Kevin Francis Herbert Maxwell
Henry Allen Stephens
Larry Steven Trachtenberg

The last accounts filed at Companies House are those for the financial year ending 5 April 1990.

Mr. Dunn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish in the *Official Report* the names of those who currently hold directorships, or have held directorships since 1985, in companies run, managed or owned by the late Robert Maxwell; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lilley: This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Textiles and Clothing

Mr. Dickens: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent issues affecting textiles and clothing have been discussed in the EC Council of Industry Ministers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Leigh: The Industry Council discussed a number of textiles and clothing related issues at its meeting on 18 November. These included a Commission communication on improving the competitiveness of the industries, recent developments in world trade and the Commission's latest proposals for structural assistance to areas of the Community with a heavy dependence on textiles industries.

Cumbria's Economy Report

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what was the total cost of the consultants' report on Cumbria's economy, strategic needs and opportunities in the 1990s.

Mr. Leigh: The report was commissioned by the Northern Development Company and was co-funded by a number of other organisations, including DTI North West. The total cost was a matter between the company and the consultants. My Department contributed £5,875 towards the cost.

Textile Industry

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he intends to make to the European Community concerning French Government subsidies to the French textile industry.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 10 December 1991]:* The European Commission (EC) is currently investigating one case of assistance to a French textile company. Any evidence of illegal subsidies should be referred to the EC for investigation.

Eggs

Mr. Martlew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from the producers of free-range eggs about the excess profit being made by the large supermarket companies from the sale of their eggs.

Mr. Redwood *[holding answer 10 December 1991]:* I understand that concerns about the disparity between producer prices and retail prices have been expressed by a producer of free range eggs. The Office of Fair Trading is looking into this complaint to see whether there is anything that would suggest that the use of the Director General's competition powers would be appropriate.

EMPLOYMENT

EC Social Action Programme

Mr. Irvine: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list all the directives and draft directives put forward by the European Commission, pursuant to the social action programme stating in each case *(a)* under which article of the treaty of Rome the

directive or draft directive has been put forward, *(b)* whether the directive or draft directive requires unanimity or can be passed by a qualified majority and *(c)* whether a decision has yet been reached in relation to it by the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Jackson: The table gives the requested information for all the Social Action Programme directives identified so far. In its social action programme the Commission indicates some areas of action without specifying the type of instrument which it intends to propose. Such proposals have not been included in the table.

(In column *(b)* of the table: U stands for unanimity and QMV for qualified majority voting)

Directive	*(a) legal base*	*(b) vote*	*(c) status*
3 directives on contracts and employment relationships other than full-time open ended contracts (atypical work);			
(i) Working conditions	100	U	under discussion
(ii) distortions of competition	100A	QMV	under discussion
(iii) health and safety	118A	QMV	adopted 25/6/91
Directive for the adaptation of working time	118A	QMV	under discussion
Directive on the introduction of a form to serve as proof of an employment relationship	100	U	adopted 14/10/91
Revision of the Directive of 17 February 1975 (75/129/EEC) on the approximation of member states pertaining to collective redundancies	100	U	under discussion
Directive on European works councils	100	U	under discussion
Directive on the protection of pregnant women at work	118A QMV	political agreement 6/11/91	
Directive on working conditions applicable to workers from other member states performing work in the host country in the framework of the freedom to provide services especially on behalf of a subcontracting undertaking	57(2) and 66	QMV	under discussion
Directive on the minimum health and safety requirements to encourage improved medical assistance on board vessels	118A	QMV	agreed 1/10/91
Directive on the minimum health and safety requirements for work at temporary or mobile work sites	118A	QMV	political agreement 14/10/91
Directive on the minimum requirements to be applied in improving the safety and health of workers in the drilling industries	118A	QMV	under discussion
Directive on the minimum requirements to be applied in improving the safety and health of workers in the quarrying and open cast mining industries	118A	QMV	not yet published
Directive on the minimum health and safety requirement for fishing vessels	118A	QMV	not yet published
Directive on the minimum requirements for safety and health signs at the workplace	118A	QMV	political agreement 3/12/91
Directive on the minimum safety and health requirements regarding the exposure of workers to the risks caused by physical agents	118A	QMV	not yet published
Directive amending Directive 83/447/EEC on the protection of workers from the risks related the exposure to asbestos at work	118A	QMV	agreed 25/6/91
Directive on the minimum safety and health requirements for activities in the transport sector	118A	QMV	not yet published
Directive on the approximation of the laws of the Member States on the protection of young people	118A	QMV	not yet published
Directive on the introduction of measures on the introduction of measures aimed at promoting the improvement in the travel conditions of workers with motor disabilities	118A	QMV	under discussion

Citric Acid Extraction

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will ask the Health and Safety Executive to conduct an inquiry into the impact on employees of the use of aspogillus citric acid extraction plants; and if he will make a statement on current information held by his Department on any respiratory problems.

Mr. Jackson: The Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) field operations division is aware of only one plant in Great Britain where aspergillus niger is used in the manufacture of citric acid. HSE inspectors will make an inspection visit to the plant in the near future to check on compliance by the company with the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and associated legislation and review the precautions taken to safeguard the health of employees.

HSE is currently aware of respiratory problems suffered by one employee of a contracting company who was employed at the plant in 1990.

Offshore Installations

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the total number of risers on offshore installations; and how many of them are currently fitted with sub-sea isolation valves.

Mr. Jackson: Following the introduction of the Offshore Installations (Emergency Pipeline Valve) Regulations 1989, 192 pipeline risers were identified as requiring the fitting or relocation of emergency shut down valve to comply with the regulations. These have now all been fitted.

Sub-sea isolation systems have been fitted to 40 pipelines on the seabed.

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what specific additional training is being provided by the Health and Safety Executive's offshore division for inspector grade personnel who were previously in the Department of Energy's petroleum engineering division.

Mr. Jackson: Inspector grade personnel previously in the petroleum engineering division of the Department of Energy have access to the full range of existing training available to Health and Safety Executive staff, supplemented by additional training to familiarise them with HSE's operating systems and procedures, and external specialist courses.

Earnings

Mr. Jack Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentage of male, female and all employees in each standard industrial classification industrial division earned less than £180 per week in 1990 and less than £200 per week in the first half year of 1991.

Mr. Jackson: The information available from the "New Earnings Survey" in April 1990 and April 1991 is provided in the tables.

Full-time employees on adult rates whose pay was unaffected by absence: Percentage whose gross weekly earnings were below £180

Standard industrial classification division	*April 1990 per cent.*		
	Men	*Women*	*All*
0	52·8	77·7	55·7
1	4·4	27·7	8·1
2	12·1	53·3	20·2
3	13·3	62·8	22·2
4	21·7	67·9	36·5
5	20·7	63·8	24·6
6	37·8	75·4	51·9
7	15·6	41·7	20·9
8	15·2	41·5	27·0
9	19·9	41·7	31·5

Source: 1990 New Earnings Survey

Full-time employees on adult rates whose pay was unaffected by absence: Percentage whose gross weekly earnings were below £200

Standard industrial classification division	*April 1990 per cent.*		
	Men	*Women*	*All*
0	53·8	77·1	56·8
1	5·3	25·7	8·8
2	15·4	54·0	23·2
3	17·9	64·5	26·3
4	25·7	70·5	40·3
5	24·2	63·7	27·8
6	40·4	75·6	53·7
7	18·1	43·1	23·0
8	17·0	43·8	29·1
9	20·3	41·6	31·8

Source: 1991 New Earnings Survey

Mr. Jack Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what percentages of manual, non-manual and all *(a)* males and *(b)* females are earning below £190 per week in (i) Great Britain, (ii) the Northern region and (iii) Northumberland.

Mr. Jackson: The information available from the "New Earnings Survey" in April 1991 is provided in the table.

Full time employees on adult rates whose pay was unaffected by absence: Percentage whose gross weekly earnings were below £190

Great Britain	*April 1991 per cent.*
Manual men	26·9
Non-manual men	12·3
All men	19·1
Manual women	77·1
Non-manual women	40·4
All women	47·2
Northern Region	
Manual men	27·5
Non-manual men	15·3
All men	22·0
Manual women	79·4
Non-manual women	53·7
All women	59·4
Northumberland	
Manual men	35·7
Non-manual men	..
All men	26·7
Manual women	82·7
Non-manual women	57·6
All women	65·0

Source: 1991 New Earnings Survey.
Note: ".." denotes sampling error too large or sample size too small for reliable estimate.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Compensation Recovery Unit

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what are *(a)* the total running costs to date of the compensation recovery unit, *(b)* the original projected costs of the compensation recovery unit each year, *(c)* the total amount of money recovered by the compensation recovery unit to date and *(d)* the total amount of money the compensation recovery unit was projected to recover each year:

(2) if he will state the total cost of appeals under the compensation recovery scheme administered by the compensation recovery unit; and whether any assistance is made available to appellants under the compensation recovery scheme:

(3) how many appeals have been lodged against certificates of total benefit issued by the compensation recovery unit, what is the total number of staff employed by the compensation recovery unit, what is the number of compensation claims registered with the compensation recovery unit to date; and what is the projected number of claims to be registered with the compensation recovery unit annually.

Mr. Jack: The administration of the compensation recovery unit is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. He will write to the hon. Member shortly and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Contributions Agency

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to retain a presence on behalf of the Contributions Agency at the Caerphilly office of his Department.

Mr. Jack: The provision of a local Contributions Agency presence is a matter for Miss Ann Chant, the Chief Executive of the Contributions Agency. She will write to the hon. Member shortly and a copy will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Child Benefit

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the *(a)* gross and *(b)* net cost of raising child benefit for all children, in real terms (i) to its 1987-88 level and *(b)* to its pre 1985-86 level.

Mr. Jack: Had child benefit been increased at each general uprating of benefits in line with movements in the index of retail prices, the April 1987 rate of £7·25 and November 1984 rate of £6·85 would become £9·55 and £10 respectively from April 1991.

The additional full year costs in 1991-92 of paying £9·55 per child, instead of the current rates of £9·25 for the eldest eligible child and £7·50 for each other child, would be about £685 million gross and £470 million net of normal adjustments to other benefits. The corresponding costs of paying £10 would be £970 million gross and £665 million net.

Ms. Richardson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what would be the *(a)* gross and *(b)* net cost of raising child benefit by 10p in 1992-93 and 1993-94 for all children.

Mr. Jack: It has been estimated that the extra costs in each year would be around £63 million gross and £45 million net.

Family Credit

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families were receiving family credit at the latest available date, breaking these figures down into *(a)* one-parent and two-parent families and *(b)* one-earner and two-earner families.

Mr. Jack: The provisional family credit caseload figure for the end of September 1991 is 353,000.

The latest available breakdowns on the basis requested are for the end of April 1991 and are as follows:

	Number
(a) One-parent families	131,000
Two-parent families	210,000
(b) One-earner families	325,000
Two-earner families	16,000

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families with children in receipt of housing benefit are also receiving family credit, broken down into couples and lone parents.

Miss Widdecombe: In May 1990, 56,800 families with children in Great Britain were receiving housing benefit and family credit. Of these, 37,900 were couples and 18,900 were lone parents.

Source: Housing Benefit Management Information System annual 1 per cent. sample May 1990.

Retirement Pension

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much it would cost annually to pay retirement pension from the day and date that a pensioner attains pensionable age rather then weekly from the following Monday.

Miss Widdecombe: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Mr. Bowden) on 9 December at columns *350-51*.

EC Disability Benefits

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the benefits in each member state of the European Community awarded on account of invalidity or disability which are payable without time limit in another member state once entitlement has been established; if he will indicate which of these benefits are believed to have been affected by the recent ruling of the European Court of Justice in the Newton case; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jack: Further to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State on 10 December at col. *377*, the right hon. Member will find a list of long-term invalidity and disability benefits for each member state in the "MISSOC" tables contained in "Social Protection in The Member States of The European Community". These are published by the European Commission and are available in the Library. It is for the Governments of other member states to determine the implications of the Newton judgment for their benefit systems and to make known the outcome of those deliberations.

Free School Meals

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many children will lose their entitlement to free school meals under the Income Support (General) Regulations 1987 as amended by Income Support (General) Amendment (No. 4) Regulations 1991 (S.I. No. 1559/1991) and under Family Credit (General)

Regulations 1987 as amended by the Family Credit (General) Amendment Regulations 1991 (S.I. No. 1520/1991).

Miss Widdecombe: No family with children need lose their entitlement to free school meals due to these regulations. Approximately 45,000 families currently working and receiving income support will become eligible for family credit next April as a result of the change to the qualifying hours rule from 24 to 16 hours a week. They will be able to choose whether to claim family credit or to remain with income support. Those who continue to receive income support will retain their entitlement to free school meals. However, we expect around 30,000 families to move on to family credit and to be better off, even allowing for the loss of free school meals. The number of school age children in these families is approximately 35,000.

When the family credit children's rates were originally set in 1988, an amount was included in lieu of entitlement to free school meals. These rates have subsequently been uprated each year.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the operation of the cold weather payments scheme in Scotland.

Mr. Scott: The social fund cold weather payments scheme covers the whole of Great Britain. There are no differences in the way it operates in Scotland.

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what advertising has been undertaken by his Department to advertise cold weather payments; and what expenditure he intends to make during the winter months on advertising the availability and criteria for these payments.

Mr. Scott: On 14 June we announced major improvements to the cold weather payments scheme which included ending the need to make a claim. All people entitled to a cold weather payment will receive it automatically. When a period of cold weather is triggered, district offices of the Benefits Agency will announce this in the local press.

The level of expenditure for the coming winter months cannot be predicted as it depends on the number and location of periods of cold weather.

Firefighting

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what special provisions are made for retained firefighters with regard to the effect of their earnings from firefighting duties on their entitlement to unemployment benefit, income support, housing benefit, community charge benefit and family credit.

Mr. Jack: All earnings from firefighting duties are disregarded in assessing the entitlement of a retained firefighter to unemployment benefit. The first £15 of such earnings are ignored in income support, housing benefit and community charge benefit, but earnings above that amount are taken into account in the normal way. In the assessment of family credit, net earnings from firefighting duties are taken into account in the same way as other earnings.

Social Fund

Mr. Terry Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many social fund inspectors were employed on 30 September;

(2) how many applications for a review by a social fund inspector were outstanding for more than one month on 30 September.

Mr. Scott: I understand from the social fund Commissioner that on 30 September 1991, there were 66 social fund inspectors employed and 2,843 review applications outstanding for more than one month.

Remunerative Work Changes

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he plans to give more information on the remunerative work changes which will come into effect in April 1992; and if he will make it his policy to circulate this information to all citizens advice bureaux.

Mr. Jack: We are planning a co-ordinated publicity package to cover both the change in the remunerative work rule in family credit and income support and the other changes which are taking place at the same time next April, particularly the introduction of disability working allowance. This publicity will start a few weeks before the changes come into force. In the meantime, I am about to write to the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux to clarify the effect of the changes in the remunerative work rule and the protection arrangements which we are providing for those on income support, and already working 16 or more hours a week, at the time of the change. I will make available a copy of this letter to the hon. Member.

Retirement Pension

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, how many pensioners each year receive their pension later than their notional birthdate arising out of the payment of pension on a Monday.

Miss Widdecombe: It is estimated that around 280,000 pensioners receive their pension on the first payday following their 60/65th birthday.

DEFENCE

Trident (Faslane)

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what year he gave the first estimate for the Trident Faslane facility; what the latest estimated cost is; and what is the difference from the cost originally announced in both real and money terms.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: On 10 May 1985, the cost of the Trident-related works programme at Clyde submarine base, Faslane was first estimated at £210 million at 1984-85 prices, of which £84 million was directly attributable to Trident. The cost estimate this year for the latter element is £176 million with future costs at 1990-91 prices, but past expenditure not revalued. A precise comparison between figures is not possible without disproportionate effort and cost.

Defence Properties

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many residential properties owned by his Department are in the Eltham contituency; and what is the current percentage rate of occupation.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As at 30 September 1991, the latest date for which figures are available, the Ministry of Defence owned 71 residential properties in the Eltham constituency, all of which were occupied. In addition, nine properties were in the process of being sold.

Eltham Palace

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to make a statement on the future use of Eltham palace.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I do not expect to be able to make a statement before the end of April 1992.

Fleet Tenders

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence why the fleet tenders HMS Manly, HMS Milbrook and HMS Mentor have been decommissioned; and what vessels will henceforth be available for seamanship training at HMS Raleigh.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The three fleet tenders at HMS Raleigh provided training in replenishment at sea—RAS—which in future will be provided more cost-effectively by a shore-based type 23 RAS rig. HMS Raleigh will continue to have a substantial number of small craft to provide new entrants with the basic sea-going experience formerly provided by the tenders.

Defence Cuts

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will postpone the planned defence cuts in the light of the events now taking place in eastern Europe.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Household Division

Mr. John Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what approaches he has received from the British Tourist Authority concerning the effect of the proposed cut in the strength of the Household Division on earnings from pageantry in London.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I am not aware of any.

Chemical and Biological Warfare

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will now review his policy regarding the release of information on Britain's chemical and biological defence research programme.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have no plans to review the policy regarding the release of information from chemical and biological research records, which is governed by the provisions of the Public Records Acts 1958 and 1967.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what documents the British Government presented to the third review conference of the biological and toxin weapons convention.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The British Government presented two documents to the third review conference of the biological and toxin weapons convention—BTWC: a document on United Kingdom compliance with the provisions of the BTWC and a document on new scientific and technological developments relevant to the convention. I am making arrangements for copies of these two documents to be placed in the Library.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the document entitled, "Transparency Mechanisms for the Canadian Chemical and Biological Defence Program" presented to the third review conference of the biological and toxin weapons convention.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will establish an independent advisory committee to review Britain's chemical and biological defence research programme.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Defence Scientific Advisory Council provides independent advice to the Secretary of State for Defence on scientific and techological matters of concern to the Ministry of Defence. The council has established the Chemical and Biological Defence Board which together with its committees reviews Britain's chemical and biological defence research programme.

Pugwash Group

Mr. Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy towards staff in his Department participating in meetings and conferences held by the Pugwash group on science and world affairs.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Staff in my Department invited to attend meetings and conferences organised by the Pugwash group accept if the subject is relevant to departmental work and time to attend is available.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 12 December 1991

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Courts (Sunday Working)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Attorney-General whether he has any proposals to have the law courts work on Sundays to expedite cases.

The Attorney-General: The Government have no plans for the courts to open on Sundays.

Radioactive Substances

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Attorney-General when he expects to publish the radioactive substances consolidation Bill.

The Attorney-General: The Lord Chancellor intends to introduce a Bill to consolidate the Radioactive Substances Act 1960 (as amended) on 16 December 1991. It is expected that the Bill will be published shortly afterwards.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Maxwell Companies (Pension Funds)

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will seek the removal of the current trustees of *(a)* the Mirror Group pension fund and *(b)* the Maxwell Communication Corporation pension fund and their replacement by independent trustees.

Mr. Maude: The removal or appointment of trustees is a matter for determination under the trust deeds of the pension schemes in question.

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the financial period of the most recent accounts of the pension funds of Mirror Group Newspapers plc and Maxwell Communication Corporation plc filed with the superannuations fund office of the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Maude: Information about the tax affairs of particular taxpayers is confidential.

Volunteer Drivers

Ms. Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will reconsider the 4,000 mile threshold on his proposed taxation of voluntary drivers' mileage allowance in rural areas.

Mr. Maude: The position in law is that motor mileage allowances paid to individuals, whether employees or volunteer drivers, are liable to tax, but tax is payable only to the extent that the allowances exceed the costs of running and maintaining a car for work or for voluntary driving and so result in a profit.

When working out these costs, volunteer drivers may use simplified administrative arrangements which are known as the fixed profit car scheme and are also available to employees. Under these arrangements "tax-free" rates, calculated by the Inland Revenue to reflect typical costs of running and maintaining a car for different engine sizes and different annual mileages, can be set against motor mileage allowances in order to calculate the taxable profit element.

There are different "tax-free" rates above and below 4,000 miles. The breakpoint ensures that standing costs—such as road tax, insurance and depreciation—are properly spread over the total mileage driven (both private and non-private) and that the tax relief is confined to the non-private proportion of motoring costs.

If volunteer drivers consider that the "tax-free" rates do not fully reflect their tax allowable motoring costs, they can keep detailed records of actual motoring expenses incurred, and private and voluntary driving, in order to make a claim based on their actual expenses.

Ms. Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his assessment of the implications of his proposed voluntary drivers' mileage allowance for volunteer bureau transport services.

Mr. Maude: The position in law is that motor mileage allowances paid to individuals, whether employees or volunteer drivers, are liable to tax to the extent that they exceed the costs of running and maintaining a car for work or for voluntary driving and so result in a profit.

I am aware that concern has been expressed about the possible impact on the availability of volunteer drivers of the arrangements which have recently been introduced for taxing motor mileage allowances paid to volunteers. In response to that concern, it has been decided to phase in the introduction of the new arrangements. For the period from 6 October 1991 to 5 April 1993 one quarter of the net profit will be taxed; for the tax year 1993-94 one half of the net profit will be taxed; for the tax year 1994-95 three quarters of the net profit will be taxed. Tax will not be payable on the full profit element until 1995-96.

I hope that the phasing in of the charge to tax will meet the concern which has been expressed.

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will raise the threshold of the exemption from taxation of the volunteer drivers' mileage allowance.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 11 December 1991]:* The position in law is that motor mileage allowances paid to individuals, whether employees or volunteer drivers, are liable to tax to the extent that they exceed the costs of running and maintaining a car for work or for voluntary driving and so result in a profit.

When working out these costs, volunteer drivers may use simplified administrative arrangements available for employees (known as the fixed profit car scheme) under which "tax-free" rates calculated by the Inland Revenue to reflect typical costs of running and maintaining a car for different engine sizes and different annual mileages can be set against motor mileage allowances in order to calculate the taxable profit element. These arrangments are an alternative to keeping detailed records of actual motoring expenses incurred, and private and voluntary driving, and making a claim based on actual expenses.

As the hon. Member may be aware, it has been decided to phase in the introduction of the arrangments for

collecting tax on allowances paid to volunteers. For the period from 6 October 1991 to 5 April 1993, one quarter of the net profit will be taxed; for the tax year 1993-94 one half of the net profit will be taxed; for the tax year 1994-95 three quarters of the net profit will be taxed. Tax will not be payable on the full profit element until 1995-96.

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received regarding the volunteer drivers' mileage allowance.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 11 December 1991]:* I have received a number of representations from organisations and individuals following the Inland Revenue's introduction of arrangements for collecting any income tax which may be due on motor mileage allowances paid to volunteer drivers. The representations have expressed concern about the possible impact of the new arrangements on volunteers' willingness to continue driving.

In replying to these representations, I have pointed out that tax is chargeable only if the allowances exceed the costs of running and maintaining a car for voluntary driving and so result in a profit; and that it has been decided to phase in the new arrangements gradually over a period.

I am very much aware of the important and valuable service these drivers provide, and hope that the phasing-in arrangements will meet the concern that has been expressed.

Voluntary Tax Contributions

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people sent voluntary extra tax contributions to the Treasury last year; what was the total amount of such contributions; and what the corresponding totals were *(a)* five years and *(b)* 10 years ago.

Mr. Maude: The number and amounts of voluntary extra tax contributions received by the Inland Revenue were as follows:

	Number	*Total amount (£)*
31 October 1981	90	129,334·98
31 October 1986	87	27,356·45
31 October 1991	53	147,012·95

Council Tax

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the level of charges per property by the private sector for the purposes of council tax valuation.

Mr. Maude: Following a competitive tendering exercise, the successful tenders by the private sector produce an average price of £1·58 per domestic property for the valuation bandings for the council tax.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a list of all those organisations which have been authorised to undertake council tax valuations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: As a result of a competitive tendering exercise for the award of contracts for the valuation banding of domestic properties in England and Wales ready for the introduction of the new council tax on 1 April 1993, 512 contracts have now been awarded to 337 private sector firms covering some 12 million properties divided between 1,052 geographical lots. The Valuation Office Agency will undertake the valuation banding of the remaining 9 million properties.

The total value of the contracts placed is £19·1 million. This represents excellent value for money for the Government and enables the work to commence on this straight away.

A list of the successful firms will be placed in the Library.

Early Retirement

Mr. Gould: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the current position with regard to the taxation of local authority enhancements of voluntary early retirement schemes; when the position was last changed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: Payments under the Local Government (Compensation for Premature Retirement) Regulations 1982 are, for tax purposes, regarded as compensation for loss of office. They qualify under the "golden handshake" rules for exemption from tax on the first £30,000. Regular payments made as additions to pensions are chargeable to income tax on the full amount. This tax treatment has not changed since the regulations were introduced. Different rules might apply to payments under other retirement arrangements.

Car Tax

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the present United Kingdom special car tax will be payable from 1 January 1993 on a car purchased and imported directly into the United Kingdom from another EC country.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: From 1 Janury 1993, car tax will be payable, as at present, on chargeable vehicles obtained in the EC and brought permanently into the United Kingdom.

Government Expenditure

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish tables showing, for each year from 1989-90 to date, identifiable Government expenditure by function in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom, expressed *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* as a percentage of the United Kingdom total identifiable general Government expenditure, *(c)* as an amount per capita and *(d)* as an amount per capita expressed as an index, United Kingdom identifiable general Government expenditure = 100.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 11 December 1991]:* Information on identifiable general Government expenditure by function and territory in 1989-90 is given in tables E5a and E5b of the statistical supplement to the 1990 autumn statement (Cm. 1520). Information for 1990-91 and updated figures for 1989-90 will be published in the statistical supplement to the 1991 autumn statement, which is scheduled for publication at the end of January.

Mortgage Interest Tax Relief

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much tax relief goes on mortgage tax relief *(a)* at basic rate and *(b)* in excess of the basic rate in 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 11 December 1991]:* The latest estimates are in the table. The estimate for 1991-92 is based on the standard assumption that interest rates remain at their current levels for the rest of 1991-92.

	Cost of mortgage interest relief (£ billion)	
	1990-91	*1991-92*
At the basic rate	7·2	6·1
In excess of the basic rate	0·5	—
Total	7·7	6·1

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many individuals in Scotland are currently receiving mortgage interest relief;

(2) if he will provide estimates of the regional distribution of mortgagors and mortgage interest relief in each year from 1988 to date;

(2) what is the current cost to the Exchequer of paying mortgage interest relief in Scotland.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 11 December 1991]:* Broad estimates based on the regional distribution of mortgage interest relief, from an analysis of the family expenditure surveys for the years 1988, 1989 and 1990, are shown in the table:

Mortgage Interest Relief

Region	*1988-89*		*1989-90*		*1990-91*[1]		*1991-92*[1,2]	
	Number of mortgagors (thousands)	*Cost (£ million)*	*Number of mortgagors (thousands)*	*Cost (£ million)*	*Number of mortgagors (thousands)*	*Cost (£ million)*	*Number of mortgagors (thousands)*	*Cost (£ million)*
Northern	520	250	540	310	550	350	550	310
Yorkshire	770	370	780	450	780	510	790	450
North West	1,110	530	1,140	680	1,140	770	1,160	640
East Midlands	660	340	670	420	680	480	680	410
West Midlands	860	430	870	540	880	620	890	510
East Anglia	350	220	360	260	370	300	370	250
Greater London	1,010	780	1,020	970	1,030	1,100	1,040	710
Other South East	1,930	1,350	1,970	1,730	1,990	1,940	2,030	1,510
South West	840	520	850	650	860	730	870	570
Wales	390	180	400	240	410	270	410	230
Scotland	640	370	660	460	670	530	670	420
Northern Ireland	120	60	140	90	140	100	140	90
United Kingdom	9,200	5,400	9,400	6,800	9,500	7,700	9,600	6,100

PRIME MINISTER

East Timor

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what steps have been taken by Her Majesty's Government to ensure the enforcement upon the Indonesian Government of resolutions 384 and 389 of the United Nations on the Indonesian invasion of East Timor.

The Prime Minister: Since 1982, the United Kingdom has supported the UN Secretary-General in his efforts to promote contacts between Indonesia and Portugal to reach a settlement satisfactory to both sides, as called for in a resolution of that year's UN General Assembly.

Arms Control

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister if he will seek to initiate with President Bush an emergency meeting of the two remaining depository states of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty to discuss the status of commitments made to the treaty by the Government of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, following the declaration of an independent commonwealth of slavic states by the leadership of the Ukrainian, Byelorussian and Russian republics on 8 December.

The Prime Minister: We have already had discussions with the United States and our other NATO allies about the Soviet Union's commitments and obligation under all international treaties including NPT. I also discussed it with President Mitterrand at the European Council and NATO Foreign Ministers will discuss the matter on 19 December. We have made it clear to the republics that their readiness to honour such commitments will be a major factor in developing our relations with them.

Prime Minister's Office (Report)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister what plans he has to publish a report on the operations of the Prime Minister's Office.

The Prime Minister: None.

Iraq (Petrochemical Programme)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Prime Minister when Her Majesty's Government first learned of the petrochemical-3 (PC-3) programme in Iraq; and what steps were taken to establish the extent of involvement by United Kingdom companies or organisations in that PC-3 programme.

The Prime Minister: We first learned of the PC3 programme in Iraq at the time the UN inspections were starting.

We have asked the UN special commission and the IAEA to let us have details of any evidence of involvement by British companies in Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programmes which may come to their

attention. Any indication of wrongdoing will be urgently investigated. If strategic export controls have been breached, it will be a matter for the courts.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Thursday 12 December.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

HEALTH

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will give for the six-month period April to September 1987 and for each subsequent six-month period, *(a)* the numbers of people admitted from waiting lists to hospital for in-patient treatment, *(b)* the numbers of people removed from in-patient waiting lists for reasons other than treatment, *(c)* the numbers of people admitted from waiting lists for day case treatment and *(d)* the numbers of people removed from day case waiting lists for reasons other than treatment.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information available centrally is given in the table. Total admissions from waiting lists have increased by more than 6 per cent. since March 1988.

It is important that health authorities actively manage their waiting lists to ensure that these contain only the names of people who need and want treatment. The regular validation of lists is now accepted management practice. People may come off waiting lists for reasons other than treatment if, for example, they have moved away, responded to an alternative treatment regime or have repeatedly not turned up or not replied to letters inviting them to get in touch with the hospital.

Removals from elective waiting lists, NHS hospitals England

6 months	*Number of patients admitted from waiting lists*			*Number of patients removed from waiting lists for reasons other than admission*		
ending	*In-patients*	*Day cases*	*Total*	*In-patients*	*Day cases*	*Total*
September 1987	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
March 1988	947,854	353,301	1,301,155	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
September 1988	941,863	359,213	1,301,076	72,131	18,419	90,550
March 1989	938,864	392,646	1,331,510	86,256	23,871	110,127
September 1989	939,516	420,536	1,360,052	92,715	26,784	119,499
March 1990	934,164	454,266	1,388,430	102,963	31,041	134,004
September 1990	910,557	465,603	1,376,160	101,572	36,409	137,981
March 1991	888,291	496,554	1,384,845	125,408	43,510	168,918

Executive Agencies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the new forms of alternative working patterns introduced into each of his Department's executive agencies since their establishment and give a breakdown by grade of the numbers of staff taking up each new working pattern for each new agency;

(2) if he will list the post, grade and maximum salary payable, including performance-related element in each case where appointments from the private sector have been made to his Department's executive agencies at grade 7 or above since their establishment;

(3) when the last annual report for each of his Department's executive agencies was published; and when the next one is due;

(4) whether a group bonus scheme is in operation in each of his Department's executive agencies;

(5) if he will list those new facilities for staff nurseries and health care schemes which have been introduced in each of his Department's executive agencies since their establishment;

(6) how many staff were in post on the date that each of his Department's executive agencies were established; and how many staff are in post now, in each case;

(7) how much was spent on events and publicity surrounding the launch of each of his Department's executive agencies; and whether the cost was borne by the parent Department or the new agency.

Mr. Dorrell: These are matters for the chief executives of the NHS Estate Management and Health Building Agency and the Medicines Control Agency. I have asked them to write to the hon. Member direct.

Schizophrenia

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment has been made of the level of staffing required to meet the needs of schizophrenic patients within the community care programme.

Mr. Dorrell: It is for individual health and local authorities to determine their own manpower levels and requirements. In drawing up their community care plans, health and local authorities should agree a local framework for ensuring the availability of services and also the resources each authority will provide to obtain such services.

Hospitals (Parking)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which regions routinely charge for parking at hospitals.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not collected centrally.

Dead Foetuses (Disposal)

Mr. Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice is given to hospital authorities about the disposal of dead foetuses; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The NHS management executive will be issuing an executive letter to all general managers and chief executives in the NHS about the disposal of dead foetuses. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Some hospitals are known to deal with these matters with understanding and sensitivity. The Government want all hospitals to apply standards of good practice, acceptable both to those personally involved, such as the parents, and to the hospital staff.

The ethical position guiding the Government's thinking is the acknowledgement that there is a respect due to the dead foetus which is based upon its lost potential for development into a fully formed human being. That respect is due no matter what the circumstances of loss —stillbirth, miscarriage or termination of pregnancy. That respect needs to be reflected, as far as is practicable, in the arrangements for the disposal of the dead foetus.

The NHS management executive will be asking hospital managers to satisfy themselves that current arrangements are acceptable. It is important that, as far as possible, account is taken of any personal wishes which have been expressed about disposal. Subject to that, incineration of the dead foetus is the usual method of disposal.

Where no special arrangements are called for, it will, in any event, be a basic requirement that separate containers are used for foetal tissue, and that the containers are delivered to the incinerator separately from any other material requiring incineration and are separately loaded into the incinerator.

Some concern has been expressed about the position of ancillary staff in relation to the handling of foetuses and foetal tissue following the termination of pregnancy. Such staff are not covered by the provisions of section 4 of the Abortion Act 1967—the "conscience clause"—which acknowledges conscientious objection to participation in treatment authorised by the Act. However, the Government believe that hospital managers will wish to ensure that the same principle is applied to any ancillary staff who express a conscientious objection to the handling of foetuses or foetal material. The issues covered in this statement will form the basis of the executive letter to general managers and chief executives. Copies will also go to relevant private hospitals.

National Disability Information Project

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the pilot sites selected for the national disability information project, the project team selected to manage the project, and the membership of the steering group.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Since the announcement of the national disability information project on 25 March 1991, *Official Report*, Volume 188, column *325*, there has been considerable public interest in the project.

During June and July, applications were sought from groups of local disability information providers to become pilot sites for the project, to develop ways of improving information services to people with disabilities, their carers and service providers. Over 600 application packs were sent out, and 101 applications returned. The standard of applications was very high. The following 12 sites have been selected as representative of a range of approaches to developing information services and will take this work forward over the next three years:

Berkshire Disability Information Group
Birmingham Information Federation
Devon Disablement Information and Advice Federation
East Yorkshire Information Service
Gateshead Disability Information Project
Gloucestershire—GUIDE
Kent Information Federation
Manchester Disability Information Service
Norfolk Disability Information Federation
Oldham Disability Alliance
The Southwark Disability Information Project
Walsall Information Federation

Tenders for the role of the project team to manage and co-ordinate the project were invited from nine organisations and the Policy Studies Institute was selected to perform this function.

A steering group, chaired by the Department of Health, has also been set up to provide general oversight and direction to the project. The non-departmental members of the steering group are:

Dr. R. Blunden—Programme Director, Community Living Development Team, King's Fund Centre for Health Services Development.

Mr. J. Evans—Former Chair of the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People.

Mr. P. Ferns—Training Consultant, specialising in equality of opportunity.

Ms. S. Haffenden—Barking and Havering Family Health Services Authority, with project experience with Carers National Association.

Mr. M. Laverman—Director of Social Services, Cleveland.

Mrs. S. Richards—Chairman, College of Occupational Therapists.

Mrs. D. Twitchin—Director of Living Options in Practice.

Dr. T. Vincent, MBE—The Open University, Deputy Director and Head of the Centre for Information Technology in Education.

Medical Radiation

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is his estimate of the amount of damage to patients, and the number affected, that has occurred as a result of excessive medical radiation;

(2) if he will conduct an inquiry into the amount of radiation hospitals are giving their patients by X-rays;

(3) if he will make it his policy to identify hospitals which, according to the National Radiological Protection Board, might be giving their patients too much radiation.

Mr. Dorrell: No current estimates are available; the figures mentioned in the National Radiological Protection Board/Royal College of Radiologists report "Patient Dose Reduction in Diagnostic Radiology", a copy of which is available in the Library, are based on data from 1983, and since then, the more widespread adoption of rare earth screens, where appropriate, will have reduced the amount of medical radiation that patients receive when undergoing diagnostic examinations. The Department of Health is currently funding a project with the National Radiological Protection Board which will provide an up-to-date benchmark which can then be updated on a yearly basis.

In the survey of radiation doses to patients undertaken by the National Radiological Protection Board, the 1983 data from hospitals were anonymised. It would be misleading to publish data on individual hospitals without detailed information on the type of examinations carried out, case mix and so on.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he intends to take any steps to minimise radiation exposure from X-rays;

(2) if there are any constraints on doctors exercising clinical judgment when ordering X-rays for patients; and if any changes are being considered.

Mr. Dorrell: The Ionising Radiation (Protection of Persons undergoing Medical Examination or Treatment) Regulations 1988 lay down that all medical exposures that take place using ionising radiation must be conducted under the responsibility of a person clinically directing, in accordance with accepted clinical practice, and with procedures to ensure a dose as low as reasonably practicable. An inspectorate has been set up within the Department of Health to enforce these regulations.

A range of advice is available to help clinicians fulfil their obligations including the National Radiological Protection Board/Royal College of Radiologists report "Patient Dose Reduction in Diagnostic Radiology", issued in 1990, and the recently issued health service guidelines from the medical devices directorate entitled "Patient Dose Reduction". These guidelines give advice to health authorities on the purchase of equipment for diagnostic X-ray examinations, with particular emphasis on the equipment aspects of minimising radiation exposure from X-rays. Copies of the guidelines are available in the Library.

The Department of Health and the King's Fund have been funding a project to evaluate the Royal College of Radiologists' guidelines on "Making the best use of a Department of Radiology" and the final report is due at the end of January 1992. This project assesses the guidelines necessary to assist clinicians in deciding the appropriateness of X-ray examinations to be ordered for their patients.

Finally at local level radiologists in charge of X-ray departments set out protocols for their departments to determine when an X-ray examination is appropriate following an X-ray request from their clinical colleagues.

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he last discussed safe medical radiation levels with the National Radiological Protection Board; and if any changes in medical practice have been, or are to be, recommended;

(2) what discussions he has had with the Royal College of Radiologists; and if any changes in medical practice have been, or are to be, recommended.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department of Health has an observer at board meetings of the National Radiological Protection Board and is fully aware of the board's views on the establishment of accepted normal values for the dose involved in diagnostic X-ray examinations. Regular liaison meetings are held between the Royal College of Radiologists and the Department of Health. The NRPB and RCR advice on changes in medical practice is set out in the recommendations of their joint report "Patient Dose Reduction in Diagnostic Radiology", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Resource Allocation Working Party

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the new system which he intends to introduce to replace the existing resource allocation working party formula.

Mr. Dorrell: Revenue and capital allocations to health authorities were based on the recommendations of the resource allocation working party until 1989. The White Paper "Working for Patients" (Cm. 555, January 1989) proposed an allocation method based on the size of a health authority's resident population, weighted to reflect that population's health and age distribution, and the relative costs of providing health services for it. The process of phasing in the new allocation system for regional health authorities began in 1990, and for district health authorities in 1991.

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how close the Thames regional health authorities were to achieving their resource allocation working party target in the last financial year.

Mr. Dorrell: The use of resource allocation working party targets was discontinued in 1990, when weighted capitation funding was introduced. Consequently, no RAWP targets for the Thames regional health authorities are available for the last financial year.

Medicines Control Agency

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has had concerning the Medicines Control Agency's proposal to increase licence fees and service charges for the year 1992.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: None to date. The consultation period ends on 17 January 1992.

ENVIRONMENT

Right to Buy

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many dwellings were owned by each district council in Cumbria at the time that the right to buy was introduced; how many are owned at the latest convenient date; and what percentage that is of the original figure.

Sir George Young: The information available from local authorities' annual housing investment programme returns is as follows:

Number of dwellings owned by the authority at 1 April

	1980	*1991*	*1991 as percentage of 1980*
Allerdale	6,742	5,550	82
Barrow-in-Furness	5,240	3,958	76
Carlisle	13,863	9,897	71
Copeland	7,827	5,094	65
Eden	3,077	2,038	66
South Lakeland	6,821	4,749	70

Right to buy was introduced in October 1980. Changes in local authorities' dwelling stocks will reflect gains from new building and other acquisitions, sales other than through the right to buy and other losses.

London Docklands Development Corporation

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what target the London Docklands development corporation has for reducing unemployment in the urban development area and in the three London docklands boroughs.

Mr. Key: The corporation has no targets for reducing unemployment but seeks to reduce local unemployment by improving the skills of local residents. New jobs created by the corporation will benefit those living both in the UDA and in the three London boroughs.

Mr. Leighton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what were the numbers of unemployed people in the urban development area and the three London docklands boroughs when the London Docklands development corporation was set up; and what are they now.

Mr. Key: There are no official figures for the urban development area as a separate area. The corporation estimates that there are about 4,500 unemployed people in the urban development area compared to 3,500 in 1981. However, there has been a fall in the rate of unemployment from 17·8 per cent. to 13·7 per cent. in the same period. Official figures for the three boroughs as a whole are 49,712 and 36,085 respectively.

Dangerous Compounds

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the United Kingdom red list of dangerous compounds.

Mr. Baldry: The United Kingdom's "red list" of dangerous substances comprises the following:

Mercury and its compounds
Cadmium and its compounds
Gamma-Hexachlorocyclohexane
DDT
Pentachlorophenol and its compounds
Hexachlorobenzene
Hexachlorobutadiene
Aldrin
Dieldrin
Endrin
Polychlorinated Biphenyls
Dichlorvos
1, 2-Dichloroethane
Trichlorobenzene
Atrazine
Simazine
Tributyltin compounds
Triphenyltin compounds
Trifluralin
Fenitrothion
Azinphos-methyl
Malathion
Endosulfan

Cryptosporidium

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he intends to take as a result of the findings of the drinking water inspectorate's report on the outbreak of cryptosporidium in North Humberside.

Mr. Trippier: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry), on 20 November 1991 to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West (Mr. Randall), *Official Report*, column *161*.

Reading Borough Council

Sir Gerard Vaughan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has about rents, mortgage repayments and mortgage interest receivable by Reading borough council and about arrears in the collection of these.

Sir George Young: Information about local authority rental income, interest on loans granted and rent arrears is collected on housing revenue account subsidy claim forms submitted by local authorities to the Department. For 1991-92 Reading borough council's claim form shows the following estimates:

income from rents and charges in respect of Housing Revenue Account dwellings, £12,258,726;
interest receivable for 1991-92 on loans granted in respect of former HRA dwellings, £811,667;
arrears of rents owed by current tenants as at end of last collection period for 1991-92, £920,000;
arrears of rents owed by former tenants as at end of the last collection period of 1991-92, £100,000.

The Department does not collect information about mortgage repayments receivable by individual local authorities, arrears of these, nor arrears of mortgage interest.

HIP Allocations (Durham)

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the housing investment programme allocations for the City of Durham in each year since 1979 in actual terms and at 1991 prices.

Mr. Yeo: Since 1981-82, authorities have been able to augment the borrowing power of their HIP allocations by using the prescribed proportion of their capital receipts. The HIP allocations made to Durham city council, and its total capital expenditure on housing, have been as follows:

£ thousands

	HIP allocation		*Gross expenditure*	
	Cash	*1991-92 prices*	*Cash*	*1991-92 prices*
1979-80	2,748	6,389	2,785	6,475
1980-81	2,235	4,391	2,129	4,179
1981-82	1,996	3,576	1,938	3,473
1982-83	2,850	4,767	3,882	6,493
1983-84	2,222	3,552	3,875	6,195
1984-85	2,571	3,914	4,121	6,274
1985-86	2,232	3,220	3,999	5,770
1986-87	1,831	2,558	4,718	6,590
1987-88	1,844	2,443	5,480	7,260
1988-89	1,840	2,274	6,022	7,444
1989-90	2,288	2,656	7,502	8,708
New Capital Finance System[1]				
1990-91	3,578	3,828	5,103	5,460
1991-92	3,087	[2]3,087	6,068	[3]6,068

[1] For 1990-91 and 1991-92, under the new capital finance system, the HIP allocation does not convey borrowing approval directly.

[2] The figure shown here is not final. Additional supplementary credit approvals are expected to be issued in the course of the year.

[3] Local authority's own estimate.

Local Government Finance

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list for each district authority in Northamptonshire the total discounted value of houses and flats for each year since 1980-81.

Mr. Yeo: The total discounted value of dwellings sold by local authorities in Northamptonshire is given in the table. Actual cash receipts in any year will depend on the extent to which sales were financed by loans from the authorities.

Discounted value of all sales[1] (£'000)

	1980-1981	1981-1982	1982-1983	1983-1984	1984-1985	1985-1986	1986-1987	1987-1988	1988-1989	1989-1990	1990-1991
Corby	716	2,837	5,393	4,326	3,711	3,901	3,332	4,998	9,036	n.a.	2,508
Daventry	1,643	2,478	2,067	1,995	1,605	1,929	n.a.	3,740	4,651	3,437	1,425
East Northamptonshire	757	2,585	1,002	1,013	831	1,008	1,720	2,519	4,160	1,404	979
Kettering	721	1,659	1,035	918	1,108	1,809	2,754	3,974	5,300	1,869	923
Northampton	1,831	2,861	2,717	2,135	1,381	n.a.	5,674	8,961	16,530	11,595	n.a.
South Northamptonshire	1,123	2,258	2,628	2,382	1,727	1,379	1,829	n.a.	5,471	2,467	767
Wellingborough	833	2,592	2,055	1,765	1,962	1,303	2,882	3,617	6,311	2,937	2,232

[1]Figures shown are as reported by individual authorities.
n.a. indicates that no data are available.

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list by local authority in Northamptonshire the total value of asset sales, excluding houses and flats, for each year since 1980-81.

Mr. Key: The available information on total receipts from asset sales, less housing receipts, for all local authorities in Northamptonshire is given in the table.

Non-housing receipts from asset sales (£'000s)

	Total Non-Housing Receipts				
Authority	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Northamptonshire	4,143	6,800	28,420	4,767	8,746
Corby	160	1,024	3,464	4,841	2,039
Daventry	382	751	1,295	3,767	3,009
East Northampton	6	626	195	0	0
Kettering	321	9,689	1,905	1,479	409
Northampton	122	175	332	21,725	11,106
South Northampton	1,357	7	9,013	157	2
Wellingborough	3,451	3,668	9,082	6,459	2,275

Source: Departmental returns.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the regulations he intends to publish as a result of the Local Government Finance Bill; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Subject to the enactment of the Bill, we intend to publish orders and regulations covering the following main areas:

- Valuation
- Liability, exemptions, discounts and reductions for disabled people
- Transitional reductions
- Demand notices
- Administration and enforcement
- Tax setting and precepting
- Funds
- Levying and special levying
- Valuation tribunals
- Non-domestic rating.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security would publish regulations on council tax benefit.

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what will be the total level of Government grant per head of adult population for 1992-93 for each of the district councils of Cumbria.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 11 December 1991]:* Under my right hon. Friend's proposals, the totals of revenue support grant, national non-domestic rate and, where appropriate, area protection grant per head of adult population for each of the district councils of Cumbria are as follows:

	£
Allerdale	743
Barrow-in-Furness	769
Carlisle	706
Copeland	748
Eden	714
South Lakeland	683

Climate Change

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if his Department will include information provided by the George Marshall Institute in its preparation for the United Nations conference on environment and development.

Mr. Baldry: The reports of the George C Marshall Institute are being considered, along with all other recent relevant information, by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in preparing a supplementary science assessment report for the intergovernmental negotiating committee on a climate convention. This information will support the INC in preparing for the United Nations conference on environment and development. My Department will continue to look to IPCC as the source of widely reviewed information on the science of climate change.

CITES

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on whether the EC CITES committee ban on imports of various C2 species is being observed in other EC nations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: None. The implementation of Community decisions in other member states is a matter for the European Commission to pursue. If we received evidence that decisions were not being implemented, we would bring this to the attention of the Commission.

Local Government Expenditure (Northamptonshire)

Mr. William Powell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out in tabular form the expenditure of *(a)* Northamptonshire county council, *(b)* Corby district council and *(c)* East Northants district council in 1978-79 and 1991-92 in (i) cash terms and (ii) constant price terms.

Mr. Key: The available information is as follows:

	Total expenditure outturn 1980-81		*Net revenue expenditure budget estimate 1991-92*
	Cash £ million	*1991-92 prices £ million*	*£ million*
Northamptonshire CC	139·7	274·4	347·9
Corby DC	3·1	6·1	5·4
East Northants DC	1·4	2·7	2·9

Note: 1980-81 is the earliest year for which expenditure figures are available. Although similar total Expenditure and Net Revenue Expenditure are not directly comparable as they derive from two different financial systems.

Waste Disposal

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many successful prosecutions have been made since 1974 for breaches of waste disposal licences not directly connected with the deposit or treatment of waste; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: By the end of 1989, there had been a total of 897 prosecutions under sections 3 and 6 of the Control of Pollution Act 1974 which may involve breach of a waste disposal licence. More detailed information about the precise nature of the offences is not held centrally.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if all waste disposal sites in the United Kingdom currently meet both the 1975 EC waste directive and 1978 EC toxic and dangerous waste directive; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: These directives require, inter alia, site-specific permits for the disposal of controlled waste and consignment notes for the movement of dangerous or difficult waste. They have been implemented in Great Britain by the Control of Pollution Act 1974, the Control of Pollution (Special Waste) Regulations 1980, the Environmental Protection Act 1990, the Town and Country Planning (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations 1988, the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Regulations 1988, the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and the Town and Country Planning Act (Scotland) 1972.

In Northern Ireland, they have been implemented by the Pollution Control and Local Government (Northern Ireland) Order 1978, the Pollution Control (Special Waste) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1981, the Planning (Assessment of Environmental Effects) Regulations (NI) 1989 and the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991.

Business Rates

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make it his policy to ensure that landlords of houses in multiple occupation do not become liable to pay business rates on the property unless a legitimate business is run from the property.

Mr. Key: Rates are a tax on the occupation of non-domestic property and, in general, it is the occupier who is liable, not the owner or landlord. Living accommodation, whether it is part of a house in multiple occupation or not, is not rateable unless its use for non-domestic purposes is such that it would preclude the domestic use of all or part of it. In the first instance it is for the Inland Revenue valuation office to decide whether a property should be included in non-domestic rating lists.

Radiation

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will calculate the changes made in the last five years in the officially estimated maximum amount of radiation which may be safely received from routine discharges from the nuclear power industry.

Mr. Baldry: The International Commission on Radiological Protection recommendation of 1977, as endorsed by the National Radiological Protection Board, advised that the average effective dose equivalent from all sources, excluding natural background radiation and medical procedures, to representative members of a critical group should not exceed 1 millisievert (mSv) in any one year. The National Radiological Protection Board in 1987 gave interim guidance that for exposure of the public arising from a single site, the effective dose equivalent should not exceed 0·5 mSv per year. The United Kingdom Government had, as stated in the White Paper Cmnd 9852 (1986), already adopted a 0·5 mSv per year level as a target in connection with authorised discharge limits. The Government are considering the consultative document "NRPB-M321, Board advise following publication of the 1990 recommendations of ICRP", issued today by the National Radiological Protection Board which recommends a reduction to 0·3 mSv.

Sports Clubs (Rate Relief)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the cost in 1990-91 of the 75 per cent. offset from the national non-domestic pool consequent to the granting of discretionary rate relief to voluntary sports clubs, indicated in his survey into charging authorities' use of discretionary rate relief under section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

Mr. Key: This information is not available.

Green Alliance

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he received a copy of the report, "Greening Government: The Failure of the Departmental Annual Reports to Reflect Integrated Policy Making", prepared by the Green Alliance; and if he has made any public response to its conclusions.

Mr. Trippier: I received a copy under cover of a letter from the Green Alliance dated 25 November. *The Times* published my reply to its coverage of the report on 27 November. Officials from a number of Departments, including my own, are meeting the Green Alliance on 13 December to discuss the report's recommendations.

Radioactive Substances

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the outcome of his recent review of exemption orders in so far as they affect radioactive substances.

Mr. Baldry: Exemption orders made under the Radioactive Substances Act 1960 are kept under regular review. New or amending orders are introduced when there is a justifiable case for doing so.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on how the application of duty of care waste management responsibilities affect radioactive waste management for small users of radioactive materials; and what consultations have been held with Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution over this matter during the past six months.

Mr. Baldry: The law relating to the duty of care as concerns waste which is set out in section 34 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 does not apply to radioactive waste. The keeping, use, accumulation and disposal of radioactive material and waste is regulated by the chief inspector of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution by means of certificates of registration and authorisation issued under the Radioactive Substances Act 1960. HMIP is part of my Department, and staff consult each other as necessary.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the criteria adopted for setting radioactive distance limits for radioactive waste repositories.

Mr. Baldry: The broad criteria on which the authorisation of radioactive waste repositories under the Radioactive Substances Act 1960 will be based are set out in a publication issued by the United Kingdom authorising Departments in 1984 entitled "Disposal Facilities on Land for Low and Intermediate Level Radioactive Wastes: Principles for the Protection of the Human Environment". A copy is in the Library.

Detailed matters relating to the radiological impact of specific facilities will depend on the circumstances of the individual applications received.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to establish a body to oversee the integrated management and disposal of high-level, heat-generating, radioactive waste along the lines of the role undertaken by United Kingdom Nirex Ltd. for other levels of radioactive waste.

Mr. Baldry: There are no such plans. High-level or heat-generating radioactive waste will be stored for a period of at least 50 years to allow the heat and radioactivity to diminish before a decision is taken on its disposal.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response he has made to the 12th report of the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee.

Mr. Baldry: I refer the hon. Member to the Department of the Environment news release dated 15 November 1991 which set out the response of my hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside to the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee's 12th annual report. Copies of the news release are in the Library.

Council Tax

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish his estimates of the likely council tax bill for band H properties in each local authority area.

Mr. Portillo: I have made no estimate of likely council tax bills. Illustrative figures showing the levels of council tax bills consistent with 1991-92 local authority budgets were published on 23 April 1991. The bill for a band H property will be three times that for a band A property.

Government Land

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the present arrangements for offering back to former owners Government land earmarked for disposal.

Sir George Young: The arrangements have recently been reviewed in the light of developments since the present "Crichel Down" rules were adopted in December 1981. Our conclusion is that the broad principles should be maintained, but certain limited changes in their application would now be appropriate. I have today issued a consultation paper setting out our detailed proposals for change.

Development Rights

Mr. Sumberg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he will announce the outcome of the consultation on permitted development rights (i) for fish farming and (ii) for smaller agricultural holdings.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Wales issued consultation papers inviting views on possible changes to planning controls over fish farming and on the implementation of new planning controls over agricultural and forestry buildings on 22 July and 24 September. We are grateful to the many bodies and individuals who responded. Lists of their submissions are being placed in the Library of the House, where copies will be available on request.

The fish farming consultation paper, which was directed at fish farming inland and excluded marine fish farming, stated that the Government's aim is to align planning controls over fish farms as closely as possible with planning controls over other forms of agriculture. It proposed to: (i) withdraw all permitted development rights for fish farming on agricultural units of less than 5 hectares, and on parcels of agricultural land of less than 1 hectare on larger units; (ii) withdraw the right of registered fish farm businesses to remove minerals from smaller sites;

and (iii) make the new permitted development rights already announced for floating fish tanks (cages) outside the national parks subject to the prior notification scheme being introduced for farm buildings.

The Government have decided to implement these changes with one modification, and amendments to the General Development Order have been laid before Parliament today. Certain limited rights will be retained in connection with fish farming on smaller units, in line with our proposals for smaller agricultural holdings. At the same time, section 14 of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 will also be brought into effect on 2 January 1992 extending planning controls over fish tanks (cages) in inland waters; and the GDO will be changed to implement decisions already announced to withdraw permitted development rights for fish farm excavations and engineering operations in national parks, introduce permitted development rights for fish tanks (cages) in inland waters outside national parks, and require local planning authorities to consult the National Rivers Authority when dealing with planning applications for fish farms.

The consultation paper also made proposals on the environmental assessment of fish farms. These do not involve the GDO, and we will be announcing our decisions later.

The 24 September consultation paper explained that, in drawing up guidance on the new planning controls for larger agricultural holdings announced in June, the Government had formed the view that there was a strong case for small farming enterprises to have limited permitted development rights, similar to those for other industry but more restricted to avoid significant environmental problems. The Government have decided to introduce such rights by amending the GDO from the date that general agricultural permitted development rights are withdrawn from such holdings. The ability of local authorities to control the siting and design of alterations and extensions and private roads in national parks will, however, continue.

The same GDO amendment order will expand discretionary controls over agricultural excavations and farm waste deposits which individually or collectively exceed 0·5 hectares on one site. All these changes to planning control come into operation on 2 January 1992.

The second consultation paper also invited comments on draft guidance for local planning authorities on agricultural buildings and roads constructed under permitted development rights. The final guidance will be issued in a revised version of planning policy guidance note 7 early next year.

The wide-ranging new planning controls over agricultural and forestry development announced in June and the decisions announced today are due to take effect on 2 January 1992. This new regime will produce substantial environmental benefits, while ensuring that the rural economy can continue to prosper. I confirm our intention to monitor the operation of the new system and review the position in three years' time.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Africa

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the African countries which are multi-party democracies.

Mrs. Lynda Chalker: At present, the following African countries are multi-party democracies: Benin, Botswana, Cape Verde, Cote D'Ivoire, Gambia, Mauritius, Namibia, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Many other African countries are currently in the process of introducing multi-party democracies. Her Majesty's Government are actively encouraging this process and have announced a number of measures to assist it.

Southern Lebanon

Mr. Adley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to secure the implementation of United Nations resolution No. 425 regarding the illegal occupation of southern Lebanon by the Israeli army.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We continue to make clear our view that the key to security in southern Lebanon is the implementation of SCR 425, the effective deployment of the Lebanese army and the withdrawal of all foreign forces in accordance with the Taif accord. We have supported recent United Nations moves to decrease tension in the area.

Arms Control

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the current status of *(a)* the 1963 partial test ban treaty, *(b)* the 1987 intermediate nuclear forces treaty of Washington, *(c)* the 1991 strategic arms reduction treaty and *(d)* the 1968 nuclear non-proliferation treaty following the declaration of an independent commonwealth of slavic states on 8 December by Ukraine, Russia and Byelorussia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The current status of these treaties is unchanged. We welcome recent statements by the Presidents of Ukraine, Russia and Belarus that they will honour the international treaty obligations of the Soviet Union. We are making it clear directly to the authorities concerned that we attach the highest importance to the effective implementation of these obligations.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Her Majesty's Government *(a)* signed and *(b)* ratified the conventional forces in Europe treaty; what implications the declaration on 8 December of the establishment of a commonwealth of independent slavic states has for this treaty; and if he has any plans to meet the leadership of the Ukrainian, Russian and Byelorussian republics to evaluate the future of the CFE treaty.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The United Kingdom signed the treaty on conventional armed forces in Europe on 19 November 1990 and ratified it on 19 November 1991. We are still studying the implications for the treaty of the declaration made on 8 December by Russia, the Ukraine

and Byelorussia, and are consulting our allies and the other treaty signatories. The political director in the Foreign Office will discuss this issue when he visits the three republics on 12-15 December. It remains our intention that the CFE treaty should be fully implemented throughout the area in respect of which the Soviet Union undertook the obligations, except the Baltic states.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the nature of the informal consultations that have started on the agenda for arms control, following the planned Helsinki review conference; who has been consulted; and what subjects have been discussed in the course of these consultations.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: At the CSCE Council of Ministers in Berlin on 19-20 June, Ministers requested their representatives in Vienna to begin informal preparatory consultations to prepare for a new process of arms control talks which would begin after the Helsinki follow-up meeting in March-July next year. These consultations began in September, and are open to all CSCE participants. Discussions have so far focused on the structure of a new forum bringing together arms control talks, a security dialogue, and the existing conflict prevention centre; and on issues that might be the subject of negotiation after the Helsinki meeting.

Gibraltar

Dr. Marek: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will seek direct representation for Gibraltar at the European Parliament.

Mr. Garel-Jones: No. I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs gave him on 10 December at column 389.

Cuba

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the United Kingdom ambassador to the United Nations voted on the agenda item on the Cuba blockade in the 46th session of the United Nations General Assembly; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: No vote was taken on the draft Cuban resolution. Consideration of the agenda item has been deferred until the 47th session of the General Assembly in 1992.

Iraq

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Her Majesty's Government received the report of the seventh International Atomic Energy Agency on-site inspection in Iraq, pursuant to United Nations Security Council resolution 687 (1991), covering the period 11 to 22 October 1991.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The IAEA report of the seventh nuclear inspection in Iraq was received on 14 November 1991, when it was published as Security Council document 23215. A copy is available in the House of Commons Library.

Arms Transfers

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will list the proposed criteria that will determine the inclusion of military equipment on the proposed United Nations register of arms transfers.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: On 9 December, the United Nations General Assembly voted by an overwhelming majority to establish at the United Nations a universal and non-discriminatory register of conventional arms transfers. The register will be established in January 1992 and will cover international transfers of seven broad categories of major weapons systems. The categories are: battle tanks, armoured combat vehicles, large calibre artillery systems, combat aircraft, attack helicopters, warships and missiles or missile systems.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Business Transactions (Liechtenstein and Switzerland)

Mr. David Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list all the reports by his Department following investigation into alleged wrongdoing or fraud which have referred to business transactions in *(a)* Liechtenstein or *(b)* Switzerland and its cantons.

Mr. Lilley: The information requested is not held centrally. However, all published inspectors' reports where the inspectors were appointed since 1979 have been reviewed and those listed in the table have been identified as containing references to business transactions in Liechtenstein or Switzerland:

Company	
Saint Piran Limited (interim report)	Switzerland
(final report)	Liechtenstein
House of Fraser plc (interim report)	Switzerland
Westminster Property Group plc	Switzerland
Equity & General plc	Both
Summer International plc	Switzerland
Brehmer plc	Switzerland
House of Fraser Holdings plc	Both
Alexander Howden Holdings plc	Both
Minet Holdings plc/WMD Underwriting Agencies Limited	
(interim report)	Switzerland
(final report)	Both

For further information, I refer my hon. Friend to the reports themselves, copies of which are available in the Library.

Whitbread (Isle of Wight)

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received about Whitbread's tenancies on the Isle of Wight.

Mr. Redwood: We have received a number of representations from my hon. Friend about the way Whitbread is treating its tenants on the Isle of Wight.

IMRO

Ms. Mowlam: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to review the working of the Financial Services Act 1986 in relation to the

responsibilities of the Investment Management Regulatory Organisation to regulate investment fund managers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The regulatory responsibilities of IMRO are a matter for the Securities and Investments Board in the first instance.

Iraq

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins), *Official Report*, 5 November, columns *63-66*, whether any of the beryllium or bismuth exports to which he refers were made to Iraq.

Mr. Sainsbury: The available information is given in the table.

United Kingdom Exports to Iraq

	Beryllium[1]		*Bismuth*[2]	
	Volume kg	*Value £'000*	*Volume kg*	*Value £'000*
1980	0	0	0	0
1981	0	0	75	0·9
1982	0	0	130	0·3
1983	0	0	250	1·6
1984	0	0	0	0
1985	0	0	4	1·8
1986	0	0	(R)	(R)
1987	0	0	0	0
1988	0	0	17	0·7
1989	0	0	0	0

[1] As defined by codes 689·91 and 699·95 of the Standard International Trade Classification (Revision 3) for 1988 onwards, and corresponding headings for earlier years.

[2] As defined by code 689·92 of SITC (R3) for 1988 onwards and corresponding headings for earlier years.

(R) Denotes information that is not available due to commercial confidentiality.

Source: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

GATT

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to urge the European Community in the GATT Uruguay round of trade negotiations to support strict linkage between the multi-fibre arrangement and strengthened GATT rules and disciplines.

Mr. Sainsbury: It is part of the European Community's mandate governing the Uruguay round textiles negotiations that this sector should be integrated into GATT on the basis of strengthened rules and disciplines. The mandate continues to be supported by the Government, the Commission and other member states.

Extortionate Credit Bargains

Mr. Devlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will be proposing any amendments to sections 137 to 140 of the Consumer Credit Act 1974 dealing with extortionate credit bargains.

Mr. Leigh: I am grateful to the Director General of Fair Trading, Sir Gordon Borrie, for his recent and valuable report on the operation of the present provisions of the Consumer Credit Act on extortionate credit bargains. I have consulted widely on the basis of the report's findings and recommendations.

While I am reassured to learn from the report that problems of extortionate credit arise only in a minority of cases mainly on the margins of the market, I have concluded that the present provisions of the Act are inadequate. Amending legislation is necessary and should be introduced when parliamentary time permits making a number of important changes to sections 137 to 140 of the Act, broadly on the lines recommended in the director general's report.

I agree with the director general that the concept of the "extortionate credit bargain" currently in the Act should be replaced by that of the "unjust credit transaction".

I propose that one test of whether a credit transaction is unjust should be that it involved payments that were "grossly excessive". In this respect, I differ from the recommendation of the director general, who recommended that the test should be that the payments were "excessive". In my view, the latter could result in too many cases coming to court where the terms were only slightly more onerous than usual. A credit transaction would also be unjust if it involved business activity which was deceitful or oppressive or otherwise unfair and improper, whether unlawful or not.

I propose that section 138 of the Act should be amended to allow the Secretary of State to make regulations, following consultations with the director general, to set out the detailed factors that the court should take into account in determining whether a credit transaction was unjust. The director general's report made a number of detailed recommendations as to the factors that might be prescribed in the Act. I consider it more appropriate in the interests of maintaining flexibility for dealing with future developments to deal with such matters in regulations.

I propose that the courts should be required to notify the director general of the outcome of any case where they have considered whether a credit transaction was just or unjust. In addition, the Act should be amended to allow, but not require, a court in both defended and undefended cases to re-open of its own motion an unjust credit transaction.

I propose that the director general should have a power to initiate proceedings for a declaration by a court that a particular credit transaction or any particular aspect of it should be deemed to be unjust. Such a power should also be available to local trading standards officers but only with the permission of the director general. In such cases I consider the burden of proof should be on the director general or trading standards officer rather than on the creditor.

Finally, I agree with the director general that the penalties which can be imposed on summary conviction for unlicensed—that is, illegal—provision of credit should be increased. At present, magistrates courts can impose only a fine up to the statutory maximum of £2,000. I propose that they should in future also be empowered to impose a custodial sentence not exceeding six months' imprisonment. This would follow the precedents of the Financial Services Act 1986 and the Insurance Companies Act 1982.

SCOTLAND

Lead Plumbing

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what percentage of private sector dwellings in Tweeddale still have lead plumbing; what is the figure recorded nationally; and if he intends to take any additional measures to reduce the percentage.

Mr. Lang: This information was provideed in the Scottish Office statistical bulletin HSG/1991/8, published in November. Copies of the bulletin, which was sent to all Members representing Scottish constituencies, are available in the House Library.

We have announced that the Government intend to increase to 90 per cent. the maximum rate of repairs grant for the replacement of lead plumbing. Local authorities will be expected to award grant in proportion to need. This will enable the most efficient use of resources and provide considerable assistance for those on low incomes.

Crafts Industry

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what was the total number of people employed by the crafts industry in Scotland as a whole and by Scottish region.

Mr. Allan Stewart: There is no information available from official sources in the form requested.

Radiation, Holy Loch

Mrs. Ray Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement concerning the increase in recorded levels of radiation detected on 14 August 1991 at the Holy Loch by Dunoon.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I understand that a radiation monitor operated by the Cowal monitoring group registered two higher than normal readings among the 113 recorded on that day. These readings occurred within a period of half an hour, the highest being 40 per cent. above the normal background. I can assure the hon. Member that local transient increases of this kind are not of radiological significance.

Voluntary Sector

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people were employed by the voluntary sector in Scotland in each year since 1970.

Mr. Allan Stewart: Information is not available in the form requested.

Shipping Subsidies

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals he has for shipping subsidies for sea transport services in Scotland in 1992-93; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lang: Subject to parliamentary approval of the estimates, I propose to make available in 1992-93 total subsidy provision of £13·6 million, compared with £12·9 million in 1991-92. The deficit subsidy for Caledonian MacBrayne Ltd. will be £6·1 million. For services to Orkney and Shetland, tariff rebate subsidies of up to £5·1 million will be available for P and O and £1·2 million for Orkney and Shetland Lines. Up to £1·2 million will be available for other coastal shippers serving the Western Isles.

The total of subsidies available will increase support in real terms. This reflects the Government's continuing commitment to assisting the essential sea transport services to the Western and Northern Isles.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Wandsworth Prison

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much time off in lieu hours are at present owed to prison officers serving at Wandsworth prison as of 1 December.

Mrs. Rumbold: On 1 December 6,442 hours were owed to prison officers at Wandsworth.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of prison officers serving at Wandsworth prison in 1990; what was the comparable figure in 1980; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: At the end of 1990, 481 prison officer staff were employed at Wandsworth prison compared with 331 at the end of 1980.

Confiscation Orders

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those offences following which a confiscation order may be made under the terms of section 71 and schedule 4 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988.

Mr. John Patten: Part VI of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 applies to all indictable offences other than drug trafficking offences, and to certain summary offences listed in schedule 4 to the Act, as amended by the Criminal Justice Act 1988 (Confiscation Orders) Order 1990 (SI 1990 No. 1570).

Indictable offences are listed in appendix 3 to the Criminal Statistics England and Wales 1989, a copy of which is in the Library.

Bail Hostels

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the categories of offenders who are excluded from open bail hostels.

Mr. John Patten: The Approved Probation Hostel and Home and Bail Hostel Rules 1976 prohibit the admission to approved hostels, including bail hostels, of any person suffering from severe subnormality or psychopathic disorder. In addition, the prior consent of the Secretary of State is required before anyone can be admitted to a hostel who is outside the limits of age approved for that hostel.

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the proportion of men bailed to hostels who are unemployed.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the role and purpose of bail hostels.

Mr. John Patten: Approved bail hostels provide supervised accommodation in the community for defendants who have been remanded on bail. Their purpose is to reduce unnecessary remands in custody under the terms of the Bail Act 1976.

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many bail hostels closed in each year since 1988-89; and if he will give the reasons in each case.

Mr. John Patten: No bail hostels have closed since 1988-89.

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will publish up-to-date statistics of re-offence by residents in bail hostels;

(2) if he will list all the categories of offence of defendants who were accommodated in bail hostels and who were subsequently convicted of those offences in each of the past five years.

Mr. John Patten: This information is not available.

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make provision of grant aid to local probation committees for building bail hostels conditional on the granting of planning permission by the appropriate authority.

Mr. John Patten: All approvals for expenditure on the provision of bail hostels are conditional on any relevant planning permission being obtained.

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will institute a system for recording, in each bail hostel area, the level of crime associated with bailees, including specifically *(a)* all serious crime, *(b)* sexual offences and *(c)* theft and burglary.

Mr. John Patten: Crime is not recorded according to bail hostel area and there are no plans to do so. Work is in hand to analyse the significance of offending on bail, and the results will be announced as soon as is practicable.

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many custodial sentences have effectively been served at bail hostels because of delays in the criminal justice system.

Mr. John Patten: Time spent on bail awaiting trial or sentence does not count towards a subsequent custodial sentence.

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many bail hostels are of the core and cluster type.

Mr. John Patten: On 1 December 1991, there were 15 bail hostels of the core and cluster type.

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy on the siting of new bail hostels; what guidance has been issued to local probation committees on the procedures to be followed in respect of public consultation in selecting sites; and if he will publish the guidance.

Mr. John Patten: The role of the Home Office in the setting up of individual bail hostels is confined to approving a proposal for funding. It is for local probation committees to decide the location of a bail hostel, obtain the appropriate planning consents and negotiate the purchase.

The Home Office requires local probation committees, when deciding on a location, to assess the reactions of local residents and elected representatives to their proposals, but no specific guidance has been issued on how this should be done.

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is *(a)* the amount of public expenditure and *(b)* the number of prison places saved per year as a result of the expansion programme for the bail hostel scheme since 1988.

Mr. John Patten: Since 1988 central Government capital expenditure of approximately £9·9 million has been provided for the bail hostel expansion programme, but not all the bed spaces funded have yet come on stream. Estimates of the number of prison places saved at the year end based on 90 per cent. occupancy of available hostel places are:

	Number
1988-89	32
1989-90	161
1990-91	383
1991-92	662

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans the Home Office has for increasing the number of remand places available.

Mrs. Rumbold: The prison building programme will deliver a further 4,500 places by the end of 1992. The majority of these are local prisons or remand centres to hold remand and newly sentenced prisoners.

Custody Costs

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the additional cost of custodial sentences compared with non-custodial sentences.

Mr. John Patten: In the year 1990-91 the average annual cost of prison custody was £20,070. It was £1,070 for a probation order and £920 for a community service order. Offenders should be punished according to the seriousness of their offences. We believe that less serious offenders can be punished adequately in the community under demanding supervision which can protect the public and help to reduce reoffending.

Bail (Private Placements)

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information he has on the success rate of probation committees who were allowed to place those on bail into private homes.

Mr. John Patten: The information requested is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Civilianisation

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of police officers who would be returned to operational duties if the West Yorkshire police authority adopted the best practice on civilianisation.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Of the 2,706 "key posts" in West Yorkshire police, 1,838—or 68 per cent.—have been civilianised. A number of forces have achieved rates at 80 per cent. or more. Although there is not necessarily an exact correlation between the number of posts civilianised and the number of officers thereby released for operational duties, it is reasonable to assume that if West Yorkshire were to civilianise 80 per cent. of "key posts", some 300 further officers could be released for operational duties.

Mr. Batiste: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list police authorities in the order of the extent to which they have implemented the policy of civilianisation.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The following table shows the proportion of "key posts"—that is, those regarded by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary as suitable for civilianisation—which had been civilianised by each provincial force up to the end of 1990. Comparative information is not available for the Metropolitan police.

Force	*Percentage of "Key Posts" civilianised*
Cheshire	64·8
Merseyside	65·4
Greater Manchester	66·3
Northumbria	67·0
Hertfordshire	67·3
Hampshire	67·5
West Yorkshire	67·9
Gwent	68·7
City of London	69·4
South Yorkshire	69·6
Gloucestershire	69·7
Lancashire	69·8
Avon and Somerset	70·5
Northamptonshire	72·2
Staffordshire	72·2
Norfolk	72·3
North Yorkshire	72·3
Essex	72·5
Derbyshire	72·6
Bedfordshire	73·0
West Midlands	73·1
Nottinghamshire	73·3
Durham	73·4
Thames Valley	73·7
Warwickshire	74·1
Humberside	74·1
Cleveland	74·3
Sussex	75·3
South Wales	75·5
Devon and Cornwall	75·8
Dorset	75·8
Lincolnshire	76·1
Leicestershire	76·5
Suffolk	76·8
Cambridgeshire	78·6
Kent	78·8
Wiltshire	79·0
Cumbria	80·2
Dyfed Powys	81·1
West Mercia	81·6
North Wales	84·2
Surrey	86·7
Average	72·1

Knives

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases concerning the sale and possession of knives have been brought by the Crown prosecution service in each of the last two years; and what assessment he has made of the effect of local amnesties on the number of such prosecutions.

Mr. John Patten: Information on the number of prosecutions concerning the illegal sale and possession of knives is given in the table.

Number of prosecutions for offences of possession and sales of knives 1988 and 1989—England and Wales

Offence	*Statute*	*1988*	*1989*
Having an article with a blade or point in a public place	Criminal Justice Act 1988 Section 139	150	2,018
Manufacture, importation and sale of certain offensive weapons	Restriction of Offensive Weapons Act 1959 Section 1, and Criminal Justice Act 1988 Section 141	2	17

Police Manpower

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list for each police force in England and Wales the figures for *(a)* total population, *(b)* rural population and *(c)* urban population used by the recent review of police manpower needs;

(2) if he will give the specific figure of the deprivation index which was calculated *(a)* for the South Wales police area, *(b)* for other police authority areas in Wales and *(c)* for police authority areas in England as part of his Department's recent review of police manpower;

(3) if he will list the specific facts on degree of overcrowding which were taken into account *(a)* in the South Wales police area as a whole and *(b)* in each district within the South Wales police area in the course of the recent review of police manpower needs;

(4) if he will list the specific cities, towns, districts and localities in the South Wales police area which have been regarded as urban in calculating the number of officers needed by the South Wales constabulary as part of his Department's recent review of police manpower;

(5) if he will list the specific towns, districts, villages and localities in the South Wales police area which have been regarded as rural in calculating the number of officers needed by the South Wales constabulary as part of his Department's recent review of police manpower.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the results of the 1986 inter-censual survey *(a)* in South Glamorgan and *(b)* other areas were used to supplement the results of the 1981 census in determining the factors considered in calculating the number of officers needed by the South Wales constabulary as part of his Department's recent review of police manpower.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys that there were no national inter-censual surveys in 1986.

Foreign Lottery Tickets

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes the Government are considering to the policy of prohibiting the importation, promotion and sale of foreign lottery tickets, in connection with the introduction of the single market.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We have no plans at present to amend the policy or the law in relation to the importation, promotion and sale of foreign lottery material.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps Her Majesty's Government are taking to prevent the illegal importation of foreign lottery tickets into Britain.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Where appropriate, with the Gaming Board for Great Britain, Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, a number of measures are taken to prevent or curtail the promotion of foreign lotteries in the United Kingdom.

Representations are, if necessary, made to the authorities in the country concerned. Of European Community countries, such representations have been made to the Federal Republic of Germany. Representations have also been made to the authorities in Austria and Vanuatu, as a result of which those countries' national lotteries have undertaken to cease their promotional activities in this country, and to the authorities in British Columbia, Canada and New South Wales, Australia.

If advertisements for foreign lotteries appear in magazines published here, the provisions of our law are drawn to the attention of the publishers who have previously undertaken not to publish such advertisements again. In addition, Her Majesty's Customs and Excise has seized substantial quantities of promotional letters intended to be posted individually here but imported in bulk.

Gambling

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any proposals to include the gambling industry within the terms of the European single market after 1992.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. The European Commission is currently examining the gambling sector in the context of the single market, but has not so far produced any formal proposals.

Au Pairs

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many EC member states have a specific definition of au pair; and in how many cases this definition is confined to women.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We do not have this information.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many au pairs in the United Kingdom for each of the last five years have entered from *(a)* each other EC member state, *(b)* other Commonwealth countries and *(c)* the rest of the world.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Entry to the United Kingdom as an au pair is restricted to unmarried girls and women aged between 17 and 27 who are nationals of the following countries: the member states of the European Community, Andorra, Austria, Cyprus, the Faeroes, Finland, Greenland, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Malta, Monaco, Norway, San Marino, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and Yugoslavia; and from 1 January 1992 Czechoslovakia and Hungary. We do not keep records of the entry of EC nationals. Information relating to other nationalities is contained in the annual publication "Control of Immigration: Statistics, United Kingdom," copies of which are in the Library.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evidence he has of abuse of au pair arrangements by women seeking to settle in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We are not aware of significant abuse of these arrangements.

Mr. Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his policy on extending the definition of au pair to include men.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I have no plans to extend the au pair scheme to men.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from local authorities about funding under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966.

Mrs. Rumbold: We received a number of representations from local authorities about the proposals for the more effective administration of section 11 grant, but I regret that no central record is maintained of these. A number of these representations are concerned with the likely scale of funding to be allowed and with the timing of the announcement of that allocation.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he proposes to announce the allocation to local authorities of section 11 funding under the Local Government Act 1966.

Mrs. Rumbold: Shortly.

Mr. Karamjit Singh Chahal

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will release Mr. Karamjit Singh Chahal from Bedford prison; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Mr. Chahal was detained following the decision to deport him in August 1990 for reasons of national security and for other reasons of a political nature, namely the fight against international terrorism. I am reviewing Mr. Chahal's application for asylum in accordance with the recent judgment of the High Court on his application for judicial review of my decision. In the meantime I am satisfied that Mr. Chahal should remain in detention.

Index of Prostitutes

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the criteria for inclusion on the central index of prostitutes; how often each entry is reviewed; and what are the criteria for the removal of names from the index.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand from the Commissioner that the central index of prostitutes records all persons in the Metropolitan police district who have been cautioned for loitering or soliciting for purposes of prostitution, or who have been charged with or convicted of these offences. Records of cautions are deleted after 12 months; records of charges are retained until the notification of the court disposal is received; and information relating to outstanding warrants is kept pending execution or cancellation. Records of conviction are retained indefinitely.

Belmarsh Prison

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reply to the letters sent to him and to his Minister of State from the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland dated 9 July, 31 July, 29 August and 9 October about Belmarsh prison.

Mrs. Rumbold: A reply to the hon. Gentleman's letters of 9 July, 31 July, 29 August and 9 October about Belmarsh prison was sent on 9 December. I regret the delay.

National Lottery

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make an estimate of the employment implications, including those for existing jobs, of the introduction of a national lottery.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The employment implications of a national lottery cannot be assessed with any accuracy at this stage. It is one of the matters included in the Government's further consideration of the arguments for and against allowing one or more privately run lotteries on a national scale.

Immigration (Domestic Workers)

Sir Alan Glyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are taken to ensure that employers will provide adequate conditions, food and sleeping accommodation when they apply for visas for immigrants to work in private houses in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Under exceptional arrangements outside the immigration rules, a domestic servant may be admitted to continue to work for an employer here, but only if the domestic servant has worked abroad for the employer for a substantial period. Before an entry clearance is granted, the employer must accept responsibility for the maintenance and accommodation of the domestic worker. While in the United Kingdom domestic workers are entitled to the normal protection of our law, as is made clear in a leaflet given to each domestic worker who is granted an entry clearance abroad or an extension of stay in the United Kingdom.

Drugs Prevention Initiative

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made with the Government's drugs prevention initiative.

Mr. Kenneth Baker: Sixteen local drugs prevention teams are now in action, and the remaining four are in the process of being recruited and appointed. A full progress report on the initiative has been published today, and a copy has been placed in the Library.

Young Offenders

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is *(a)* the average and *(b)* the maximum number of hours that young people being held at Feltham are kept in solitary confinement in their cells;

(2) if he will state the average number of hours per day that young offenders are held alone in cells in Feltham young offenders institution.

Mrs. Rumbold *[holding answers 26 November 1991 and 2 December 1991]:* Solitary confinement is not a term used in the prison service, though there will be times when, for a variety of reasons, young people will be alone in their cells.

It is not possible to give an average figure for the amount of time spent by young people alone in their cells in Feltham young offenders institution. Generally, however, all prisoners who are accommodated in single cells will be alone between 9 in the evening and 8 the following morning. During the day, young prisoners on the convicted side of the establishment will be out of their cells for about seven to eight hours each day during the week and for about five to six hours during the weekend, on top of which they will receive any visits to which they are entitled. On the unconvicted side of the establishment, young prisoners will spend five to six hours out of their cells, plus any visits they are allowed to receive.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what plans he has to ensure that the results of students with special educational needs in further education in *(a)* public examinations and *(b)* non-examined courses are recorded and publicised in a way which reflects their achievements positively.

Mr. Eggar: Under the Further and Higher Education Bill currently before Parliament, the Secretary of State will have the power to make regulations requiring the governing body of any institution within the further education sector to publish details about the educational achievements of their students, including those with special educational needs.

Schools Reorganisation, Plymouth

Mr. Fatchett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he is in a position to make a decision on the proposed schools reorganisation in Plymouth, as submitted by Devon local education authority; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: The proposals under sections 12 and 13 of the Education Act 1980 to which the hon. Member refers were published on 5 July and are currently before the Secretary of State. My right hon. Friend will reach a decision as soon as possible, consistent with a full and careful consideration of the proposals.

Sport Review

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make it his policy to publish his ministerial review of sport before the end of the Year of Sport.

Mr. Atkins: It will be published as soon as it is ready.

St. Anne's Primary School, Birkenhead

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he will approve the capital plans for St. Anne's primary school, Rock Ferry, Birkenhead, which are now lodged with his Department.

Mr. Fallon: I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 5 November 1991 at col. *57*.

TRANSPORT

Marchioness Disaster

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what representations he has received concerning omissions of relevant facts from the investigation and report of the marine accident investigation branch into the Marchioness disaster;

(2) on what date he received the letter from the hon. Member for Newham, South dated 19 August concerning the Marchioness report and the numbers of accidents over the years which have involved the dredger Bowbelle; on what date his letter R/M/PSO/13111/91 was sent in reply; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: No representations concerning omissions of relevant facts from the investigation and report have been received.

The letter of 19 August from the hon. Member was received on 20 August; I replied on 19 September. That letter from the hon. Member was not considered to be a representation about relevant facts in the context of the Marchioness report. The marine accident investigation branch inspectors were aware of the number of incidents involving vessels, including Bowbelle, which had occurred prior to the tragic accident that they were investigating. Section 15 of the report discussed the reaction of the owners, the Port of London Authority and the Department at some length. To have gone into detail on each incident would have greatly lengthened that section without adding to its value; the reason for singling out the incidents described in annex 11 of the report is that they had particular similarities to the Marchioness case.

M25

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) why a section of the M25 was closed between 4 pm and 6 pm on 1 December; whether there was any danger to the public during this time; and what length of the motorway was closed;

(2) under what powers a section of the M25 was closed to traffic on the afternoon of 1 December.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I have been asked to reply.

A section of the motorway between junctions 19 and 21 on the M25 was closed by the local civil police using normal police powers after a vehicle in a MOD convoy suffered a mechanical breakdown. There was no danger to the public, police or military personnel. The inconvenience caused to other road users is greatly regretted.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

EC Development Council

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the EC Development Council on 28 November.

Mrs. Chalker: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Dr. Twinn) on 9 December at column *278*.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Kingfisher Chips

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will name the manufacturers of the Kingfisher chips served in Members Dining Room.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall arrange for the Refreshment Department to let the hon. Member have this information.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Tourism

12. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is his current estimate of the volume and value of tourism to Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: Overall visitor numbers are expected to improve on last year's 1·15 million—itself a record. Of particular significance is the estimated 15 per cent. increase in pure holiday visitors. In 1990, out-of-state visitors spent about £153 million in Northern Ireland.

Student Loans

13. **Mr. Stott:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the working of the student loans scheme in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: The student loans scheme is administered on a United Kingdom-wide basis by the Student Loans Company and is operating successfully in Northern Ireland. A full-year loan plus grant now gives a student over 30 per cent. more money than did the grant alone in 1989-90.

Political Initiatives

14. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he has any plans for new political initiatives in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: I am currently in contact with the main constitutional parties in Northern Ireland and the Irish Government, to see whether a new basis for fresh talks can be established. I am pleased to say that there is a general desire to make substantive progress in the period before the election and a general acceptance that the key elements of my statement to the House on 26 March 1991 should apply in any fresh talks.

Employment

15. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the current levels of employment in Northern Ireland.

20. **Mr. Dover:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the number of people currently employed in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: At June 1991, the latest date for which figures are available, there were an estimated 525,680 employees in employment. This represents an increase of almost 25,000 in the past five years.

24. **Mr. Beggs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on recent changes in the level of employment in Northern Ireland in 1992.

Mr. Needham: The latest figures indicate that at June 1991 there were some 525,680 employees in employment, a decrease of 2,660 since March. The current level of employment is, however, almost 25,000 higher than at June 1986.

Intergovernmental Talks

17. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make a statement on his most recent talks with the Irish Government.

Mr. Brooke: A meeting between the Prime Minister and Taoiseach, which I also attended, took place in Dublin on 4 December. It discussed a wide range of EC, other international and bilateral issues. A meeting of the Anglo-Irish Conference was held on 20 November.

Security

18. **Sir Patrick Duffy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave earlier today to the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux).

Electricity Industry

19. **Mr. Nellist:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people currently work in the electricity supply industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham: At 30 September, 5,576 people were working in the electricity supply industry in Northern Ireland.

25. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a further statement on the progress of the privatisation of Northern Ireland Electricity.

Mr. Needham: Bids for the purchase of the power stations have been received and are being evaluated. Draft legislation has been laid before Parliament and will be debated in due course.

27. **Mr. McGrady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on fair employment in the Northern Ireland Electricity service.

Mr. Needham: I am informed by the chairman of Northern Ireland Electricity that the company is committed to and implementing an employment policy designed to achieve full equality of opportunity.

Royal Family (Portraits)

21. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will introduce legislation to clarify the law with respect to the display of portraits of Her Majesty or members of the royal family.

Mr. Needham: There are no plans to introduce such legislation; in the context of the work place the position is already adequately covered in the code of practice on fair employment.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland why he instructed the removal of a portrait of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II from Her Majesty's prison, The Maze; and if he will make a statement on the display of such portraits in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Mawhinney: It is the policy of the prison service that official portraits of Her Majesty the Queen and Prince Philip are displayed in specified areas. There is no provision for the diplay of portraits or emblems in areas used by visitors to prison establishments or other areas accessible by the public.

Spearhead Battalion

22. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a further statement on the deployment of the spearhead battalion in Northern Ireland to support the RUC and UDR.

Dr. Mawhinney: After consultation with the Chief Constable and the General Officer Commanding, my right hon. Friend agreed with the Secretary of State for Defence that an additional battalion should be temporarily deployed to Northern Ireland from 26 November 1991 to operate in support of the RUC.

This is a decisive and measured response to the current security situation. It is yet another example of the Government's commitment to provide the security forces with the resources they need to help bring terrorism to an end.

Northern Ireland International Airport

23. **Mr. Clifford Forsythe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what Government and European grants were paid to Northern Ireland international airport during the periods January 1990 to December 1990 and January 1991 to October 1991.

Mr. Needham: During the period January 1990 to December 1990, Belfast international airport received grants of £4,861·78 and £6·22 million from Government and the European Commission respectively. Between January 1991 and October 1991 £600,000 was paid to the airport by the European Commission. No grant was paid to the airport by Government during this latter period.

Public Spending

26. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money per head of population is currently spent per head of population in Ulster.

Dr. Mawhinney: The Northern Ireland Office and Northern Ireland Departments will spend approximately £6,449 million in 1991-92, which represents about £4,050 per head of population.

Road Deaths

28. **Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people died on the roads in each of the three years up to 30 October.

Mr. Needham: The figures are as follows:

	Number
1 January 1989 to 30 October 1989	154
1 January 1990 to 30 October 1990	143
1 January 1991 to 30 October 1991	151

Border Poll

29. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has any plans for holding a border poll in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: No.

Governance

30. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he has recently met the leaders of the major political parties to discuss the governance of Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner).

Unemployment

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the current levels of unemployment in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: At 10 October 1991, the latest date for which information is available, there were 101,441 unemployed claimants in Northern Ireland, which represents a decrease of 2,994 compared with the previous month.

Dyslexia

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many schools in Northern Ireland have a specialised teacher for children suffering from dyslexia at *(a)* primary level and *(b)* post-primary level.

Dr. Mawhinney: This information is not readily available in the form requested.

Dyslexia can describe a variety of specific learning difficulties experienced by children. In most cases the children concerned are educated in ordinary schools, many of which have teachers with responsibility for co-ordinating remedial teaching by class teachers and who also provide remedial teaching for small groups of children withdrawn from their normal classes for short periods each week.

Education and library boards have a duty to identify and make provision for children with special educational needs. Assistance for pupils with literacy and numeracy problems is provided in a number of ways, for example, by peripatetic remedial teachers, reading centres, literacy teaching and support services and outreach from some special schools.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what training teachers receive in *(a)* recognising symptoms of dyslexia in pupils and *(b)* how to assist pupils who show symptoms of dyslexia.

Dr. Mawhinney: Dyslexia can describe a variety of learning difficulties experienced by children. All courses of initial teacher training must include an element designed to enable students to develop the capacity to identify and deal with pupils with learning difficulties. For serving teachers, the education and library boards mount in-service courses with similar objectives.

The Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (CATE), whose remit applies to England, Wales and Northern Ireland, is at present undertaking an inquiry into the preparation of student teachers to teach reading. As part of this inquiry, CATE has been asked to devote attention to the question of the training of teachers in how to identify and help pupils who might be termed dyslexic.

Suckler Calves

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table to show for the principal markets in Northern Ireland the price received for suckler calves in each of the months September, October and November, respectively, of the current year, and the figures for 1986, 1981 and 1976, and if he will show the prices in actual and real terms taking 1976 as the base year.

Mr. Hanley: The information requested is as follows:

Year	*Current Prices (£/head)*			*Prices in real terms*[1] *(£/head)*		
	Sept.	*Oct.*	*Nov.*	*Sept.*	*Oct.*	*Nov.*
1976	—	171·56	174·40	—	171·56	171·99
1981	—	228·85	223·61	—	123·24	119·13
1986	214·18	230·16	224·17	90·30	96·87	93·56
1991	—	276·61	241·51	—	84·82	74·31

[1] Deflated by changes since October 1976 in the United Kingdom index of retail prices.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Pupil Selection

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many children who undertook the selection transfer procedure in the academic year 1990-91 gained *(a)* grade 1, *(b)* grade 2, *(c)* grade 3 and *(d)* grade 4 in each of the education and library board areas; and of these how many gained a place in the school of their first choice.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is as follows:

Table 1
Grades obtained by children in the 1990-91 transfer procedure tests in primary schools in each education and library board area.

Education and library board	Grade 1	2	3	4	Total
Belfast[1]	1,016	485	471	1,328	3,300
Western	1,413	553	571	1,038	3,575
North-Eastern	1,592	650	650	1,459	4,351
South-Eastern	1,624	649	657	1,423	4,353
Southern	1,009	495	454	859	2,817
Total	6,654	2,832	2,803	6,107	18,396

Table 2
Pupils admitted to school of first choice in September 1991 by grade[1]

Education and Library Board	Grade 1	2	3	4
Belfast	1,538	696	377	1,108
Western	1,359	350	482	969
North-Eastern	1,554	530	504	1,440
South-Eastern	1,233	315	454	1,325
Southern	929	393	342	733
Total	6,613	2,284	2,159	5,575

[1] As pupils admitted to secondary and grammar schools in each board's area can transfer from primary schools in other board's area, it is not valid to compare tables 1 and 2 for each board.

Agriculture

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table to show for each of the last 10 years for which figures are available gross income of Northern Ireland agriculture by sector and in total showing figures in actual and real terms, taking the first year as a base; and if he will show in the same way (i) the value of agricultural land and (ii) the value of farm equipment for those years.

Mr. Hanley: Gross income data are not available. Data using the closest alternative measure, total income from farming, are shown in table 1.

Total income from farming is an aggregate measure of income and is not calculated by sector. The closest available sectoral measure is the sector gross margin, data on which are given in table 2.

Information on the value of agricultural land is given in table 3.

Information on the value of farm equipment is not available.

Table 1
Total income from Farming

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
In actual prices (£ million)	91·9	123·4	128·2	170·2	119·5	106·3	156·0	181·4	211·8	168·9
In real terms (Index 1981 = 100)	100	124	123	155	103	88	125	138	150	109

Table 2
Aggregate gross margin estimates by sector
(a) In actual prices (£ million)

Sector	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990 (f)
Dairying	111·6	144·6	153·6	157·7	147·6	136·6	164·8	198·1	224·6	191·8
Beef rearing and fattening	95·6	80·6	104·9	130·7	126·7	107·1	119·9	161·1	177·9	177·9
Sheep	14·1	16·9	25·0	28·4	33·3	34·9	40·7	47·3	51·7	57·0
Pigs	16·2	19·5	11·7	21·0	20·6	17·5	18·3	10·4	24·8	30·0
Poultrymeat and eggs	1·3	−1·9	−4·2	3·6	2·8	7·4	9·8	1·6	5·2	10·4
Cereals	16·2	18·0	22·7	25·1	15·3	21·8	23·3	23·4	27·4	31·3
Potatoes	19·6	18·9	24·5	15·2	11·6	17·8	17·5	14·0	20·3	20·4
Horticulture	10·3	9·0	12·5	13·9	16·0	14·4	19·5	22·7	17·4	19·3

(b) In real terms (Index 1981 = 100)

Sector	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990(f)
Dairying	100	119	121	119	105	94	108	124	131	102
Beef rearing and fattening	100	78	97	115	105	86	92	118	121	110
Sheep	100	111	156	169	187	189	212	235	238	240

Sector	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990(f)
Pigs	100	111	64	109	101	83	83	45	99	110
Poultrymeat and eggs	100	−131	−285	231	169	438	554	85	262	477
Cereals	100	102	123	130	75	103	106	101	110	115
Potatoes	100	89	110	69	47	69	65	50	67	62
Horticulture	100	81	107	114	122	107	139	154	110	111

Table 3
Value of agricultural land

	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
In actual prices (£ million)	2,847·2	2,533·4	2,733·3	2,733·6	2,702·8	2,810·6	2,937·0	2,569·2	3,114·4	3,024·1
In real terms (Index 1981 = 100)	100	82	85	81	75	75	76	63	71	63

Disabled Drivers (Parking)

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will arrange for the Department of the Environment roads service to make provision for free parking for disabled drivers in Northern Ireland along the lines of that made available in Great Britain by local authorities.

Mr. Needham: I have no plans to introduce legislation to enable disabled drivers to park free of charge in Department of the Environment car parks. Orange badge holders are entitled to free parking on roads where charges or restrictions would normally apply.

Crawfordsburn

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will designate Crawfordsburn, County Down as an environmentally sensitive area.

Mr. Needham: There are no plans to designate Crawfordsburn as an environmentally sensitive area, nor are there any plans to apply any other nature conservation-related designation to the area. It is intended, however, to designate a conservation area in Crawfordsburn village during 1993-94.

Rathgael Training School

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many occasions young persons have absconded from Rathgael training school, Bangor in each month since 1 July 1991, giving the number of occasions on which each young person has absconded on each occasion; and whether Bangor police station is notified of every such case of absconding irrespective of the home address of the person absconding.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information requested is given below:

1991	Clients	Episodes
July	38	70
August	47	114
September	44	74
October	41	69
November	31	48
Total	[1]94	375

[1] Some individuals absconded in more than one month.

All episodes of absconding are reported to Bangor police station irrespective of clients' addresses.

Labour Statistics

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the number of unemployed young people in the North Down area; and what was the figure for each of the past 10 years.

Mr. Needham: The number of unemployed persons aged under 25 in the North Down district council area at 10 October 1991, the latest date for which figures are available, was 738. Information for previous years is only available from 1984 onwards.

October	Number of unemployed [1] (aged under 25)
1984	1,248
1985	1,210
1986	1,175
1987	1,113
1988	888
1989	706
1990	789
1991	738

[1] Figures are not consistent over time due to changes in procedures governing entitlement to benefit.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the amount of money which it is estimated has been paid out as a result of fraudulent applications for DHSS benefits which have been detected in each of the last five years in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: During the period 1986 to 1990 the amount of money paid in Northern Ireland as a result of fraudulent claims for DHSS benefits, which have since been detected, was:

	£
1986	668,924
1987	640,924
1988	621,109
1989	814,637
1990	894,140

The figure for 1990 represents a period of 15 months from 1 January 1990 to 31 March 1991 as from 1991 it was decided to record these statistics on a financial year basis. Figures in respect of 1991 will not be available until mid-1992.

Hearing Therapists

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many hearing therapists are employed in Northern Ireland; and whether he has proposals to extend the services provided by hearing therapists in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: There are two hearing therapists employed in Northern Ireland. The Regional Strategy for the Health and Personal Social Services in Northern Ireland (1992-97) identifies as a key area of concern the need to improve services for people suffering from sensory disability. Boards are required to ascertain the numbers and needs of sensorily impaired people in their populations and ensure access to specialist teams of staff to provide support for those with a hearing and/or visual impairment.

Freshwater Fish

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what is the scope and frequency of monitoring of freshwater fish flesh in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: There is no regular monitoring regime for freshwater fish flesh. Monitoring and testing are undertaken, however, where problems are suspected.

In 1990, at the request of the Foyle Fisheries Commission, a number of samples of salmon from the River Foyle estuary were analysed for contaminants.

In 1986-87 Northern Ireland scientists participated in a United Kingdom survey of pesticide and heavy metal residues in eels from freshwater sites. A similar survey is planned for 1995.

Terrorists (Compensation Claims)

Mr. Maginnis: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many awards of compensation have been made in cases where terrorists have been *(a)* shot dead and *(b)* shot and injured by the security services since 15 November 1985; and if he will publish full details.

Dr. Mawhinney *[holding answer 5 December 1991]:* The available information is set out in the table below. It should be noted that this information, which is based on the date of settlement and not of the incident concerned, does not differentiate between "terrorist" and "non-terrorist" incidents; and includes awards arising from the use of plastic baton rounds.

	Financial years			
	1987-88	*1988-89*	*1989-90*	*1990-91*
Number of awards of compensation for persons:				
Killed in shooting incidents	1	2	2	2
Wounded in shooting incidents	19	20	23	28

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefit Offices

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 18 November, *Official Report*, column *84*, and the Benefit Agency's subsequent letter, if he will ask the district managers to provide information on the number, and the periods in which, benefit offices were closed to the public during official opening hours in the current year, giving the reasons for each closure.

Miss Widdecombe: Provision of local services is a matter for Mr. Michael Bichard, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. I understand from him that district managers are encouraged to tailor their services to the needs of the local community.

The range of public caller facilities now offered by the Benefits Agency is too diverse to allow meaningful comparisons between offices or to justify collection of detailed information centrally. Information about the withdrawal of these facilities could be obtained from district managers only at disproportionate cost. Mr. Bichard will write to the hon. Member, and copies will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Household Incomes

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he proposes any changes in the series of statistics covering households with below average incomes.

Mr. Newton: As I have previously informed the Social Security Select Committee, since the publication in July 1990 of the last set of biennial tables covering households below average income, a thoroughgoing "stocktaking review" of the methodology and presentation has been carried out by the Department's officials, including statisticians, together with a statistician from the Central Statistical Office. The group conducting the review has also undertaken consultation with a number of independent experts, including the Institute for Fiscal Studies.

Their report is published today, and copies have been placed in the Library. It makes 45 recommendations aimed at improving both the content of HBAI and the clarity of its presentation. I have accepted these in full, and have also agreed to adjust the coverage of HBAI so that it relates to the whole United Kingdom, instead of Great Britain as at present, and to adopt 1979 as the base year for time series. Although these changes will involve considerable extra work, we nevertheless intend to publish the next biennial figures, for 1989, within two years of the last.

I have also given further careful consideration to the Select Committee's request that such figures should be published annually, instead of biennially. I agree that this is now sensible, and arrangements are therefore being made for annual publications from the 1989 figures onwards.

Similarly, I propose to meet the Select Committee's request that take-up estimates for the income-related benefits, which hitherto have also been published biennially, should be published annually. DSS statisticians are currently considering what improvements can be made

in the methodology for making these estimates, and will aim to produce those for 1989 at about the same time as the next HBAI, in mid-1992.

These improvements will be pursued in close collaboration with the IFS, which has agreed to assist the Department's statisticians in calculating and checking HBAI results before publication, and in making the database more readily available to external researchers once publication has taken place.

At the same time as making these changes, we are examining ways of improving the basic data from which HBAI is drawn. We are therefore piloting a new "family resources survey" with a view to evaluating the contribution that this could make to enhancing the information on which studies such as HBAI are based.

EC Pension Levels

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out the level of the basic state pension, and any earnings-related supplement for a person on the average wage in each European Community country currently, in sterling at current purchasing power parity exchange rates.

Mr. Jack: There are no comparable statistics available on average annual wages in the member states of the European Community. As a consequence, it is not possible to provide the pension comparisons requested by the hon. Member.

Low-income Families

Mr. Clay: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what index he used to calculate the figure of £600 million a year in real terms as an increase in means-tested benefits for low-income families.

Mr. Jack: The figure of £600 million has been calculated by revaluing each additional package of help into 1992-93 terms by the GDP deflator.

Mr. Clay: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will give a detailed breakdown of how the £600 million extra a year in real terms which has been made available to families through income-related benefits, has been allocated to families with low incomes;

(2) if he will give details for each year from 1988-89 onwards of how much of the extra £600 million a year, in real terms, given to low-income families has *(a)* gone into each means-tested benefit, *(b)* increased the real value of each means-tested benefit to individual households and *(c)* been spent because of changes in the numbers of families receiving means-tested benefits.

Mr. Jack: The detailed breakdown is in the table.

It is not possible to estimate the increased value of each income-related benefit to individual households because individual families will have benefited in different ways and at different times from one or more of the separate packages.

Costings of each package of help are calculated using forecasts of family numbers receiving income-related benefits in the year of introduction. In arriving at the total cost no account is taken of subsequent changes in the numbers of families receiving income-related benefits.

Year and change	*Amount*	*Value in a full year at 1992-93 prices*
	£ million	*£ million*
April 1988		
Introduction of Family Credit	200	256
April 1989		
Extra 50p in IRB child allowances	70	84
April 1990		
£1 on Family Credit adult credit	70	78
Extra 50p on Income Support, Family Credit and Housing Benefit family premium		
Extra 50p on childs personal allowances in Income Support, Family Credit and Housing Benefit		
Increase in lone parent premium in Housing Benefit and Community Charge Benefit		
Increase in lone parent earnings disregard in Housing Benefit and Community Charge Benefit		
Extra in disabled child premium in Income Support (£8 million)		
Extra for expectant mothers through Social Fund maternity payment (£3 million)		
October 1991		
Increase for families on Income Support to ensure they gain from Community Housing Benefit inclusive	[1]63	133
April 1992		
Change in Family Credit hours rule and maintenance disregard for lone parents		69
Total annual extra help in 1992-93 made available for families with children since 1988		620

[1] Half year.

Earnings Disregard

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to publish the findings of his Department's monitoring of the impact of the new earnings disregard rules introduced under the Social Security Act 1986.

Miss Widdecombe: The Department has monitored the effect of the earnings rules in income support, family credit, housing benefit and community charge benefit since 1988. As a result, we have already made changes to the rules which will provide extra help for working families with children. The earnings disregard for lone parents was raised from £15 to £25 in housing benefit and community charge benefit from October 1990. We are also reducing the hours of work needed to claim family credit from 24 to 16 hours a week in April 1992. At the same time, we shall be introducing a disregard of the first £15 a week of any maintenance received for a child in family credit, housing benefit and community charge benefit.

Women Claimants

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many women in couples claiming supplementary benefit/income support have been the claimant in each year since 1983; and if he will provide the figures as a proportion of all couples on supplementary benefit/income support for each year.

Miss Widdecombe: The information requested is given in the table:

Year	*Number of female claimants*	*All couple cases*	*Proportion*
1983	500	1,020,600	1 in 2,041
1984	12,140	1,086,300	1 in 90
1986	20,700	1,126,700	1 in 54
1987	25,300	1,073,600	1 in 42
1988	24,600	841,000	1 in 34
1989	25,400	723,800	1 in 28
1990	34,600	691,200	1 in 20

Note: No information is available for 1985. The Annual Statistical Enquiry for that year was deferred until 1986.
Source: Supplementary Benefit/Income Support Annual Statistical Enquiries.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Warren: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has decided the final locations of the new administration centres for the Child Support Agency; when these new offices will be operational; and how they will be staffed.

Mr. Jack: Negotiations on the location of the new administration centres have been concluded successfully and I can now confirm that they will be sited in Hastings, the black country (Dudley), Belfast, Falkirk, Birkenhead and Plymouth, each one of which will create 500 new administrative jobs. The centres in Hastings, the black country and Belfast will come into operation from 1 April 1993 followed by Falkirk, Birkenhead and Plymouth by autumn 1993. Local recruitment for the majority of the jobs will start to build up from about six months before the operational dates.

The selection of Hastings has enabled us to offer opportunities to a substantial number of Property Services Agency staff who would otherwise be facing redundancy. It is our hope that we can co-ordinate the occupation of the Hastings centre with the rundown in staffing of PSA to ensure a major civil service presence in the area.

Pension Funds

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to lay regulations following the consultation he has undertaken on the restriction of self-investment by pension funds for which provision was made in the Social Security Act 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Newton: The Social Security Act 1990 provided powers enabling restrictions to be placed on the extent to which the resources of occupational pension schemes may be invested in the sponsoring employer, or an associate and connected employer.

Shortly after the passage of the Act, the Government commissioned independent consultants, Ernst and Young, to report on the extent of such investment and problems which might arise in restricting it.

Following their report, draft regulations to achieve such restriction were referred to the Occupational Pensions Board. After consultation with interested bodies, the board reported on the draft towards the end of July. Having considered its recommendations, together with other representations received subsequently about the need for appropriate provisions to avoid causing unnecessary difficulties for companies and pension funds in respect of existing self-investment, we intend to lay regulations to restrict self-investment early in the new year.

EMPLOYMENT

Earnings

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the gross weekly earnings of the lowest decile of full-time workers aged under 18 years, whose pay was not affected by absence, for each year since 1979, in both actual and real terms in 1991 prices.

Mr. Forth: The earnings information requested is published in table 126 of part E of the new earnings survey report for each year from 1979, for men and women separately. Information for men and women combined is published in table X4 of part B from 1984 to 1988, and in table X4 of part A from 1989 to 1991; it is not available prior to 1984.

Information on the retail prices index (all items) to convert earlier years' figures to 1991 prices is published in table 6·4 of the latest "Employment Gazette" for April 1991, and in table 26 of the annual supplement to "Economic Trends" for April of earlier years.

Copies of the publications are available in the Library.

Wages Council Legislation

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what was *(a)* the gender, *(b)* the occupation and *(c)* the average working hours of each underpaid worker in establishments prosecuted for breaching wages council legislation in 1989, 1990 and 1991 to date, identifying (i) the establishment at which each worker was employed, (ii) the type of offence committed against the employee, (iii) the penalty and legal costs incurred to the employer, (iv) the arrears of wages paid to each employee, separately identified, (v) the employee's hourly rate of pay before the prosecution and (vi) the relevant wages council rate which the employee received thereafter, identifying the relevant wages council order.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 6 December 1991]:* I regret that the full information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The information which is readily available is provided in the following table.

1989

1. Employer's name and address *2. Appropriate wages council*	*Number and type of offences*	*Number of workers*	*1. Penalties placed on employers* *2. Statutory minimum remuneration payable from date of hearing*
1. Bhatia's, Rochester, Kent 2. Retail Food and Allied Trades Wages Council	2—Failure to pay at least the statutory minimum rate.	Two	1. £150 fine, £250 costs, £1,600 arrears. 2. £2·48 per hour.
1. Bishops of Swanage, Swanage, Dorset 2. Retail Trades (Non-Food) Wages Council	1—Failure to pay at least the statutory minimum rate.	One	1. £200 fine, £350 costs, £800·20 arrears. 2. £2·49 per hour.
1. Franklins of Saltburn, Saltburn, Cleveland 2. Retail Trades (Non-Food) Wages Council	3—Failure to pay at least the statutory minimum rate.	Three	1. £600 fine, £250 costs, Court order to pay arrears of £2,740·38. 2. £2·49 per hour.
1. Gosport Royal Naval Association Club Ltd., Gosport, Hants 2. Licenced Non-Residential Establishments Wages Council	3—Failure to pay at least the statutory minimum rate.	Three	1. £30 fine, £20 costs. 2. £2·30 per hour.
1. Grahams Transport Stop, Bridgewater, Somerset 2. Unlicenced Place of Refreshment Wages Council	2—Failure to pay at least the statutory minimum rate.	Two	1. £400 fine, £200 costs, £3,145·55 arrears. 2. £2·38 per hour.
1. Johns, South Ockenden, Essex 2. Retail Food and Allied Trades Wages Council	1—Failure to produce records.	—	1. £300 fine, £100 costs. 2. £2·48 per hour.
1. Kingfisher, Hull, Yorkshire 2. Retail Food and Allied Trades Wages Council	5—Failure to pay at least the statutory minimum rate.	Five	1. £100 fine, £150 costs, £7,408·91 arrears. 2. £2·48 per hour.
1. Maurices Discount, Nottingham 2. Retail Food and Allied Trades Wages Council	1—Failure to pay at least the statutory minimum rate.	One	1. £100 fine, £100 costs, £429·71 arrears. 2. £2·33 per hour.
1. Record Stores, Rochester, Kent 2. Retail Food and Allied Trades Wages Council	4—Failure to pay at least the statutory minimum rate, keeping false records.	Three	1. £675 fine, £250 costs, £1,762·87 arrears. 2. £2·48 per hour.
1. Ron Whites Fruit Basket, Southampton 2. Retail Food and Allied Trades Wages Council	2—Failure to pay at least the statutory minimum rate.	One	1. £500 fine, £243·50 arrears. 2. £2·48 per hour.

Prosecutions under sections 16, 19, and 21 of the Wages Act 1986

1990

1. Employer's name and address *2. Appropriate wages council*	*Number and type of offences*	*Number of workers*	*1. Penalties placed on employers* *2. Statutory minimum remuneration payable from date of hearing*
1. Burger House, Maidstone 2. Unlicensed Place of Refreshment Wages Council	2—Failure to pay at least the statutory minimum rate, keeping false records.	One	1. £600 fine, £345 costs, £1,280 arrears. 2. £2·38 per hour.
1. G.S. Fruit, Sheffield 2. Retail Food and Allied Trades Wages Council	3—Failure to pay at least the statutory minimum rate, keeping false records.	Two	1. £450 fine, £150 costs. 2. £2·48 per hour.
1. One Stop Foods, Leeds 2. Retail Food and Allied Trades Wages Council	2—Failure to pay at least the statutory minimum rate.	Two	1. £100 fine, £150 costs, £443 arrears. 2. £2·48 per hour.
1. Pavilions Kebab House, Buxton 2. Retail Food and Allied Trades Wages Council	1—Failure to produce records.	—	1. £400 fine, £69 costs. 2. £2·685 per hour.
1. Post Office Stores, Avening 2. Retail Food and Allied Trades Wages Council	2—Failure to pay at least the statutory minimum rate, keeping false records.	One	1. £50 fine, £1,128 arrears. 2. £2·48 per hour.
1. Terry's Hair Fashion, Swanley 2. Hairdressing Undertakings Wages Council	3—Failure to pay at least the statutory minimum rate, failure to keep records, failure to post notices.	One	1. £225 fine, £50 costs, £150 arrears. 2. £2·40 per hour.

1. Employer's name and address *2. Appropriate wages council*	*Number and type of offences*	*Number of workers*	*1. Penalties placed on employers* *2. Statutory minimum remuneration payable from date of hearing*
1. Truss Self-Service, Aldershot 2. Retail Food and Allied Trades Wages Council	3—Failure to pay at least the statutory minimum rate, keeping false records.	Two	1. £150 fine, £200 costs, £1,277 arrears. 2. £2·685 per hour.
1. Weardale Hotel, Spennymoor 2. Licensed Non-Residential Establishments Wages Council	1—Failure to produce records	—	1. £100 fine, £70 costs. 2. £2·50 per hour.
1. Westons, Barrow in Furness 2. Retail Food and Allied Trades Wages Council	4—Failure to pay at least the statutory minimum rate.	Four	1. £160 fine, £400 costs, £100 arrears. 2. £2·48 per hour.

Prosecutions under sections 16, 19, and 21 of the Wages Act 1986
1991 to date

1. Employer's name and address *2. Appropriate wages council*	*Number and type of offences*	*Number of workers*	*1. Penalties placed on employers* *2. Statutory minimum remuneration payable from date of hearing*
1. Allardyce Cafe, Stonehaven 2. Retail Food and Allied Trades Wages Council	2—Failure to pay at least the statutory minimum rate.	Two	1. Admonishment. 2. £2·955 per hour.
1. P. Bilton, Sheffield 2. Retail Food and Allied Trades Wages Council	3—Failure to pay at least the statutory minimum rate.	Three	1. £200 fine, £70 costs, £111·64 arrears. 2. £2·955 per hour.
1. Bridge House Hotel, Scunthorpe 2. Licensed Residential Establishment and Licensed Restaurant Wages Council	1—Failure to pay at least the statutory minimum rate.	One	1. £150 fine, £200 costs, £418·08 arrears. 2. £2·56 per hour.
1. Central Carpets, Hull 2. Retail Trades (Non-Food) Wages Council	8—Failure to pay at least the statutory minimum rate, failure to keep records, failure to post notices.	Three	1. £800 fine, £390 costs, £1,750 arrears. 2. £2·69 per hour.
1. D. E. Drinkall, Hull 2. Retail Food and Allied Trades Wages Council	6—Failure to pay at least the statutory minimum rate, failure to keep records, failure to post notices.	Four	1. £150 fine, £293·75 costs, £3,103 arrears. 2. £2·955 per hour.
1. Egremont Hotel, Taunton 2. Licensed Residential Establishment and Licensed Restaurant Wages Council	3—Failure to pay at least the statutory minimum rate, failure to post notices, false records.	Two	1. £375 fine, £400 costs, £70·95 arrears. 2. £2·66 per hour.
1. Filey Frozen Foods, Filey 2. Retail Food and Allied Trades Wages Council	1—Failure to pay at least the statutory minimum rate.	One	1. £300 fine, £150 costs, £804 arrears. 2. £2·685 per hour.
1. Gill Manufacturing, Leeds 2. Clothing Manufacturing Wages Council	1—Failure to produce records	—	1. £400 fine, £230 costs. 2. £2·4875 per hour.
1. Hughes General Store, Sealand, Deeside 2. Retail Food and Allied Trades Wages Council	3—Failure to pay at least the statutory minimum rate, false records.	Two	1. £200 fine, £100 costs, £1,529·89 arrears. 2. £2·955 per hour.
1. G.C. Mull & Co., Finsbury Park, London 2. Retail Food and Allied Trades Wages Council	2—Failure to pay at least the statutory minimum rate.	Two	1. £100 fine, £50 costs, £1,537 arrears. 2. £2·955 per hour.
1. New Image, Bedminster 2. Hairdressing Undertakings Wages Council	2—Failure to pay at least the statutory minimum rate.	One	1. £100 fine, £25 costs, £121 arrears. 2. £2·66 per hour.
1. B.D. Price, Dudley 2. Retail Trades (Non-Food) Wages Council	1—Failure to comply with a requirement of an inspector.	—	1. £400 fine, £393 costs. 2. £2·955 per hour.
1. Snooker Masters Ltd., Wishaw, Lanarkshire 2. Licenced Non-Residential Establishments Wages Council	6—False records, failure to pay at least the statutory minimum rate, inadequate records.	Four	1. Admonished by Sherrif. Required to pay arrears £408·76. 2. £2·74 per hour.

1. Employer's name and address 2. Appropriate wages council	Number and type of offences	Number of workers	1. Penalties placed on employers 2. Statutory minimum remuneration payable from date of hearing
1. Spar Shop, Newcastle upon Tyne 2. Retail Food and Allied Trades Wages Council	3—Failure to pay at least the statutory minimum rate, failure to keep records, failure to post notices.	One	1. £100 fine, £100 costs, £850 arrears. 2. £2·955 per hour.
1. Trendy, Hull, Yorkshire 2. Retail Trades (Non-Food) Wages Council	2—Failure to keep records, failure to post notices.	—	1. £400 fine, £90 costs. 2. £2·955 per hour.
1. Vanessa Gail Hair Design, Leeds 2. Hairdressing Undertakings Wages Council	2—Failure to pay at least the statutory minimum rate.	Two	1. £250 fine, £100 costs, £2,218 arrears. 2. £2·66 per hour.
1. Village Market, Langley Park 2. Retail Trades (Non-Food) Wages Council	4—Failure to pay at least the statutory minimum rate.	Two	1. £160 fine, £300 costs, £540 arrears. 2. £2·955 per hour.

Offshore Installations

Mr. Wareing: To ask the Secretary of State for employment (1) how many improvement notices the Health and Safety Executive's offshore division has issued since 1 April 1991;

(2) how many prohibition notices the Health and Safety Executive's offshore division has issued since 1 April 1991;

(3) how many prosecutions have been commenced by the Health and Safety Executive's offshore division since 1 April 1991.

Mr. Jackson: *[holding answer 11 December 1991]:* Since 1 April 1991, under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, the Health and Safety Executive's offshore safety division has served no improvement notices. Two prohibition notices have been served. Inspectors have additional powers under the Mineral Workings (Offshore Installations) Act 1971 to prohibit an activity or the use of equipment or to require improvement to be made. These powers have been designed specifically for offshore operation, and are used extensively. No prosecutions have been commenced by HSE's offshore safety division since 1 April 1991. Decisions on offshore safety-related prosecutions are normally a matter for the procurator fiscal in Scotland and the Crown prosecution service in England. I am not aware of any prosecutions commenced by these authorities since 1 April 1991.

Industrial Safety Reports

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the number of safety reports, under regulation 7(i) of the Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazard Regulations 1984, submitted to each Health and Safety Executive region before 8 July 1989 and the number of site occupiers who have still to receive a confirmatory letter from the Health and Safety Executive stating that the report has been examined, that selective inspections based on the report have been completed and that the report will now be used as a reference document in future inspections.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 11 December 1991]:* Only information about safety reports submitted to the Health and Safety Executive by August 1989 is readily available centrally. Details of those submitted before 8 July 1989 can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

By August 1989, HSE had received 331 such reports. The following table shows a breakdown by the HSE regions:

	Number
Wales and the South West	45
London and the South East	14
Home Countries	24
Midlands	21
Yorkshire and the North East	105
North West	57
Scotland	65

All these reports have received an initial evaluation. A total of 104 safety reports received by HSE have been assessed as satisfying the requirements of schedule 6 of the regulations following examination on a multidisciplinary basis. Some of the 104 reports may have been received by HSE after August 1989, but the exact number received before that date could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

WALES

Appointments

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will update his answer of 12 March 1991, *Official Report*, columns *448-58*, to the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside listing the full-time and part-time public appointments for which he is responsible, together with the salary and the date for when each appointment is due for renewal, including those posts which are not salaried.

Mr. David Hunt: The following appointments are salaried. All are part-time posts. I will supply details of non-salaried appointments as soon as possible.

Name	Remuneration £	Current appointment ends
CARDIFF BAY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION		
Chairman		
Mr. Geoffrey Inkin, OBE	29,905	2 April 1993
Deputy Chairman:		
Councillor Lord Brooks of Tremorfa	16,880	4 May 1992
Members:		
Mrs. Mair Barnes	4,770	2 April 1993
Mrs. Honor Chapman, CBE	4,770	2 April 1992

Name	Remuneration £	Current appointment ends
Mr. Alan Cox, CBE	4,770	2 April 1993
Mr. Hugh Hudson-Davies	4,770	2 April 1993
Mr. B. Thomas	4,770	1 June 1994
Councillor Paddy Kitson	4,770	4 May 1992
Councillor John Phillips	4,770	31 July 1994
Professor Richard Silverman	4,770	2 April 1992
Mr. James Beveridge	4,770	2 April 1992
Councillor Leon Smith	4,770	31 August 1994
Councillor Jeff Sainsbury	4,770	31 July 1994
Welsh Development Agency		
Chairman:		
Dr. Gwyn Jones	64,975	30 September 1994
Deputy Chairman:		
Sir Donald Walters	20,990	31 July 1992
Members:		
Mr. E. Glyn Davies[1]		31 March 1992
Mr. Philip Head[2]		31 December 1993
Mr. Richard Brewster	5,945	30 September 1993
Mr. John Foley, MBE	5,945	28 February 1994
Mr. Ralph Phillip Vinson Rees	5,945	31 December 1992
Mr. David Griffith Roberts, OBE	5,945	31 December 1992
Mr. David Colyn Gardner	5,945	31 December 1992
Mr. David Malpas	5,945	31 December 1992
Dr. Pamela Kirby	5,945	30 November 1994
Note:		
[1] Receives salary as Chairman DBRW.		
[2] Receives salary as Chief Executive of WDA.		
Countryside Council for Wales		
Chairman:		
Mr. Michael Griffith, CBE	27,375	4 November 1993
Deputy Chairman:		
Professor David Q. Bowen	9,440	4 November 1993
Members:		
Professor Dennis Bellamy	5,900	4 November 1993
Councillor Morgan Chambers	5,900	4 November 1993
Dr. W. Allan Evans	5,900	4 November 1993
Mr. John Harrop	5,900	4 November 1993
Dr. Merylyn Hedger	5,900	4 November 1993
Mr. Tom Jones	5,900	4 November 1993
Mr. Merfyn Williams	5,900	4 November 1993
Dr. Steve Ormerod	5,900	4 November 1993
Development Board for Rural Wales		
Chairman:		
Mr. E. Glyn Davies	29,835	1 April 1992
Members:		
Mr. Robert Gee	5,900	1 April 1992
Mr. Ian A. Jones	5,900	1 April 1993
Councillor Veronica Hollis	5,900	1 April 1992
Councillor Andrew M. Leonard	5,900	1 April 1994
Mr. Jeffrey Morgan	5,900	1 April 1992
Mr. Edward Rae, OBE	5,900	1 April 1993
Mr. Hywel Roberts	5,900	1 April 1992
Mr. Peter Saunders	5,900	1 April 1994
Councillor E. J. K. Shaw	5,900	1 April 1994
Sir Donald Walters	5,900	1 April 1993
Councillor Roger Williams	5,900	1 April 1992
Wales Tourist Board		
Chairman:		
Mr. I. Prys Edwards	32,850	31 July 1993
Members:		
Mrs. Lorna Minors	5,900	16 September 1994
Mr. Christopher L. Pollard, OBE	5,900	14 April 1992
Mr. E. Glyn Davies	5,900	31 March 1992
Mr. David H. Griffith	5,900	16 September 1993
Mr. John Dunscombe	5,900	31 October 1992
Mr. Chris R. Jackson	5,900	18 December 1993

Name	Remuneration £	Current appointment ends
Land Authority for Wales		
Chairman:		
Mr. Geoffrey D. Inkin, OBE	29,595	25 November 1992
Deputy Chairman:		
Mr. John D. Allen, CBE	8,395	29 December 1993
Members:		
Mr. R. P. V. Rees	5,905	29 December 1993
Mr. Graham Jones	5,905	29 December 1993
Mr. Walter Rhys-Webb	5,905	29 December 1993
Mr. Ray G. Owen	5,905	29 December 1992
Mr. Alan Edwards	5,905	29 December 1993
Sports Council for Wales		
Chairman:		
Mr. Ossie Wheatley	14,900	31 March 1993
Deputy Chairman:		
Mr. Tom Baxter-Wright	8,100	31 March 1993
Housing for Wales		
Chairman:		
Mr. John Allen, CBE	27,250	1 December 1994
Deputy Chairman:		
Mr. Jonathan Evans	8,435	During 1992
Members:		
Robert Ellis	3,695	31 May 1994
Mr. James Procter	3,695	1 December 1993
Professor Peter Williams	3,695	1 December 1994
Mr. Michael Murphy	3,695	31 May 1994
Curriculum Council for Wales		
Chairman:		
Mr. Richard Daugherty	10,200	31 August 1994
Deputy Chairman:		
Mr. Ieuan Price	5,500	31 August 1994
Training Enterprise and Education Advisory Group for Wales		
Chairman:		
Sir Mel Rosser	11,300	31 March 1992
Historic Buildings Council for Wales		
Chairman:		
The Marquess of Anglesey	4,155	31 March 1992
Family Health Service Authorities		
Clwyd		
Chairman:		
Councillor Tom W. Jones	10,705	31 August 1992
Non-executive Members:		
Mr. Thomas Birchall	5,000	31 March 1993
Councillor Neil A. Formstone	5,000	16 September 1994
Mr. Paul D. M. Griffith	5,000	30 November 1992
Mrs. Lynne Hughes	5,000	30 November 1992
Mr. William J. Ridgway	5,000	31 March 1994
Mr. Christopher B. Swale	5,000	16 September 1994
Mrs. Irene J. Train	5,000	31 March 1993
Mrs. N. P. (Patsy) Woodward	5,000	30 November 1992
Dr. Peter Wykes	5,000	31 March 1994
Dyfed		
Chairman:		
Mrs. Vanessa J. Bourne	10,705	31 May 1994
Non-executive Members:		
Mr. David Bentham	5,000	16 September 1994
Mrs. Anne Bowen	5,000	31 March 1993
Mrs. Brenda L. Davies	5,000	30 November 1991
Mr. Thomas Lloyd	5,000	31 March 1993

Name	Remuneration £	Current appointment ends
Mr. T. O. S. Lloyd	5,000	16 September 1994
Mrs. Anne M. Morris	5,000	30 November 1992
Councillor Edwyn P. Parry	5,000	31 March 1994
Mr. W. J. C. Roberts	5,000	31 March 1994
Mr. David P. Williams	5,000	30 November 1992
GWENT		
Chairman:		
Mr. Kenneth R. C. Rew	10,705	31 May 1994
Non-executive Members:		
Mrs. Estelle Blake	5,000	31 March 1994
Mr. David H. W. Davies	5,000	16 September 1994
Mr. John A. Gallimore	5,000	30 November 1992
Mr. Stuart Geddes	5,000	31 March 1994
Dr. Gregory L. Graham	5,000	31 March 1993
Mr. John F. Ingledew	5,000	16 September 1994
Mr. D. Jones	5,000	31 March 1993
Councillor Peter J. Law, JP	5,000	16 September 1994
Mrs. Patricia A. White	5,000	30 November 1992
GWYNEDD		
Chairman:		
Dr. John E. A. Kenrick	9,903	31 May 1994
Non-executive Members:		
Mrs. E. Barlow	5,000	31 March 1994
Mr. G. Morris Jones	5,000	30 November 1992
Mr. T. Jones	5,000	31 March 1994
Mr. Barry J. Owens	5,000	16 September 1994
Dr. Ian Ellis Roberts	5,000	31 March 1993
Mrs. Lorna Scharer	5,000	16 September 1994
Mr. Gwyn T. Thomas	5,000	30 November 1992
Mr. Richard N. Thomas	5,000	31 March 1993
Mr. Richard Webb	5,000	30 November 1992
MID GLAMORGAN		
Chairman:		
Mrs. Kathrin E. Thomas	10,705	31 August 1992
Non-executive Members:		
Mrs. Bridget Caroline Dimond	5,000	16 September 1994
Mr. Peter Jenkins	5,000	31 March 1993
Mr. Raymond W. Martin	5,000	30 November 1992
Mr. Ian Price	5,000	31 March 1994
Mrs. Dorothy Richardson	5,000	31 March 1994
Mr. Victor Rizzo	5,000	30 November 1992
Dr. Bipin K. Shah	5,000	31 March 1993
Mr. Edward H. Tiltman	5,000	16 September 1994
Dr. Eira Williams	5,000	16 September 1994
POWYS		
Chairman:		
The hon. Anthony T. Lewis, JP	9,903	31 May 1994
Non-executive Members:		
Mrs. Patricia A. Antill	5,000	31 March 1993
Mr. David S. Baird-Murray	5,000	30 November 1992
Mr. Paul G. J. Davies	5,000	31 March 1994
Mrs. Margaret J. Dodd	5,000	30 November 1992
Miss Barbara Hughes	5,000	16 September 1994
Mr. Hywel Davies	5,000	16 September 1994
Mr. J. D. Roberts-James	5,000	31 March 1993
Dr. Ainsley Reid	5,000	31 March 1994
Mrs. Jean Ryder	5,000	16 September 1994
SOUTH GLAMORGAN		
Chairman:		
Dr. Richard G. Lloyd	10,705	31 August 1992
Non-executive Members:		
Mr. R. A. Fuge	5,000	31 March 1993
Mr. Richard C. Daniel	5,000	30 November 1992
Mrs. J. Edwards	5,000	31 March 1993
Mr. James H. Leighton	5,000	16 September 1994
Mr. Iltyd R. Lloyd	5,000	30 November 1992
Miss Elizabeth J. Muir	5,000	16 September 1994
Mr. Ian Phillips	5,000	31 March 1994
Mr. Gerald Rapport	5,000	16 September 1994
Dr. Michael T. K. Wheeler	5,000	31 March 1994
WEST GLAMORGAN		
Chairman:		
Mr. Graham L. Jones	10,705	31 August 1992
Non-executive Members:		
Mrs. Jane V. Davies	5,000	16 September 1994
Mr. Robert J. Davies	5,000	30 November 1992
Mrs. Margaret M. Evans	5,000	31 March 1994
Mr. Alan L. Jones	5,000	31 March 1994
Mr. Gerald Lawler	5,000	16 September 1994
Mr. William G. Rees	5,000	30 November 1992
Mr. Gerald Thomas	5,000	31 March 1993
Mr. Douglas S. Williams	5,000	30 November 1992
Dr. Eleanor M. Williams	5,000	31 March 1993
DISTRICT HEALTH AUTHORITIES		
CLWYD		
Chairman:		
Mrs. Anne Lloyd Roberts	17,610	31 July 1994
Non-executive Members:		
Professor T. M. Hayes	5,000	31 August 1994
Mr. Trefor G. Jones	5,000	31 August 1994
Vacant	5,000	31 October 1992
Mr. John R. Slater	5,000	31 August 1994
Mrs. Angharad Waters	5,000	31 October 1992
EAST DYFED		
Chairman:		
Mr. James S. Thomas	15,659	31 July 1992
Non-executive Members:		
Mrs. Lynette George	5,000	31 Auguest 1994
Mr. Emrys W. Jones	5,000	31 August 1994
Mr. Peter G. Price	5,000	31 October 1992
Mr. John Williams	5,000	31 August 1994
Mr. Owen J. Williams	5,000	31 October 1992
GWENT		
Chairman:		
Mr. Roger Newton	17,610	31 July 1994
Non-executive Members:		
Mr. Richard J. Dilnot	5,000	31 August 1994
Dr. Gareth Jones	5,000	31 October 1992
Mrs. Fiona N. Peel	5,000	31 August 1994
Professor Alan Richens	5,000	31 August 1994
Mr. Roy C. Stevens	5,000	31 October 1992
GWYNEDD		
Chairman:		
Mrs. Noreen L. Edwards, CBE	15,659	31 July 1992
Non-executive Members:		
Mr. Dilwyn O. Evans	5,000	31 October 1992
Mr. R. Hefin Davies	5,000	31 August 1994
Mr. Graham Hulse	5,000	31 August 1994
Mr. Richard H. P. Oliver	5,000	31 August 1994
Mr. John L. Williams	5,000	31 October 1992
MID GLAMORGAN		
Chairman:		
Mr. Bryn Davies, MBE, CBE	17,610	31 July 1992
Non-executive Members:		
Dr. D. Eurof Evans, OBE	5,000	31 October 1992
Mrs. Sandy Grant	5,000	31 October 1992
Professor Oliver P. Gray	5,000	31 October 1992
Mr. Derek W. C. Morgan	5,000	31 August 1994
Mr. O. Graham Saunders, OBE	5,000	31 August 1994

Name	Remuneration £	Current appointment ends
PEMBROKESHIRE		
Chairman:		
Captain Henry W. Phillips	13,812	31 July 1991
Non-executive Members:		
Mrs. Rachel P. James	5,000	31 August 1994
Mr. John E. Lloyd	5,000	31 August 1994
Rev. Thomas A. Thomas	5,000	31 October 1992
Dr. Edward R. Verrier Jones	5,000	31 October 1992
Mrs. Margaret Thomas	5,000	31 October 1992
POWYS		
Chairman:		
The Hon. Mrs. R. H. P. Price	13,812	31 July 1994
Non-executive Members:		
Major Michael W. F. Dyer	5,000	31 October 1992
Mr. Hugh Hudson Davies	5,000	31 August 1994
Mr. David G. Margetts	5,000	31 August 1994
Mr. Richard G. S. Mills	5,000	31 October 1992
Mr. P. R. Swanson	5,000	31 October 1992
SOUTH GLAMORGAN		
Chairman:		
Mr. Alun S. Jones	17,610	31 July 1992
Non-executive Members:		
Mr. Nigel J. Butcher	5,000	31 October 1992
Professor Sir Herbert L. Duthie	5,000	31 August 1994
Mr. Simon M. Jones	5,000	31 October 1992
Mr. John W. Phillips	5,000	31 August 1994
Lady Roisin M. Pill	5,000	31 August 1994
Professor Norman R. I. Robertson	5,000	31 October 1992
WEST GLAMORGAN		
Chairman:		
Mr. P. D. Allen, CBE	17,610	31 July 1991
Non-executive Members:		
M. G. Shellard	5,000	31 August 1994
Professor L. Bloom	5,000	31 October 1992
Mrs. Carolyn Kirby	5,000	31 October 1992
Mr. C. C. Lea	5,000	31 August 1994
Mr. M. Rosser	5,000	31 October 1992
HEALTH PROMOTION AUTHORITY FOR WALES		
Chairman:		
Dr. S. Smail	15,125	31 March 1992
Non-executive Members:		
Dr. B. N. C. Littlepage	5,000	31 March 1993
Mrs. I. Train	5,000	31 March 1993
Mr. R. Cuthbertson	5,000	31 March 1993
Mr. J. D. Griffiths	5,000	31 March 1993
Mr. J. Thomas	5,000	31 March 1993

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what are *(a)* the number of patients on waiting lists for admission to each district general hospital within Mid-Glamorgan for each specialty; and what is the average time on the list and *(b)* the number of patients waiting to see each consultant; and what is the average waiting time.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: The most recent information available on in-patient and day case waiting lists and median waiting times, analysed by hospital and specialty, is published in "Welsh Hospital Waiting List Bulletin 1991: No. 2," which is available in the Library of the House.

Information on consultant waiting lists and waiting times is not held centrally. However, the recently published patients charter sets out the Government's plans to improve the quality and range of information on health care services in Wales with locally published waiting times for out-patient, day care and in-patient treatment by hospital, specialty and consultant.

In support of the priority attached to reducing waiting times, the waiting times initiative received record funding of £1·3 million in 1991. In addition, over £2 million has been allocated to the Department's unique treatment centre initiative which aims to treat Welsh patients waiting for treatment for certain key disabling conditions. Four treatment centres have been opened since December 1989. These measures, together with the increased efficiency resulting from the reforms of the health service will lead to downward pressure on waiting lists. In addition, all health authorities in Wales are committed to the waiting times targets set out in the "Agenda for Action" which will deliver a progressively improving service for patients.

Schools Inspectorate

Mr. Rowlands: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he will list those who have to date served as Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, the term they served and the terms and remit of their appointments.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The principal functions of Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools in Wales are to advise the Secretary of State on the quality and standards of education in Wales and to manage the inspectorate in Wales.

Since 1964, the post has been a permanent appointment within the Welsh Office. Prior to that the post was with the Whitehall Department responsible for education in England and Wales. Those with chief inspector responsibilities since the post was established in 1907 have been:

Sir O. M. Edwards
Sir Alfred Davies
Sir P. Watkins
Mr. G. P. Williams
Dr. W. J. Williams
Dr. W. J. Thomas
Mr. W. Ll. Lloyd CB (1952-72)
Mr. E. O. Davies (1972-82)
Mr. I. R. Lloyd (1982-90)
Mr. R. L. James (1990-)

Dates for the earlier chief inspectors are not immediately available.

Sports Clubs (Rate Relief)

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the cost in 1990-91 of the 75 per cent. offset from the national non-domestic pool consequent to the granting of discretionary rate relief to voluntary sports clubs indicated by his survey into charging authorities' use of discretionary rate relief under section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Latest local authority returns indicate that in 1990-91 the cost of the 75 per cent. offset from the non-domestic rating pool consequent to the granting of discretionary rate relief was £486,249. This relates to all non-profit making organisations occupying properties under section 47 2*(b)* and *(c)* of the Act including property occupied for religious, philanthropic, scientific, welfare and recreational purposes.

The survey of relief given to voluntary sports clubs related to numbers of properties, not the cost of the relief granted.

Cardiff Bay Development Corporation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the Cardiff Bay development corporation concerning the upholding by the Advertising Standards Authority on 6 December of the complaint against the misleading nature of the current "Cardiff Bay before and after" advertising campaign concerning the proposed barrage designed by the Travis Dale Partnership; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: None. Individual advertising campaigns are a matter for the corporation.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the annual grant-in-aid to the Cardiff Bay development corporation for each financial year since its inception.

Mr. David Hunt: Cardiff Bay development corporation has received the following annual grant in aid since it was established on 3 April 1987:

	£ million
1987-88	11·5
1988-89	18·3
1989-90	29·0
1990-91	33·6

South Glamorgan TEC

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what consultations he has had with the chairman of the South Glamorgan training and enterprise council concerning the numbers of unemployed youngsters under 18 years of age not so far placed in a job or training place under the youth training guarantee; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply given to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Welsh Office, on 14 November 1991, *Official Report*, column *643*.

Agriculture

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proposals he has for the reorganisation of the agriculture service provided by his Department; which offices will be affected; what are the employment consequences; and what assessment he has made of the likely effect of such changes on the extent and quality of agricultural advice available in the Principality.

Mr. David Hunt: I have already announced that ADAS will operate as a joint agency serving England and Wales when it comes into existence on 1 April 1992. I have also announced that the Welsh headquarters of the agency will remain at Trawsgoed, Aberystwyth, and that there will be two business centres at Cardiff and Ruthin. The agency will continue to occupy its other offices when it is established and no decisions will be taken on its longer-term office structure until the implications of any changes have been fully considered. I have every confidence that the agency will provide an efficient and high-quality service to all its customers.

Housing for Wales

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what resources will be made available to Housing for Wales to support development in the financial year 1992-93.

Mr. David Hunt: In gross terms the resources available to Housing for Wales will amount to over £123·4 million. Taking account of associated private sector funding, the overall programme will be worth over £174 million next year. Of this, I expect that over £45 million will be devoted to housing in rural areas. Compared to provision over the three years up to and including 1991-92, plans for the next three provide an uplift of over 38 per cent. in cash terms. This means that excluding the likely additional benefit of in-year transfers from local authorities, Housing for Wales' basic annual production target can be raised by over 16 per cent. from 3,000 to 3,500 units. As regards current expenditure, I shall be making available £6 million in 1992-93 to cover the costs of the special needs management allowance scheme which is of particular importance in supporting the housing component of our strategies for the vulnerable groups in Wales. This amounts to a 25 per cent. increase over provision for 1991-92.

ENERGY

Electricity (Theft)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what discussions he has had with the chairman of the electricity companies about the levels of theft of electricity; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend and I meet the chairmen from time to time and we discuss a range of issues.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what research his Department is funding into the development of technology to reduce the level of theft of electricity in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: None. Research into the development of technology to reduce the level of theft of electrictity is a matter for electricity supply companies.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any plans to introduce increased penalties for the theft of electricity; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: I have been asked to reply. We have no plans to increase the maximum penalty of five years imprisonment for the offence of abstracting electricity.

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secetary of State for Energy what estimates he has made of the cost, including both surveying costs and loss of generating capacity, of the submission of the revised safety case by Nuclear Electric to the nuclear installations inspectorate.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: This is a commercial matter for Nuclear Electric plc.

Nuclear Facilities (Decommissioning)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what studies have been commissioned by Her Majesty's Government into appraising the costs and economics of decommissioning nuclear facilities.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My Department has commissioned three studies into the economic aspects of decommissioning nuclear facilities.

For the study by Nuclear Services Group into British Nuclear Fuel plc's estimates of its decommissioning costs I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 15 February 1990 at column *329*.

The other studies were carried out by the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority into the Central Electricity Generating Board estimates of its decommissioning costs and by Ernst and Young to compare the methodologies by which BNFL, CEGB and the South of Scotland Electricity Board's decommissioning provisions were made to ensure consistency of basis.

The contents of these reports are commercially confidential.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when Her Majesty's Government expect to finalise their decision on the proposal by Nuclear Electric to establish a deferred safe store for some categories of nuclear waste.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Government are currently considering Nuclear Electric's decommissioning proposals. I am unable to predict when this will be completed.

DEFENCE

Truck Cargo Vehicles

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the contract for the truck cargo heavy duty vehicles on order for his Department was signed; with which company it was signed; and what is the expected delivery date of these vehicles.

Mr. Alan Clark: A contract was placed with Brown and Root Vickers Ltd. in March 1988. Deliveries will be completed by the end of the next financial year.

Military Nuclear Programme

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether safeguarded uranium has ever been used to fuel the military reactors at Calder Hall and Chapelcross.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The reactors have not been fuelled by safeguarded uranium.

Mr. Cohen: to ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the last date that uranium originating from *(a)* South Africa and *(b)* Namibia was delivered to the United Kingdom, in any form, for use in the military nuclear programme.

Mr. Alan Clark: It is not our normal practice to give details of the procurement arrangements for our nuclear programme.

Nuclear Weapons Safety

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what studies have been commissioned by his Department in the last 10 years on nuclear weapons safety.

Mr. Alan Clark: The safety of our nuclear weapons is kept under continuous review.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what secretarial and administrative support is being given to the nuclear weapons safety review;

(2) what is the total budget for his Department's review of nuclear weapons safety.

Mr. Alan Clark: The working group on nuclear weapons safety is being given whatever resources and support it requires in order to carry out its task.

M25 (Incident)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the incident involving vehicles belonging to his Department near junction 21 of the M25 on 1 December.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A section of the motorway between junctions 19 and 21 on the M25 was closed by the local civil police using normal police powers after a vehicle in a MOD convoy suffered a mechanical breakdown. There was no danger to the public, police or military personnel. The inconvenience caused to other road users is greatly regretted.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the registration number of the vehicle belonging to his Department that was damaged in the incident near junction 21 of the M25 on 1 December.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: For security reasons, it is not our practice to disclose the registration numbers of military vehicles.

Atomic Co-ordinating Office, Washington

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the role and function of the atomic co-ordinating office, Washington; how many personnel are assigned to it; what is its annual budget; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The role and function of the atomic co-ordinating office, Washington, is to ensure UK/US compliance with arrangements laid down in the 1958 "Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the United States of America for Co-operation on the Uses of Atomic Energy for Mutual Defence Purposes", the terms of which are laid out in Cmnd 537. Six personnel are presently assigned to this office. It is not our practice to disclose the annual budgets of individual units.

Nuclear Submarines

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether there has been any break in the deterrent patrol since 1979.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many man days work have been carried out in inspection, repair and safety work on decommissioned nuclear-powered submarines in each year since 1983.

Mr. Alan Clark: To date only HMS Dreadnought is fully decommissioned. She is closely monitored to ensure her continued radiological safety and approximately 3,500 man days have so far been spent on inspection, repair and safety work since her removal from service in 1982.

Aldermaston

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date construction work on the A90 building at AWE Aldermaston commenced.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Construction work on the A90 building at AWE started in March 1983.

Nuclear Test Ban Treaty

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the annual expenditure committed by his Department to resolving outstanding problems of verification of a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The most important verification technology is seismology. Government expenditure on unclassified work in this area for the current year is £1·5 million. The Government also undertake classified work in related areas, details of which cannot be revealed on grounds of national security.

Army Units (Operating Costs)

Mr. Churchill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he has anything to add to his answer of 15 November, *Official Report*, column *703*, on operating costs of Army units.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No, other than to note that the *Official Report* contains a typographical error: the estimated annual operating cost of a TA infantry battalion in the United Kingdom for 1991-92 is £2 million.

Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what impact his announcement of the cessation of routine carriage of tactical nuclear weapons on Royal Navy ships will have on his policy of neither confirming nor denying the presence of nuclear weapons on those vessels.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Secretary of State announced in September that our ships will no longer carry tactical nuclear weapons in normal circumstances. It remains the Government's policy neither to confirm nor to deny the presence of nuclear weapons in specific locations at specific times.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy to make public details of correspondence sent to his Department critical of nuclear weapons in cases where the authors make explicit their willingness for such disclosure.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: No.

Armoured Vehicles

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he intends to complete his review of the quantity of armoured personnel carriers and heavy armoured combat vehicles that he plans to deploy by 1995.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I expect the key elements of the review of armoured personnel carrier and heavy armoured combat vehicle numbers to be completed shortly.

Defence Budget

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what change he is considering in his policy on the release of information relating to the long-term costings of the defence budget.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: None.

Housing

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what communications have taken place with the Association of District Councils regarding the provision of housing for ex-service personnel.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces has written to Lady Anson, chairman of the Association of District Councils.

Equipment Deployment

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if, pursuant to his answer of 3 December, *Official Report*, column *88*, on future defence equipment, he will state the types of main battle tanks, armoured infantry fighting vehicles, artillery pieces, combat aircraft, and attack helicopters that he plans to deploy by 1995.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The types of equipment covered by my answer of 3 December at column *88* are:

	Equipment
AIFV	Certain variants of Warrior
Artillery pieces	MLRS, 155 mm AS90 (replacing M109), 155 mm FH70 and 105 mm Light Gun
Combat aircraft	Canberra, Harrier, Jaguar, Tornado ADV and Tornado IDS
Attack helicopters	Lynx/TOW, Lynx/LBH, Gazelle and Scout

By 1995 our plans envisage the deployment of variants of Chieftain, Challenger 1 and Challenger 2.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will state the number and type of transport helicopter, anti-aircraft missile systems, anti-tank missile systems and transport vehicles currently deployed with the Army and the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The RAF currently deploys the following transport helicopters:

	Number
Gazelle	29
Chinook	32
Wessex	50
Puma	42

Army Lynx, Gazelle and Scout helicopters also serve in a transport role as necessary.

There are three air defence missile systems, Blowpipe, Javelin and Rapier, currently in service with regular and TA air defence regiments and the RAF regiment. There are three anti-tank missile systems, Milan, Swingfire and TOW, in service with the Army, the first with all regular infantry and Ghurka battalions, and TA infantry battalions committed to NATO roles; the second with regular medium reconnaissance regiments; the third with the Army Air Corps.

Both services employ large and varied fleets of transport and logistic vehicles, the numbers for which could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Quality Assurance Unit

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consideration has been given to the relocation of the quality assurance unit to Stockton.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: My Department announced on 6 August that the "Options for Change" reductions had made it necessary to review the plan announced in 1989 to relocate the Ministry of Defence's quality assurance staff to the Preston Farm site on Teesside. Our studies will be completed as quickly as possible.

"Options for Change"

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 3 December, *Official Report*, columns *84-86*, whether he will list the number and rank of service personnel currently deployed at each of the bases which are due to be closed or reorganised as a result of "Options for Change".

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The answer could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Regional Administration

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received concerning the restructuring of his Ministry's regional administration; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The Department has received a number of representations, principally from staff representatives, about the restructuring of its regional administration organisation. It stands by its conclusion that the concentration of grant and subsidy work and other administrative functions at nine regional service centres will significantly improve the cost effectiveness of its operations, including the services it provides to its customers.

Set-aside

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what studies have been undertaken by his Ministry covering the relative effectiveness of set-aside schemes as against conventional subsidies in connection with the problem of surplus production; and if he will publish them.

Mr. Curry: Set-aside was an integral part of the 1988 package of agricultural stabilisers which introduced important price cuts for arable crops. It would be misleading to assess the 1988 scheme in isolation from this context.

In 1989 the Department commissioned Reading university to undertake a socio-economic evaluation of the set-aside policy. This included a simple comparison of the Exchequer costs of set-aside with the estimated marginal disposal costs saved on production forgone for the first year of the scheme. The study did not seek to assess the effectiveness of the scheme in the light of the wider considerations outlined above.

Reading university will be publishing its findings early next year.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list, in chronological order, the changes, amendments or extensions to the set-aside scheme that have been made since its introduction in 1988; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The set-aside scheme was implemented in Great Britain through the Set-Aside Regulations 1988. These regulations have been amended three times.

The main changes introduced by the Set-Aside (Amendment) Regulations 1989 were to

(i) extend the definition of arable crops covered by the scheme

(ii) amend the definition of arable land to allow land in bare fallow to count towards the base area

(iii) permit temporary grassland to be set-aside in certain circumstances

(iv) stipulate that the set-aside area may not exceed the total area of relevant arable land registered for the reference period

(v) add a definition of grazing land

(vi) allow the appropriate Minister to authorise the application of inorganic fertilisers on set-aside land in certain circumstances.

The main changes introduced by the Set-Aside (Amendment) Regulations 1990 were to

(i) introduce a new grazed fallow option

(ii) introduce new environmental management conditions and extend the range of environmental features to be protected under the fallow options and increase the relevant grants to reflect this

(iii) reduce the level of grant payable when more than 100 hectares and more than 75 per cent. of the base area are fallowed

(iv) allow a modest level of flexibility in the amount of land set-aside annually under the rotational fallow option.

The Set-Aside (Amendment) Regulations 1991 amended the definition of less-favoured areas for the purposes of the scheme.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the numbers of landowners in England who are currently receiving annual payments under the set-aside scheme of *(a)* between £5,000 and £9,999, *(b)* between £10,000 and £19,999, *(c)* between £20,000 and £29,999, *(d)* between £30,000 and £39,999, *(e)* between £40,000 and £49,000, *(f)* between £50,000 and £59,999, *(g)* between £60,000 and £69,999 and *(h)* £70,000 and over.

Mr. Gummer: For set-aside participants who joined in the first two years of the scheme, the number of set-aside agreements recorded centrally in England is: under £5,000—1,378, and over £5,000—840. The figures break down as follows:

Annual payment	Number of agreements
Less than £5,000	1,378
£5,000—£9,999	444
£10,000—£19,999	267
£20,000—£29,999	76
£30,000—£39,999	25
£40,000—£49,999	15
£50,000—£59,999	3
£60,000—£69,999	4
£70,000 and over	6

These figures include payments to both landowners and tenants. Information on the payments to landowners alone and to participants who joined in the third year of the scheme is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will place in the Library a standard copy of each of the separate items of correspondence sent from his Department to applicants entering into the set-aside scheme; and if he will ensure that such correspondence includes all letters from initial acknowledgement to final payment.

Mr. Maclean: I have today placed copies of all the standard forms and letters in the Library.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many set-aside schemes have been monitored by *(a)* aerial survey and *(b)* ground inspection; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: It is not my Department's policy to publish detailed information about its inspection arrangements as this could seriously impede effective enforcement.

A combination of aerial photography and satellite imagery is used to check the base year registration details for a significant proportion of applications each year. In addition the intention is to make a physical inspection of all set-aside land at least once during the course of a five-year agreement. Additional inspections would be carried out where this was judged necessary.

The European Commission is anxious to extend the use of remote sensing as an enforcement mechanism. My Department is currently considering a joint trial with the Commission to assess the scope for using this technique more widely.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will conduct a review into the way in which set-aside applications are processed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: Our systems are kept under continual review.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proportion of set-aside applications are monitored and inspected prior to approval; what mechanism is used; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: All set-aside applications are checked to ensure that they have been properly completed and that the proposal to set land aside meets the relevant conditions of the scheme. Physical site inspections, aerial photography and satellite imagery are used as appropriate to confirm that the land concerned is eligible and was down to arable crops in the qualifying base year. In the five-year set-aside scheme, my Department also aims to carry out a physical inspection at least once during the period of the set-aside agreement. Under the temporary one-year set-aside scheme, a proportion of the land entered into the scheme is subject to physical inspection. It would not be appropriate to publish full details of these arrangements as this could seriously impede effective enforcement.

It is my Department's policy to recover grant, in whole or in part, if a deliberate breach of the rules is identified at any stage during the period of a set-aside agreement.

Ozone Depletion

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many staff in his Department are working full-time on the effects of ozone depletion on the United Kingdom agricultural crops; and at what grades they are employed.

Mr. Maclean: The duties of a number of Ministry staff are concerned with air pollution issues affecting agricultural crops, although none works exclusively on ozone depletion.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list all studies commissioned or undertaken by his Department on the effects of ozone depletion on the United Kingdom agricultural crop yield; and what plans he has for future research.

Mr. Maclean: Against the background of the Department of the Environment's continuing programme of work on the effects of ozone depletion on plants, the Department is considering whether any complementary studies of the effects on agricultural crops would be appropriate.

Environmental Protection

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with the National Rivers Authority over proposals to establish a new environmental protection agency.

Mr. Maclean: There have been informal meetings with the NRA, but it would be premature to go further until responses have been received to the Government's consultation paper setting out the background to their plans for an environment agency and the main options for realising them. The NRA has recently put forward its views which will be studied carefully.

Badgers Act 1991

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy not to issue general licences under section 4 of the Badgers Act 1991 to those claiming to be in pursuit of foxes; when he expects to announce his policy on the issue of section 4 licences; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: There are no powers to issue general licences under section 4 of the Badgers Act 1991. I expect to issue shortly a consultation document setting out our proposals for licensing under section 4 of this Act.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will ensure that no licences under

section 4 of the Badgers Act 1991 are issued to individuals who have been convicted of any offence of animal cruelty or any offence under wildlife protection legislation or to organisations employing people convicted of such offences.

Mr. Maclean: In deciding whether to issue licences under section 4 of the Badgers Act 1991 account will be taken of any previous convictions under the Protection of Animals Act 1991, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Badgers Act 1973.

Seafood

Mr. Ashley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether, in any fishing areas in Britain, consumers are exposed to unsafe doses of radiation through eating seafood.

Mr. Maclean: No.

Pollution Research

Mr. Frank Cook: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food up to what distance from the United Kingdom coastline his Department monitors the seawater and sediments for radioactive pollution; what contribution his Department makes towards establishing a scientific research base for the European Communities in controlling oceanic and sea pollution; and if he will make a statement on the future of pollution research conducted by his Department.

Mr. Maclean: The Ministry's fisheries radiological inspectorate carries out regular monitoring of seawater and sediments for radioactivity, and the results are published, with maps indicating areas covered, in the annual series of reports entitled "Radioactivity in Surface and Coastal Waters of the British Isles", copies of which are in the Library of the House. In addition to routine monitoring of coastal sediments, we have a full programme of offshore monitoring. Areas covered include the North sea, the Irish sea, Scottish waters, the English channel and the Bristol channel. The Ministry contributes its substantial expertise on marine pollution issues to EC activities in this field. This has included contributions to project MARINA, designed to assess exposure for the EC population to radiation as a consequence of disposals of radioactive waste into member states' waters. The Ministry also collaborates on projects within the EC's radiological protection and marine science and technology programmes. In total we plan to spend some £3·9 million on research and development related to aquatic environment protection in 1992-93. This is in areas such as the impact of riverine inputs, new potential pollutants, the impact of fishing on the marine environment and the relationship between pollution and fish disease, as well as on matters related to radioactivity and nuclear wastes. The programme is closely co-ordinated with that of other countries not only through the EC, but through other international organisations, such as the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas and the North sea task force.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 13 December 1991

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Botswana

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what British aid funds have been used to fund Botswana's wildlife activities since 1 January 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: We have funded the salary and most allowances of the deputy director of wildlife since February 1990 at a cost of around £54,500 in the last complete financial year. We are also providing three United Kingdom training awards this academic year at an estimated cost of £26,000.

Following a review of our support to the natural resources sector, we shall be considering with the Government of Botswana an appraisal mission to identify a programme aimed at promoting environmentally sustainable management of livestock and wildlife. This will be pursued at the bilateral aid talks being held on 12 December.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what funding is given by Britain directly or indirectly to the deputy director of wildlife in Botswana.

Mrs. Chalker: The salary and most allowances of the deputy director of wildlife in Botswana are funded under the aid programme at a cost of some £54,500 in the last complete financial year.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what studies the Overseas Development Administration has contributed to in respect of the culling of elephants in Botswana.

Mrs. Chalker: We have financed no studies in respect of the culling of elephants in Botswana, but we are financing the salary and most allowances of the deputy director of wildlife, who can be expected to be associated with studies of this subject.

PRIME MINISTER

Council Tax

Mr. Battle: To ask the Prime Minister if he will co-ordinate an examination by the Secretary of State for the Environment and Secretary of State for Social Security of the impact upon claimants in receipt of family credit and disability working allowance, of increasing the taper for the proposed council tax rebates to 20 per cent.; and if he will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: Such an examination has already taken place. The overall effect on people who receive family credit or disability working allowance will be very small.

Non-ministerial Public Bodies

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 28 November, *Official Report*, column *614*, what is the definition of executive duties used when deciding whether a person is carrying out such duties in a political party.

The Prime Minister: There is no formal definition. The rule is applied by Departments after consideration of the nature of the particular post held.

ENVIRONMENT

Housing Investment

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what has been, at constant 1991-92 prices, the volume of local authority housing investment for each year since 1979-80, giving the outturn figures up to 1990-91 and the estimated figures for 1991-92, by region, and distinguishing new housebuilding, renovation of local authority stock, private sector grants and others.

Mr. Yeo: I have placed a table providing the information requested in the Library.

Homelessness

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what special help is being given by his Department to local authorities to help homeless people now sleeping rough; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Yeo: My Department is providing, through Single Homelessness in London, a London boroughs working party, 300 places in shelters between December and March, at an estimated cost of £1 million. SHIL has developed a co-ordinated strategy of emergency shelters, transportation and support for those sleeping rough in central London during the winter.

This programme is part of my Department's £96 million rough sleepers initiative in central London, which has provided 500 places in hostels, with another 400 to come; 500 bedspaces in flats and houses leased from private owners, with a further 180 to come, and 370 places —out of an anticipated 2,000—in permanent housing.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many copies of his departmental planning guidance notes on renewable energy projects have been printed in the first print run; and if he will make it his policy to arrange for the widespread distribution of this document to relevant parties and major public libraries.

Mr. Yeo *[holding answer 12 December 1991]:* My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning announced on 5 December, *Official Report*, col. *185*, the issue for public consultation in England and Wales of draft planning policy guidance about renewable energy. A copy of the consultation paper has been sent to over 300 organisations and individuals, including local authority associations, professional and planning bodies, and conservation and energy organisations, inviting comments by 12 February 1992.

Copies of the consultation paper have been placed in the Library. Copies of the draft guidance may also be obtained, on request, from the Department of the Environment, room C13/13, 2 Marsham street, London SW1P, 3EB, or from the Welsh Office, room G040, Cathays park, Cardiff, CF1 3NQ.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish a table showing the level of rate support grant/revenue support grant for local authorities for the years 1979-80 to 1992-93 showing *(a)* the cash figure in £ billion, *(b)* the percentage of actual local authority expenditure covered by RSG and *(c)* the sum expressed in constant prices where 1979-80 = 100.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 12 December 1991]:* the available information is as follows:

	Rate support grant		*Total expenditure*		*Rate support grant as a percentage of total expenditure*
	Cash (£ billion)	*1981-82 prices (£ billion)*	*Cash (£ billion)*	*1981-82 prices (£ billion)*	*Per cent.*
1981-82	9·0	9·0	18·2	18·2	49·5
1982-83	9·0	8·4	19·7	18·4	45·7
1983-84	9·1	8·1	20·8	18·6	43·6
1984-85	9·1	7·7	21·3	18·1	42·7
1985-86	9·2	7·4	21·7	17·4	42·3
1986-87	9·1	7·1	23·8	18·5	38·1
1987-88	9·5	7·0	25·7	19·0	36·9
1988-89	9·7	6·7	27·7	19·1	35·0
1989-90	9·6	6·2	29·4	19·0	32·6

	Revenue support grant		*Net revenue expenditure*		*Revenue support grant as a percentage of net revenue expenditure*
	Cash (£ billion)	*1981-82 prices (£ billion)*	*Cash (£ billion)*	*1981-82 prices (£ billion)*	*Per cent.*
1990-91	9·5	5·7	33·2	19·8	28·5
1991-92	9·7	5·4	36·3	20·2	26·6

Notes:

(1) Rate support grant and revenue support grant are not directly comparable as they derive from two different financial systems.

(2) Total expenditure and net revenue expenditure are not directly comparable as they derive from two different financial systems.

(3) Under the local government finance system introduced in 1990 the level of revenue support grant is affected, inter alia, by the amount of non-domestic rates distributed from the national pool. In 1990-91 and 1991-92 the total amount received by the authorities was £10·4 billion and £12·4 billion respectively (£6·2 billion and £6·9 billion at 1981-82 prices). For comparison in 1989-90, the total income from non-domestic rates was £9·6 billion (£6·2 billion at 1981-82 prices).

(4) In 1991-92 community charge grant is also being paid, amounting to about £4·8 million (£2·7 million at 1981-82 prices).

(5) The 1992-93 provisional revenue support grant settlement is £16·6 billion (£8·9 billion at 1981-82 prices).

(6) Information is not available for years before 1981-82.

TRANSPORT

Light Dues

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those member states of the EC which will be charging light dues after 1991.

Mr. McLoughlin: Within the EEC I believe that only the United Kingdom, Ireland and Greece have systems of light dues; but that Denmark charge their own flag vessels for the use of their Decca radionavigation system. I am unaware of any changes in the position after 1991.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures will be taken against the possibility of outbreaks of fire in the channel tunnel when it is in use.

Mr. Freeman: The matter has recently been covered in the inquiry by the Home Affairs Committee into fire, safety and policing of the channel tunnel. I understand that the Committee will be publishing its report on 19 December 1991 as HC 23.

Merchant Shipping

Mr. Grylls: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proposals the Government are considering to assist British merchant shipping following the defence review; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: A statement on the review of the availability of British flag shipping for defence purposes will be made as soon as that review is complete.

Dock Labour Scheme

Mr. Bell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what checks were carried out by his Department with Humberside Holdings Ltd. or Humberside Sea and Land Services Ltd. in relation to the abolition of the dock labour scheme to ensure that compensation payments were made only in accordance with redundancy conditions; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: None. Neither firm was an employer of registered dockworkers.

Mr. Bell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will state the full amounts of compensation recovered under the liquidation arrangements entered into consequent upon the abolition of the dock labour scheme as at 31 July 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: A total of £497,604.

Mr. Bell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the cost to the Tees and Hartlepool port authority of redundancy payments made by the authority under the dock labour scheme covering the years 1989, 1990 and 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The following is the information.

Year	*£*
1989	2,883,500
1990	304,000
1991	3,163,500

Mr. Bell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of the full redundancy costs was borne by his Department in liquidation cases, and for what per cent. of the redundancy payments made on the abolition of the dock labour scheme did they register as non-preferential creditors; what amounts were received from the assets of Lindsey Dock Services Ltd. and John Sutcliffe Consolidated Stevedores Ltd. against redundancy paid by these two companies under the dock labour scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Under the Dock Work (Compensation Payments Scheme) Regulations 1989, the Department meets the full cost of compensation in such cases, and becomes a non-preferential creditor in respect of 50 per cent., representing the employer's share. It has received an interim dividend of £75,712 from the liquidators for Lindsey Dock Services Ltd. and none so far in respect of John Sutcliffe Consolidated Stevedores Ltd.

Mr. Bell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many redundancies there were within the Tees and Hartlepool port authority in the years 1989, 1990 and 1991 following the abolition of the dock labour scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The THPA employed 445 registered dockworkers at the time of abolition. Redundancies have been as follows:

	Number
1989	183
1990	18
1991	192

Mr. Bell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many redundancies there were within Immingham and Grimsby docks in the years 1989, 1990 and 1991 following the ending of the dock labour scheme; how many registered dock workers were employed by Lindsey Dock Services Ltd. and John Sutcliff Consolidated Stevedores Ltd.; how many jobs were lost on the liquidation of these companies; what was the amount outstanding in severance liabilities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: There were 498 redundancies at Grimsby and Immingham in 1989, including the entire workforces of Lindsey Dock Services (106) and John Sutcliffe Consolidated Stevedores (226). Total compensation received by employees of the two firms was £3,028,000 and £7,272,000 respectively. Subsequent redundancies have numbered 24 in 1990 and 10 in 1991.

Bus Services, London

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many routes that have been put out to tender by London Buses Ltd. have been won by private bus operators.

Mr. Freeman: Of London Transport's 529 existing bus routes, 223 have been contracted out by competitive tender; 100 are run by private bus operators, and 123 by London Buses Ltd. Subsidiaries.

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what would be the cost of setting up a new bus executive for London.

Mr. Freeman: No estimates have yet been made of the costs involved in setting up a new London bus executive. However, the Government see no reason why the cost of establishing a new executive should be significantly greater or less than the cost of other options canvassed in our consultation paper "A Bus Strategy for London".

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to publish the responses received to his consultation paper, "A Bus Strategy for London", how many responses were received and from whom; what was the proportion supporting and opposing the creation of a new bus executive for London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: We received just over 200 official responses to the consultation paper "A Bus Strategy for London". A list of respondents has already been placed in the Library. It is not the Government's intention to publish responses. There was more support amongst respondents for creating a passenger transport authority for London or for designating London Transport as bus authority than there was for the creation of a non-departmental public body. However, with very few exceptions, those who advocated either of the former approaches were also opposed to deregulation. The creation of a new London bus executive will give London a body dedicated to bus activities, without distraction, and without any potential conflict of interest.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Examination Results

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to publish the analysis of the summer 1991 examination results.

Mr. Eggar: Assuming that schools and LEAs respond promptly and accurately to the survey, the first results should be available for publication in March. Full results should be published around the end of 1992.

School Transport

Mr. Barry Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the average percentage cost of school transport expressed as a total of each education authority's total education budget.

Mr. Fallon: For 1989-90, the latest year for which actual spending information is available, each local education authority's spending on transport from home to school expressed as a percentage of its total net recurrent expenditure on education was as follows:

Home to school transport[1] as a percentage of net recurrent expenditure[2] on education, 1989-90

LEA	*Per cent.[3]*
ILEA	0·51
Barking	0·53
Barnet	0·35
Bexley	0·70
Brent	0·72
Bromley	1·21
Croydon	0·89
Ealing	1·54
Enfield	n/a
Haringey	n/a
Harrow	1·22
Havering	1·08
Hillingdon	1·34
Hounslow	n/a
Kingston-upon Thames	0·99
Merton	0·13
Newham	1·54
Redbridge	1·29
Richmond upon Thames	1·07
Sutton	1·28
Waltham Forest	1·11
Birmingham	0·84
Coventry	0·56
Dudley	0·68
Sandwell	0·73
Solihull	1·38
Walsall	0·53
Wolverhampton	0·47
Knowsley	0·56
Liverpool	1·01
St. Helens	0·88
Sefton	0·88
Wirral	1·26
Bolton	0·99
Bury	0·57
Manchester	n/a
Oldham	0·63
Rochdale	0·92
Salford	1·51
Stockport	n/a
Tameside	1·24
Trafford	0·99
Wigan	0·60
Barnsley	0·36
Doncaster	0·58
Rotherham	0·83
Sheffield	0·52
Bradford	0·91
Calderdale	1·04
Kirklees	0·88
Leeds	1·23
Wakefield	n/a
Gateshead	0·73
Newcastle Upon Tyne	0·77
North Tyneside	n/a
South Tyneside	0·32
Sunderland	0·45
Isles of Scilly	1·20
Avon	0·46
Bedfordshire	2·21
Berkshire	1·62
Buckinghamshire	2·00
Cambridgeshire	2·93
Cheshire	1·65
Cleveland	0·50
Cornwall	2·34
Cumbria	2·57
Derbyshire	1·49
Devon	2·97
Dorset	2·53
Durham	1·87
East Sussex	1·67
Essex	2·45
Gloucestershire	2·69
Hampshire	1·72
Hereford & Worcester	1·69
Hertfordshire	1·58
Humberside	1·56
Isle of Wight	2·27
Kent	2·96
Lancashire	1·48
Leicestershire	1·94
Lincolnshire	2·53
Norfolk	3·35
North Yorkshire	2·86
Northamptonshire	1·82
Northumberland	2·58
Nottinghamshire	1·08
Oxfordshire	2·65
Shropshire	2·51
Somerset	2·43
Staffordshire	1·46
Suffolk	0·23
Surrey	2·49
Warwickshire	2·14
West Sussex	1·90
Wiltshire	2·30
ENGLAND AVERAGE	1·48

[1] Local education authorities' costs of their own drivers and vehicles, and their payments in respect of public transport and contract hire, used to transport pupils from home to nursery, primary and secondary schools and to special education schools or other establishments.

[2] Net recurrent expenditure on education includes total expenditure other than costs of financing capital expenditure, less income other than from specific grants.

[3] The percentages are derived from authorities' returns of their spending to the Department of the Environment.

n/a indicates that a return was not received.

Grammar Schools

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the number of maintained grammar schools in England in *(a)* June 1970, *(b)* February 1974, *(c)* May 1979 and *(d)* the latest available date.

Mr. Eggar: Information relating to the precise dates requested is not available. However, the numbers of maintained grammar schools in England as at January 1970, 1974, 1979 and 1991 are given in the following table.

The 1991 figure (which is provisional) includes grant-maintained grammar schools. Direct grant grammar schools (which ceased to exist as such in 1980) are excluded from the figures for 1970, 1974 and 1979.

	Maintained Grammar Schools
1970	1,038
1974	675
1979	254
1991	148

Education Exhibitions

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish *(a)* details of the total estimated cost and staffing requirements of his Department's education exhibitions, *(b)* a full list of the 25 towns and cities in England which the exhibition will visit, *(c)* the dates when the exhibitions will visit each location and *(d)* the duration of each visit.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The total estimated cost of the "Time for School" touring exhibition including staffing is £170,000. A list of the 25 towns and cities to be visited including the dates and duration follows:

Location	*Dates*	
Birmingham	2, 3, 4 January 1992	3 days
Stoke-on-Trent	8 to 9 January 1992	2 days
Shrewsbury	10 to 11 January 1992	2 days
Manchester	15 to 16 January 1992	2 days
Preston	17 to 18 January 1992	2 days
Wood Green, London	22 to 23 January 1992	2 days
Edgware	24 to 25 January 1992	2 days
Luton	29 to 30 January 1992	2 days
Stevenage	31 January to 1 February 1992	2 days
Swindon	5 to 6 February 1992	2 days
Cheltenham[1]	7 to 8 February 1992	2 days
Leicester	12 to 13 February 1992	2 days
Nottingham	14 to 15 February 1992	2 days
Middlesbrough	19 to 20 February 1992	2 days
Sheffield[1]	21 to 22 February 1992	2 days
Doncaster	26 to 27 February 1992	2 days
Leeds	28 to 29 February 1992	2 days
Newcastle[1]	4 to 5 March 1992	2 days
Gateshead	6 to 7 March 1992	2 days
Skelmersdale	11 to 12 March 1992	2 days
Warrington	13 to 14 March 1992	2 days
Eastbourne	18 to 19 March 1992	2 days
Southampton	20 to 21 March 1992	2 days
Telford	25 to 26 March 1992	2 days
Brierley Hill, Dudley	27 to 28 March 1992	2 days

[1] Subject to final confirmation.

Schools (Capital Allocations)

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to announce his decision in respect of capital allocation for schools.

Mr. Fallon: We have already announced that £524 million will be allocated for schools buildings for 1992-93, an increase of 11 per cent. over the £472 million allocated in 1991-92. Building grants for voluntary aided schools will also increase to £151 million, a rise of over 15 per cent. on the current year.

My right hon. and learned Friend intends to announce his decisions on the distribution of annual capital guidelines and voluntary aided school capital allocations for 1992-93 to local education authorities before Christmas.

National Curriculum

Mr. Straw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will publish a full list of all documents relating to the national curriculum and its amendments by *(a)* the National Curriculum Council, *(b)* the School Examinations and Assessment Council and *(c)* him or his Department, since June 1987.

Mr. Eggar: The information requested is in the two tables following. Interim documents which become redundant when subject orders are laid, such as working group reports, subject proposals and draft subject orders, are detailed in table 2.

Table 1
Documents relating to the National Curriculum

Documents published by the Department of Education and Science	*Date of publication*
1. National curriculum subject orders and associated documents	
Mathematics in the National Curriculum	March 1989
Science in the National Curriculum	March 1989
English in the National Curriculum	September 1989
English in the National Curriculum (No. 2)	March 1990
Technology in the National Curriculum	March 1990
History in the National Curriculum	1991
Geography in the National Curriculum	1991
Modern Foreign Languages in the National Curriculum	November 1991
Modern Foreign Languages in the National Curriculum: Section 3 order	November 1991
2. Other statutory instruments and circulars	January 1989
Education Reform Act 1988: Local Arrangements for the Consideration of Complaints, Circular 1/89	
Education Reform Act 1988: The School Curriculum and Assessment, Circular 5/89	February 1989
Education (National Curriculum) (Modern Foreign Languages) Order 1989, SI 1989/825 and Circular 9/89	May 1989
Education (Schools Curriculum and Related Information) Regulations 1989, SI 1989/954 and Circular 14/89	June 1989
Education (School Curriculum and Related Information) Regulations 1989 Amendment, SI 1989/1181 and covering letter	July 1989
Education Reform Act 1988: Temporary Exceptions from the National Curriculum, SI 1989/1181 and Circular 15/89	July 1989
Education (School Curriculum and Related Information) Regulations 1989 Amendment, SI 1990/1109 and covering letter	May 1990
Management of the School Day, Circular 7/90	July 1990
The Education (Individual Pupils' Achievements) (Information) Regulations 1990, SI 1990/1381 and Circular 8/90	July 1990
Education (School Curriculum and Related Information) (Amendment) Regulations 1991, SI 1991/1278	1991
Education (Information on School Examination Results) (England) Regulations 1991, SI 1991/1265, and Circular 9/91	1991
Education (National Curriculum) (Assessment Arrangements for English, Mathematics and Science) (Key Stage 1) Order 1991, SI 1991/2169	October 1991
Education (National Curriculum) (Assessment Arrangements for Technology) Order 1991, SI 1991/2170	October 1991

Documents published by the Department of Education and Science	*Date of publication*
National Assessment Arrangements: assessing seven-year-olds in English, Mathematics, Science and Technology in 1992	October 1991
Circular 4/91: The Education (National Curriculum) (Assessment Arrangements for English, Mathematics and Science) (Key Stage 1) Order 1991; the Education (National Curriculum) (Assessment Arrangements for Technology) (Key Stage 1) Order 1991	October 1991
3. Other publications	
Education Reform: the Government's proposals for schools: National Curriculum, more open enrolment, financial delegation, Grant Maintained Schools, City Technology Colleges	November 1987
Task Group on Assessment and Testing: A Report	December 1987
Task Group on Assessment and Testing: Three supplementary Reports	March 1988
Task Group on Assessment and Testing Report: A Digest for Schools	March 1988
Our Changing Schools	November 1988
National Curriculum: From Policy to Practice	February 1989
National Curriculum: A Guide for Parents (Various translations)	August 1989
Aspects of English: English in the National Curriculum in Key Stages 1 to 4: Teachers notes	September 1991
How is Your Child Doing at School? A parents' guide to testing	1991
Your Child's Report—what it means and how it can help	1991
Your Child and the National Curriculum: a parent's guide to what is taught in schools	December 1991
4. Speeches by the Secretary of State	
National Curriculum for 14 to 16 year olds: Speech by the Right hon. John MacGregor OBE MP, Secretary of State for Education and Science, at the Conference of the Society of Education Officers in London on 25 January 1990	February 1990
National Curriculum and Assessment: A Summary of Messages from Recent Speeches to Teachers Associations by the Right Hon. John MacGregor OBE MP, Secretary of State for Education and Science	June 1990
5. Reports and other publications by HM Inspectorate	
Report by HM Inspectors on the Implementation of the National Curriculum in Primary Schools, Carried Out Summer 1989	1989
The Implementation of the National Curriculum in Primary Schools: A Survey of 100 Schools, Autumn Term 1989: A report by HM Inspectorate	1990
Mathematics Key Stages 1 and 3	April 1991
Science Key Stages 1 and 3	April 1991
English Key Stages 1 and 3	April 1991
Assessment, Recording and Reporting	June 1991
National Curriculum and Special Needs	July 1991
Information Technology and Special Needs in Schools	October 1990
In-service Training for the Introduction of the National Curriculum: report by HM Inspectorate 1988-1990	September 1991
Teaching and Learning of Information Technology	October 1991
Teaching and Learning of Design and Technology	October 1991
Initial Training of Primary Teachers for Science and the National Curriculum	October 1991
Training Teachers for the National Curriculum	October 1991
Training Teachers for the National Curriculum: History	October 1991
Documents published by the National Curriculum Council	
6. National Curriculum Non-Statutory Guidance (published in association with National Curriculum Statutory Orders)	
Mathematics Non-Statutory Guidance	June 1989
Science Non-Statutory Guidance	June 1989
English Key Stage 1 Non-Statutory Guidance	June 1989
Technology Non-Statutory Guidance: Design and Technology Capability	April 1990
Technology Non-Statutory Guidance: Information Technology Capability	April 1990
English Key Stages 2-4 Non-Statutory Guidance	July 1990
Geography Non-Statutory Guidance	May 1991
History Non-Statutory Guidance	May 1991
Modern Foreign Languages Non-Statutory Guidance	November 1991
7. NCC Subject Reports—Reports to the Secretary of State on the outcome of consultation and NCC's recommendations	
Science for Ages 5-16	August 1988
Mathematics for Ages 5-16	August 1988
English for Ages 5-11	May 1989
English for Ages 5-16	November 1989
Geography	November 1990
History	December 1990
Modern Foreign Languages	May 1991
Design and Technology for Ages 5-16	November 1989
Mathematics in the National Curriculum (1991): a report to the Secretary of State on the statutory consultation for attainment targets and programmes of study in Mathematics	October 1991
Science in the National Curriculum (1991): a report to the Secretary of State on the statutory consultation for attainment targets and programmes of study in Science	October 1991
Geography and History at Key Stage 4	October 1991
Whole Classes Taking GCSE or Equivalents Early	November 1991
8. National Curriculum Council Circulars	October 1988
Applying the National Curriculum to Five Year Olds in September 1989	
A New Description for School Year Groups	February 1989
Implementing the National Curriculum in Primary Schools	March 1989
English 5-11 in the National Curriculum: A Digest	April 1989
Implementing the National Curriculum—Participation by Pupils with Special Education Needs	May 1989
The National Curriculum and Whole Curriculum Planning: Preliminary Guidance	October 1989
Publications on the National Curriculum from NCC, DES, HMI and SEAC	December 1989
Technology 5-16 in the National Curriculum: A Digest	December 1989
English 5-16 in the National Curriculum: A Digest	December 1989
The National Curriculum at Key Stage 4	May 1990
Circular 11: Linguistic Diversity and the National Curriculum	March 1991
Circular 12: Report on Monitoring the Implementation of the National Curriculum Core Subjects, 1989-90 (and summary)	July 1991
9. Other Publications	February 1989
The National Curriculum Information Pack No. 1	
An Introduction to the National Curriculum	May 1989
Developing INSET Activities	May 1989
A Framework for the Primary Curriculum	July 1989
A Curriculum for All: Special Education Needs in the National Curriculum	October 1989
National Curriculum Council: A Guide for Employers	November 1989
The National Curriculum: A Guide for Parents of Primary Children	June 1990
The National Curriculum Information Pack No. 2	March 1990
Teaching, Talking and Learning in Key Stage One	March 1990

Documents published by the Department of Education and Science	*Date of publication*
The National Curriculum: A Guide for Parents of Secondary Children	May 1990
Education for Work: a guide for industry and commerce	April 1991
The National Curriculum: a guide for staff of museums, galleries, historic houses and sites	November 1990
Working Together: English in the National Curriculum in Key Stages 1 and 2	June 1990
The National Curriculum and the Initial Training of Student, Articled and Licensed Teachers	April 1991
Science Explorations (video and notes)	May 1991
Technology 5-11 (video and notes)	October 1990
Design and Technology 11-16 (video and notes)	August 1991
The Whole Curriculum	April 1990
Education for Economic and Industrial Understanding	April 1990
Health Education	July 1990
Careers Education and Guidance	August 1990
Environmental Education	September 1990
Education for Citizenship	November 1990
Teacher Placements and the National Curriculum	March 1991
Managing Economic and Industrial Understanding in Schools	March 1991
Planning for Key Stage 4: discussion paper and supplementary paper for NCC invitation conferences	September 1990
The National Curriculum at Key Stage 4 (advice to the Secretary of State)	November 1990
Science and Pupils with Special Educational Needs: a workshop pack for Key stages 1 and 2	September 1991
10. Guides to Teacher Assessment	
Your Questions Answered	January 1990
Teacher Assessment in the Classroom	January 1990
Teacher Assessment in the School	January 1990
A Sourcebook for Teacher Assessment	January 1990
National Curriculum Assessment. Responsibility of LEAs in 1991-92	August 1991
Timetable for Assessment Cycle 1991-92	September 1991
School Assessment Folder: Key Stage 1	November 1990
Records of Achievement in Primary Schools	December 1990
National Curriculum Assessment: Assessment Arrangements for Core Subjects at Key Stage 1	February 1991
English En1: Speaking and Listening	February 1991
Teacher Assessment at Key Stage 3	January 1991
Teacher Assessment at Key Stage 3: an in-service resource for Mathematics	January 1991
Teacher Assessment at Key Stage 3: An in-service resource for Science	January 1991
Key Stage 1 School Assessment Folder update	October 1991
National Pilot for Mathematics and Science Key Stage 3: end of key stage assessment arrangements 1992	October 1991
National Tests for 7-year-olds in English, Mathematics and Science	October 1991
Key Stage 3 School Assessment Folders in Mathematics and Science (Part 1) and teacher assessment leaflet	October 1991
11. Other Documents	
Assessment Matters No. 1: Graphwork in Schools Science	July 1990
Assessment Matters No. 2: Measurement in School Science	August 1990
Leaflet No. 2: Negotiating Tasks in Design And Technology	April 1991
Leaflet No. 3: Structuring Activities in Design and Technology	August 1991
Key Stage 4 Assessment: Quality assured	June 1991

Table 2
Consultative and interim national curriculum documents

	Date of publication
Documents published by the Department of Education and Science	
1. *General Consultation Document*	
The National Curriculum 5-16: A Consultation Document	June 1987
2. *National Curriculum Working Group Reports*	
National Curriculum Science Working Group Interim Report	November 1987
National Curriculum Mathematics Working Group Interim Report	November 1987
National Curriculum Design and Technology Working Group Interim Report	November 1988
National Curriculum History Working Group Interim Report	August 1989
National Curriculum Geography Working Group Interim Report	November 1989
National Curriculum Modern Foreign Languages Working Group Initial Advice	March 1990
National Curriculum History Final Working Group Report	April 1990
3. *Subject Proposals of the Secretaries of State*	
Mathematics for Ages 5-16: Proposals of the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the Secretary of State for Wales	August 1988
Science for Ages 5-16: Proposals of the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the Secretary of State for Wales	August 1988
English for Ages 5-11: Proposals of the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the Secretary of State for Wales	November 1988
English for Ages 5-16: Proposals of the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the Secretary of State for Wales	June 1989
Design and Technology for Ages 5-16: Proposals of the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the Secretary of State for Wales	June 1989
Geography for Ages 5-16: Proposals of the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the Secretary of State for Wales	June 1990
History for Ages 5-16: Proposals of the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the Secretary of State for Wales	June 1990
Mathematics for Ages 5-16: Proposals of the Secretary of State for Education and the Secretary of State for Wales	May 1991
Science for Ages 5-16: Proposals of the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the Secretary of State for Wales	May 1991
History and Geography at Key Stage 4: Proposals of the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the Secretary of State for Wales	May 1991
Whole Classes of Pupils Taking Examinations for GCSE or Equivalent Qualifications in National Curriculum Subjects Early: Proposals of the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the Secretary of State for Wales	June 1991

	Date of publication
Science at Key Stage 4: Proposals of the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the Secretary of State for Wales	July 1991
Art and Music at Key Stage 4: Proposals of the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the Secretary of State for Wales	August 1991
4. Draft Subject Orders	
National Curriculum: Draft Orders for Mathematics	December 1988
National Curriculum: Draft Orders for Science	December 1988
Education (National Curriculum) (Modern Foreign Languages) Draft Order	March 1989
National Curriculum: Draft Order for English Key Stage 1	March 1989
National Curriculum: Draft Order for English Key Stages 2-4	December 1989
National Curriculum: Draft Order for Technology	December 1989
National Curriculum: Draft Amendment Order for Technology	June 1990
National Curriculum: Draft Order for Mathematics	October 1991
National Curriculum: Draft Order for Science	October 1991

Adult Education

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is his estimate of national spending on vocational adult education and the amount spent on leisure adult education in the current year.

Mr. Eggar: In 1989-90, the latest year for which information on actual spending is available, local education authorities' returns indicate that their net recurrent expenditure on adult education centres was £137 million. This includes the cost of self-standing adult education centres and of adult education centres within further education colleges. The £137 million excludes the cost of all other education for adults which further education colleges provide, because this is not separately identified on LEAs' returns. Nor do the returns distinguish between different kinds of education for adults. The Department is currently undertaking a survey to establish the proportion of spending on further education attributable to the courses for adults, including leisure and recreational courses, which under the proposals in the Further and Higher Education Bill (HL) will remain the responsibility of LEAs.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Family Credit

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the latest available figures for the take-up of family credit.

Mr. Jack: The latest information about the number of families taking up family credit is a provisional caseload figure of 353,000 for the end of September 1991. Nearly 700,000 claims have been received since April 1991, more than half of them from new claimants as opposed to those renewing an existing award.

Since April 1988 when the scheme started, over 2·4 million awards have been made.

Invalidity Benefit

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what provision is made for people who are in receipt of invalidity benefit, but not income support, who require special outsize clothing due to their medical condition.

Mr. Scott: There is no provision.

Early Retirement

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make it his policy to ensure that those over the age of 60 years claiming unemployment benefit do not have to fulfil availability for work criteria if they are not currently working, and have taken early retirement under a recognised early retirement scheme.

Mr. Jack: Unemployment benefit is a short-term contributory benefit for people who are temporarily unemployed. To receive this benefit, a person must be capable of and available for work. He or she must also actively seek work. We have no plans to exempt persons aged 60 or over from these conditions.

However, a person aged 60 or over is not required to be available for work in order to receive income support, or class 1 national insurance credits to maintain their entitlement to sickness benefit and retirement pension.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Schools Inspectorate

Mr. Straw: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what reviews of Her Majesty's inspectorate of schools Her Majesty's Treasury has undertaken or participated in since 1979; what was the purpose of each review and its date; and whether it was published.

Mr. Mellor: The Treasury has not undertaken any reviews of its own into Her Majesty's inspectorate since 1979, but one Treasury official did assist with a DES-led grading review in 1989. The review was not published.

Gambling

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list by sector the latest figures for the amounts of revenue derived annually, by way of taxation and other revenues, from all forms of gambling in the United Kingdom.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard *[holding answer 12 December 1991]:* In the year ended 31 March 1991 receipts of betting and gaming duties from sectors of the gambling industry were as follows:

	£ million
Off-course betting	479
Pool betting	303
Casino gaming	57
Gaming machines	98
Bingo	67

Value added tax is also chargeable on the net take of gaming machines and on certain fees paid to participate in bingo. It is not possible to calculate the VAT yield from information on VAT returns.

CIVIL SERVICE

Morale

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service what proposals he has to improve morale in the civil service.

Mr. Renton: Our aim is to have an efficient, effective and well-motivated civil service. Managers in Departments and agencies continually work to achieve this.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service how many non-departmental public bodies are currently in existence; and when the annual list of such bodies will be published.

Mr. Renton: On 1 April 1991 there were 375 executive bodies, One more than last year; 874 advisory bodies, 97 less than last year; 64 tribunals, two less than last year; and 131 boards of visitors, three more than last year. In total there were 1,444 non-departmental public bodies—a fall of 95 over last year. Details can be found in "Public Bodies 1991" published today. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

SCOTLAND

Dyslexia

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many (a) primary and (b) post-primary schools in Scotland have a specialist teacher for children suffering from dyslexia.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Learning support teachers, who assist children with specific learning difficulties such as are caused by dyslexia, are employed in schools in Scotland at which such children are pupils. At September 1990, the numbers of teachers with a qualification in learning difficulties employed in primary and secondary schools were 880 and 470 respectively.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what training teachers receive in (a) recognising symptoms of dyslexia in pupils and (b) how to assist pupils who show symptoms of dyslexia.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: All pre-service teacher training courses now contain elements covering special educational needs in which references to dyslexia and its identification are included. The guidelines which determine the content of diploma courses in special educational needs now strongly encourage the inclusion of elements on specific learning difficulty. Specialist courses for teachers on dyslexia are also being developed at Jordanhill college and Moray house. The Scottish Office Education Department has commissioned a research study of policy, practices and provision for children with learning difficulties including dyslexia. This will make recommendations about the content of further training courses in relation to dyslexia and offer specific guidance to teachers of dyslexic children.

Sport

Mr. Home Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the allocation of funds from the Foundation for Sport and the Arts to sports facilities in Scotland.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This is a matter for the foundation to consider. The foundation plans to announce its next tranche of grants in Edinburgh on 20 December and I will be participating in the announcement.

Speech Therapy

Dr. Godman: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions he has had with the chairmen of health boards about *(a)* the adequate provision of speech therapists and *(b)* the recruitment, selection and training of such therapists; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer Wednesday 11 December]:* A further £2 million has been made available from 1 April next year toward the cost of speech therapy services for children with a formal record of needs. My officials have met the College of Speech Therapists, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Association of Directors of Education, Scotland to discuss this additional allocation. The latest meeting took place on 6 December.

The recruitment and selection of speech therapists is a matter for health boards. As to training, all speech therapy training in Scotland is operated by the higher education sector, which liaises closely with health boards over the curriculum, clinical placements, and other aspects of the course.

Foreign Lottery Tickets

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions he has had with the Scottish Sports Council regarding the possible free movement of lottery tickets in the EC post-1992.

Mr. Michel Forsyth *[holding answer Thursday 12 December]:* I have discussed this matter and others relating to the Scottish Sports Council's support for a national lottery with the chairman and members of the Scottish Sports Council, on a number of occasions. I have confirmed the advice which I have received that the sale of foreign lottery tickets in the United Kingdom can be controlled by domestic law as it stands.

WALES

Executive Agencies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether a group bonus scheme is in operation in each of his Department's executive agencies.

Mr. David Hunt: Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments is currently the Department's only executive agency. At present, no group bonus scheme operates within Cadw although the framework document allows the agency the flexibility to introduce one.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what is the maximum salary payable to the chief executive

of each of his Department's executive agencies, including performance-related element, and the length of time of the chief executive's contract in each case.

Mr. David Hunt: Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments is currently the Department's only executive agency. The maximum salary payable to the chief executive is £46,122 with the possibility of a performance bonus of up to 10 per cent. of that salary. His contract is for three years.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much was spent on events and publicity surrounding the launch of each of his Department's executive agencies; and whether the cost was borne by the parent Department or the new agency.

Mr. David Hunt: Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments is currently the Department's only executive agency. Cadw was launched as an agency on 1 April 1991 at a cost of £321 borne by the new agency.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many staff were in post on the date that each of his Department's executive agencies were established; and how many staff are in post now, in each case.

Mr. David Hunt: Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments is currently the Department's only executive agency. There were 235 staff in post in Cadw when it was established. At present, there are 250·5 staff in post.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the post, grade and maximum salary payable including performance-related elements, in each case where appointments from the private sector have been made to his Department's executive agencies at grade 7 or above, since their establishment.

Mr. David Hunt: Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments is currently the Department's only executive agency. Only one appointment, at grade 6 level, has been made to Cadw through open competition. The maximum salary payable including performance pay in this case is £41,120. Another appointment at grade 7 level is being processed.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the quality of service performance indicators adopted by each of his Department's executive agencies since their establishment; and separately identify those quality of service performance indicators already operative prior to agency status.

Mr. David Hunt: Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments is currently the Department's only executive agency. Indicators of Cadw's performance and targets for the agency's first year were announced in March 1991.

These all covered similar ground to those operative before agency status.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the first degree obtained by the chief executive of each of his Department's executive agencies; and from which university or polytechnic it was awarded.

Mr. David Hunt: Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments is currently the Department's only executive agency. Cadw's chief executive's first degree is in English, archaeology and anthropology. It was awarded by Cambridge university.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list those new facilities for staff including nurseries and health care schemes which have been introduced in each of his Department's executive agencies since their establishment.

Mr. David Hunt: Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments is currently the Department's only executive agency. Cadw staff have access to the Cardiff civil service nursery which opened in August 1991. No other new facilities for staff have been introduced since the formation of the agency.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales when the last annual report for each of his Department's executive agencies was published; and when the next one is due.

Mr. David Hunt: Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments is currently the Department's only executive agency. The agency was launched on 1 April 1991 and its first annual report will be published in July 1992.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the new forms of alternative working patterns introduced into each of his Department's executive agencies since their establishment; and provide a breakdown by grade of the numbers of staff taking up each new working pattern for each new agency.

Mr. David Hunt: Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments is currently the Department's only executive agency. There have been no new forms of alternative working patterns introduced into the agency since its establishment.

Manufacturing Output

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what has been the change in manufacturing output in Wales since 1978.

Mr. David Hunt: According to the Welsh index of production and construction, manufacturing output for the second quarter of 1991 was at a level of 29·0 per cent. higher than the average quarterly value for 1978.

Cardiff Bay Barrage

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many letters he has received to date concerning the groundwater side-effects of the proposed Cardiff Bay barrage as part of his public consultation exercise.

Mr. David Hunt: Since the public consultation exercise was launched on 25 September I have received 114 letters about groundwater related matters.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to his answer of 4 December, *Official Report*, column *136*, whether any part of his recent allocation of £22 million of additional grant-in-aid to the Cardiff Bay Development Corporation is earmarked for the acquisition of or rearrangement of the water abstraction rights of Associated British Ports at Blackweir from the River Taff for the purpose of complying with his written undertaking to the National Rivers Authority to secure their right to control river flow into the impoundment behind the proposed Cardiff Bay barrage during periods of drought; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The additional allocation of £22 million to the grant-in-aid planned for the development

corporation in 1993-94 and 1994-95 is to support the construction of Cardiff bay barrage. The detailed breakdown of the corporation's budget between different activities is determined in the months leading up to the financial year in question.

Set-aside Scheme

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many farmers have received payment under the set-aside scheme, for each year since 1988, in each county in Wales for *(a)* horse-based activities, *(b)* golf courses, *(c)* game cover for commercial shoots, *(d)* sports grounds, *(e)* other recreational facilities and *(f)* other; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: No payments have been made under categories *(c)* and *(d)*.

The following numbers of participants have received payment under the other options:

Set-aside first payment year 1989-90

	Dyfed	West Glamorgan	Gwent
Horse based activities	—	1	1
Other	1	—	—
Totals	1	1	1

Set-aside second payment year 1990-91

	Dyfed	Clwyd	Gwynedd	West Glamorgan	Gwent
Horse-based activities	4	1	—	2	1
Golf Courses	—	1	—	—	—
Other recreational facilities	—	—	1	—	—
Other	1	—	—	—	—
Totals	5	2	1	2	1

Set-aside third payment year 1991-92

	Dyfed	Clwyd	Gwynedd	West Glamorgan	Gwent
Horse-based activities	4	2	—	2	1
Golf Courses	—	1	—	—	—
Other recreational facilities	—	—	1	—	—
Other	1	—	1	—	—
Totals	5	3	2	2	1

The statistics for each year are cumulative and include the figures from the previous year.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many landowners in Wales are currently receiving annual payments under the set-aside scheme of *(a)* between £5,000 and £9,999, *(b)* between £10,000 and £19,999, *(c)* between £20,000 and £29,999, *(d)* between £30,000 and £39,999, *(e)* between £40,000 and £49,999, *(f)* between £50,000 and £59,999, *(g)* between £60,000 and £69,999 and *(h)* £70,000 and over.

Mr. David Hunt: The following number of payments are being made in the above categories.

(a) 11; *(b)* 6; *(c)* 2; *(d)* Nil; *(e)* Nil; *(f)* Nil; *(g)* Nil; *(h)* Nil.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give the figures for each county in Wales for each year since 1988 of *(a)* the number of serious irregularities of the set-aside scheme, *(b)* the number of minor breaches of the scheme and *(c)* the number of cases where payments where witheld in full or in part; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The information is as follows:

1988-89 set-aside year
All Wales

	Number
(a)	Nil
(b)	Nil
(c)	Nil

1989-90 set-aside year

	Dyfed	Gwent
(a)	Nil	1
(b)	1	Nil
(c)	Nil	1

1990-91 set-aside year

	Dyfed	Gwent	West Glamorgan
(a)	Nil	2	Nil
(b)	2	Nil	2
(c)	[1]—	2	Nil

[1] The action to be taken on these two cases of minor breaches in Dyfed is still under consideration.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Hearing Therapists

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many hearing therapists were employed in each of the health and social services boards in each of the years from 1 April 1981 to 31 March 1991;

(2) how many hearing therapists are currently employed in each of the health and social services boards.

Mr. Hanley: There are two hearing therapists working in Northern Ireland at present—one in the Eastern board, appointed throughout 1981 to date and one in the Southern board, appointed in 1991. The Eastern board is

in the process of appointing three additional trainee hearing therapists. The Northern board is examining the need to employ this grade.

Social Security

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how many persons have been granted loans from the social fund; what was the total amount paid out during the last financial year; and what was the comparable amount in previous years;

(2) how many homeless are in receipt of income support in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hanley: Social security operational matters are the responsibility of Mr. Alec Wylie, chief executive of the Social Security Agency. He will write to the hon. Gentleman and copies of his reply will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Family Credit

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many single parents are in receipt of family credit in the Province.

Mr. Hanley: Social security operational matters are the responsibility of Mr. Alec Wylie, chief executive of the Social Security Agency. He will write to the hon. Gentleman regarding the number of single parents in receipt of family credit in the Province and copies of his reply will be placed in the Library and the Public Information Office.

Disabled People (Benefit)

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what improvements he plans to make in benefit for disabled people.

Mr. Hanley: From April 1992, the Disability Living Allowance and Disability Working Allowance (Northern Ireland) Order 1991 introduces two new social security benefits for disabled people in Northern Ireland at the same time as these benefits are introduced for the rest of the United Kingdom.

The new disability working allowance will be payable to disabled people in employment who have a reduced work capacity because of their disability. This will be the first benefit in this country specifically intended to help disabled people to work even if their earning capacity is reduced.

The new disability living allowance will be both tax free and non-income related. For people disabled before the age of 65, it will replace and extend the help with the extra costs of disability currently available through attendance allowance and mobility allowance.

The order also provides for an improved claims and adjudication system for disability living allowance and attendance allowance for people over 65.

Set-aside Scheme

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many farmers have received payment under the set-aside scheme, for each year since 1988, in each county in Northern Ireland for *(a)* horse-based activities, *(b)* golf courses, *(c)* game cover for commercial shoots, *(d)* sports grounds, *(e)* other recreational facilities and *(f)* other; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: The number of farmers receiving payment in Northern Ireland since 1988 by county and by enterprise is set out in the table.

	Antrim	*Armagh*	*Down*	*Fermanagh*	*Londonderry*	*Tyrone*
Total number of farmers receiving payments						
1989	2	1	5	—	5	—
1990	1	1	3	—	3	—
1991	—	1	3	—	1	—
Horse-based activities	(1989) 1	—	(1990) 1	—	(1989) 1	—
	—	—	(1991) 2	—	(1990) 1	—
Golf courses	—	—	—	—	(1991) 1	—
Game cover for commercial shoots	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sports grounds	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other recreational	—	—	—	—	—	—
Others	(1989) 1	(1989) 1	(1989) 5	—	(1989) 4	—
	(1990) 1	(1990) 1	(1990) 2	—	(1990) 2	—
	—	(1991) 1	(1991) 1	—	—	—

Uptake in Northern Ireland has been very limited, of a total arable area of 64·949 hectares only 331 hectares, which representing 0·5 per cent. of the total area, have been set aside in the first 3 years of the scheme.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give the numbers of landowners in Northern Ireland that are currently receiving annual payments under the set-aside scheme of *(a)* between £5,000 and £9,999, *(b)* between £10,000 and £19,999, *(c)* between £20,000 and £29,999, *(d)* between £30,000 and £39,999, *(e)* between £40,000 and £49,999, *(f)* between £50,000 and £59,999, *(g)* between £60,000 and £69,999 and *(h)* £70,000 and over.

Mr. Hanley: No farmers or landowners in Northern Ireland receive payments above £5,000 per year. Twenty-six farmers are in receipt of payments of up to £4,999.

Dr. David Clark: to ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will give the figures for each county in Northern Ireland for each year since 1988 of *(a)* the number of serious irregularities of the set-aside scheme, *(b)* the number of minor breaches of the scheme and *(c)* the number of cases where payments were withheld in full or in part; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Hanley: There have been no serious irregularities connected with the scheme in Northern Ireland. One minor breach resulted in a part-payment being withheld. The low level of uptake has made it possible to check all applications and claims for payment.

EMPLOYMENT

Baynards House

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment when the lease of Baynards house expires; and what consideration is being given by the Government to terminating it and relocating those employed there to Bootle or a new London office.

Mr. Forth: The lease to Baynards house expires on 24 March 1994. The Health and Safety Executive is currently considering a range of options for accommodating its London headquarters after that date.

Dock Labour Scheme

Mr. Bell: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what assessment he has made of the impact on the efficiency and reliability of the ports industry of the abolition of the dock labour scheme;

(2) when he proposes to publish a report on the effectiveness of the abolition of the dock labour scheme; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The results of an initial assessment of the effects of abolition were published in an article in the July 1990 issue of the *Employment Gazette*. Further assessment had to wait until the effects of abolition of the scheme had fully worked themselves through the port industry. Earlier this year my right hon. and learned Friends the Secretarys of State for Transport and Employment commissioned MDS-Transmodal and Pieda plc to carry out a more comprehensive study to assess the economic effects of abolition of the dock scheme and to examine the extent to which abolition had met its objectives. Changes in efficiency, reliability and quality of service will necessarily be examined.

The final report is expected to be completed about the end of next year. I would expect the main findings to be published shortly afterwards.

EC Directives

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list in rank order the members of the European Community by the number of directives in the social affairs field which each country has implemented; what these directives are; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The tables give the required information, first on the implementation records of each member state for the directives so far required to be implemented in the social field; and, secondly, on the subjects of those directives. I shall write to my hon. Friend giving more detailed information on the record of member states on each individual directive.

The United Kingdom's exemplary record is proof of its commitment to a social dimension for the European Community. The Government accordingly welcome the agreement at Maastricht to amend the treaty of Rome to strengthen compliance with Community obligations by giving the European Court of Justice the power to impose financial penalties on member states which have failed to comply with its judgments.

Member States' Record of Implementation

Of the 18 directives in the social field currently required to be implemented and their implementation notified to the European Commission, the record of member states is as follows.

	Number
United Kingdom	18
Germany	18
Spain	17
Ireland	[1]16
France	16
Greece	16
Portugal	[1]15
Denmark	[1]15
Belgium	15
Netherlands	15
Luxembourg	13
Italy	11

[1] Out of 17.

Note: Ireland, Portugal and Denmark have either derogations from one of the directives, or a delayed implementation date.

Directives in the Social Affairs Field

The following directives are currently required to have been transposed into the national law of member states:

- Directive on the banning of certain specified agents and/or certain work activities (88/364).
- Directive on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to noise at work (88/188).
- Directive on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to asbestos at work (83/477).
- Directive on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to metallic lead at work (82/605).
- Directive on electrical equipment for use in potentially explosive atmospheres in mines susceptible to firedamp (82/130).
- Directive on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to chemical, physical and biological agents at work (80/642).
- Directive on the protection of the health of workers exposed to vinyl chloride monomer (78/610).
- Directive on the provision of safety signs at places of work (77/676).
- Directive on the protection of employees in the event of the insolvency of their employer (80/987).
- Directive on safeguarding of employee's rights in the event of transfers of undertakings (77/187).
- Directive on collective redundancies (75/129).
- Directive on equal treatment for men and women in self employment (86/613).
- Directive on equal treatment for men and women in occupational social security schemes (86/378).
- Directive on equal treatment for men and women in matters of social security (79/7).
- Directive on equal pay for men and women (75/117).
- Directive on equal treatment for men and women in access to employment (76/207).
- Directive on the abolition of restrictions on movement and residence within the Community for workers of Member States and their families (68/360).
- Directive on the education of the children of migrant workers (77/406).

HOME DEPARTMENT

Holloway Prison

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what action is being taken with respect to the three senior staff of the prison medical services whose conduct was criticised in the special report made to him in April 1991 by the board of visitors of Holloway prison; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what response he has made to the special report of the board of visitors of Holloway prison made to him in April 1991; and if he will make a statement;

(3) if he will review the case of the prisoner separated from her newly born baby which was the subject of a special report in April 1991 by the board of visitors of Holloway prison; and if he will make a statement;

(4) what action he proposes to take in response to the special report made to him in April 1991 by the board of visitors of Holloway prison concerning the separation of a mother from her newly born child; and if he will establish an independent inquiry into this incident.

Mrs. Rumbold: I will write to the hon. Member.

Prison Medical Services

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to improve the manner in which the prison medical services respond to representations on matters of concern from boards of prison visitors.

Mrs. Rumbold: Heads of all prison service headquarters divisions and directorates, including the director of prison medical services, were recently reminded of the importance of acknowledging and dealing expeditiously with letters from boards of visitors. I am assured by the medical director that she and senior members of her staff are mindful of the need to apply this principle to all communications from boards and that it is reflected in recently introduced administrative arrangements for dealing with such communications.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what guidelines exist to govern the medical treatment of mothers with children and pregnant women in prison who are suffering from infectious diseases;

(2) if he will establish an inquiry independent of the prison medical services to establish guidelines for the medical treatment of mothers with children and pregnant women in prison who are suffering from infectious diseases.

Mrs. Rumbold: Prison medical officers are statutorily responsible for the health care of prisoners in their charge. As registered medical practitioners they enjoy clinical independence; and they have unfettered freedom to call upon such specialist advice as they consider necessary. The director of prison medical services has issued no guidance to medical officers relating specifically to the treatment of pregnant women or mothers and babies with infectious disease. This is one of the clinical areas to be considered in a review of hepatitis B policy which is being undertaken in consultation with the Department of Health.

Operation Container

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he expects to be able to end Operation Container; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what recent representations he has received regarding Operation Container; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: I have received representations about prisoners in police cells in the Manchester area from the Greater Manchester police authority, from hon. Members and others. There is a countrywide shortage of prison accommodation, but I acknowledge that there is a particular problem in the Greater Manchester area. This is because 600 cells in Manchester prison which were damaged in the disturbances last year cannot be brought back into use before 1993. I visited Manchester on 9 December and saw Operation Container at first hand. I was able to meet the deputy chief constable and representatives of the police authority. I also visited the central detention centre and two divisional police stations and spoke to police officers directly involved in the work, and to some of the prisoners themselves. My visit reinforced my view that this use of police cells is unacceptable. My right hon. Friend and I are determined that it should be brought to an end in the shortest possible time.

Some important steps have already been taken to provide additional prison accommodation. The roles of three young offender establishments have been changed to adult use and new accommodation is being opened as quickly as possible.

There are six new prisons opening in 1991-92 providing nearly 3,800 places and a further six establishments, providing some 3,200 places due to open in 1992-93. Work is also in hand to determine whether any refurbishment projects at existing establishments could be postponed. In addition, I am considering whether it would be feasible to find emergency accommodation which could be brought into use to give relief in the north-west.

Probation Service

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the code of professional conduct which serves to guide probation officers in their dealings with the general public.

Mr. John Patten: The professional conduct of probation officers is a matter for the employing probation committee. It has therefore not been considered necessary for the Home Office to issue such guidance.

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines he has issued concerning the relationships between probation committees and the probation service.

Mr. John Patten: Under paragraphs 2 and 3 of schedule 3 to the Powers of Criminal Courts Act 1973 a probation committee is a body corporate responsible for the running of the probation service in a probation area. The constitution and duties of probation committees are set out in parts II and III of the Probation Rules 1984, as amended. Under section 74 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991 the Secretary of State may make an order requiring a probation committee to carry out any of its statutory

duties if it is in default. The decision document "Organising Supervision and Punishment in the Community" published by HMSO in 1991 puts forward proposals for reorganising the probation service to increase its efficiency and effectiveness, including reshaping the role of probation committees. These proposals are currently under discussion with the probation service and others.

Bail Hostels

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the Government's policy concerning the maximum desirable size of any new bail hostel, having regard to the ability of the local probation service to supervise both the conduct of bailees and the interaction between bailees.

Mr. John Patten: The maximum desirable size of a new bail hostel is determined by practical considerations such as the demand for places. These considerations have led to hostels of different size in different localities and the largest currently offers 32 places.

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to monitor and evaluate the bail hostel expansion programme and its effects upon the host areas.

Mr. John Patten: A thematic inspection of bail hostels will be carried out by Her Majesty's inspectorate of probation in 1992. This will examine local management and regimes including supervision arrangements.

There are no plans to monitor or evaluate centrally any effects on host areas. However, rule 18(1)(b) of the Approved Probation Hostel and Home and Bail Hostel Rules 1976 requires that a log book is kept in which every event of importance connected with the hostel is entered. Rule 18(2) requires that the log book shall be laid before the managing committee at each of their meetings. This identifies any incidents within the local community. Managers are encouraged to invite local residents to sit on the management committee.

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the experience necessary for a member of the probation service to set up and run a bail hostel.

Mr. John Patten: Bail hostels managed by the probation service are normally run by a senior probation officer warden, but someone with equivalent qualifications and/or experience would not be excluded. Oversight is provided by an assistant chief probation officer who is accountable through the area chief probation officer to the local probation committee.

Currently there is one bail hostel managed by a voluntary managing committee. The warden is a senior probation officer seconded from the local probation service. A senior member of the probation service also sits on the voluntary managing committee.

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much each county probation service is paid for the accommodation of each bailee in a bail hostel, per night, per occupant; and what are the numbers overall.

Mr. John Patten: The most recently available information is that in 1989-90 each approved hostel, including bail hostels, was able to charge residents up to £5·66 per night and probation committees £6·20 per night as a local authority flat rate payment. The Home Office revenue contribution per approved hostel place is not separately identified according to the type of resident, but the average grant paid per resident night for 1989-90 was £20·36.

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the average operating cost per occupied place for the bail hostel system compared with the average operating cost per occupied place for the prison system.

Mr. John Patten: On the most recently available information the average annual running cost of an occupied place in bail and probation/bail hostels to the Home Office and local authorities in 1989-90 was £9,696.

The average operating cost per inmate for local prisons and remand centres in 1989-90 was £16,068.

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the effect of the Children Act 1989 upon the long-term policy of the Home Office relating to bail hostels.

Mr. John Patten: None. The Children Act does not contain provisions bearing upon the occupancy of bail hostels.

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what level of Home Office funding was given to Shropshire probation service for the services of a management consultancy involved in the Twyford house application for change of use to a bail hostel.

Mr. John Patten: So far £2,722·50 has been approved as payment for work undertaken by architects, up to 30 September 1991, in respect of the application for the change of use of Twyford house to a bail hostel.

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list staffing levels and the numbers of residents in all existing bail hostels.

Mr. John Patten: The levels of supervisory staff and the numbers of places in existing bail hostels are as shown in the table.

	Wardens	*Deputy wardens*	*Assistant wardens/ night supervisors*	*Places*
Basildon	1	1	7	[1]25
Blackburn	1	1	4	18
Brighton	1	1	3	15
Chorlton	1	1	6	27
Clarks House	1	1	5	26
Corfton Road	1	1	5	20
Curtis House	1	1	3	15
Cuthbert House	1	1	4	16
Dickson House	1	1	6	28
Dover Bail	1	1	4	18
Dudley Centre	1	1	5	22
Emroch House	1	1	4	15
Howard Lodge	0·5	1	4	20
Howden House	1	1	6	27
Kelley House	1	2	4	28
Kew	1	1	3	14
Lichfield Road	1	1	4	16
Marshall House	1	1	5	22
Pennywell	1	1	5	22

	Wardens	Deputy wardens	Assistant wardens/ night supervisors	Places
Ryecroft	1	1	4	16
South Bank	1	1	6	27
Stonnall Road	1	1	3	12
Sycamore Lodge	1	1	6	32
Townmoor	1	1	5	22
Tulse Hill	1	2	7	27
Ty Newydd	1	1	3	12
Walmer Villas	1	1	4	18
Welford House	1	1	5	26
Wilton	1	1	5	22

[1] Expanding to 32 places shortly.

Bail

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the amounts of public funds allocated to bail information schemes.

Mr. John Patten: With effect from April 1992 probation service expenditure will be cash limited and areas will receive hypothecated grant for bail information schemes. The level of hypothecated grant for each probation area in 1992-93 is shown in the table. Expenditure on bail information schemes was not separately identified prior to 1992-93.

Probation area	Hypothecated grant £
Avon	71,014
Bedfordshire	52,472
Berkshire	129,462
Buckinghamshire	47,118
Cambridgeshire	0
Cheshire	23,202
Cleveland	23,724
Cornwall	0
Cumbria	77,905
Derbyshire	37,108
Devon	96,807
Dorset	59,446
Durham	25,958
Essex	16,062
Gloucestershire	0
Hampshire	38,538
Hereford and Worcester	45,609
Hertfordshire	45,174
Humberside	59,142
Kent	0
Lancashire	26,985
Leicestershire	51,356
Lincolnshire	55,824
Greater Manchester	196,702
Merseyside	238,994
Norfolk	88,616
Northamptonshire	0
Northumbria	118,462
Nottinghamshire	0
Oxfordshire	0
Shropshire	77,842
Somerset	34,200
Staffordshire	74,289
Suffolk	37,461
Surrey	30,598
East Sussex	76,443
West Sussex	67,181
Warwickshire	23,928
West Midlands	322,184
Wiltshire	25,678
North Yorkshire	0
South Yorkshire	99,851
West Yorkshire	166,907
Dyfed	22,265
Gwent	0
North Wales	20,746
Powys	0
South Glamorgan	36,352
Mid Glamorgan	0
West Glamorgan	51,697
Inner London	457,172
North East London	27,831
South East London	48,283
South West London	14,959
Middlesex	111,198
Total	3,452,745

Mr. Conway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the definition of low and high risk bailees; and what information sources magistrates have available to them in order to decide whether or not to remand in custody or on bail.

Mr. John Patten: There is no such definition. Relevant information is provided to magistrates by the Crown prosecutor and the defendant or a legal representative. Magistrates may also call for information from court duty probation officers, police officers, sureties and others.

Police Manpower

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what calculations were made to allow for demographic and other trends since 1981 to ensure that the use of census figures on unemployment accurately reflected the current situation in communities within the South Wales police area;

(2) if he will give the figures and percentages for unemployment in the South Wales police area *(a)* given by the Government at the time of the 1991 census, *(b)* given in the census reports and *(c)* given by the Government at the time of his Department's recent review of police manpower and describe the extent to which these figures were taken into consideration in the review;

(3) if he will give the specific figures and percentages of unemployment *(a)* in the South Wales police area and *(b)* in each district within the South Wales police area which were taken into consideration in arriving at a formula figure for police manpower needs in the South Wales constabulary during the course of his Department's recent review of police manpower;

(4) if he will list the figures for single-parent families *(a)* in the South Wales police area and *(b)* in each district within the South Wales police area which were taken into account in constructing the index figure in the formula used in the recent Home Office review of police manpower;

(5) what assumptions were made about the increase in the number of single-parent families in the South Wales police area over the last 10 years to ensure that accurate assumptions were being made on this matter during the recent Home Office review of police manpower.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I will write to the hon. Member.

Police Vehicles (Fatal Accidents)

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide details on the number of fatal accidents involving motor vehicles driven by police in the course of their duties for the most recent 12-month periods for which statistics are available.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: In the year ending 31 December 1990 outside the Metropolitan police district there were 17 civilian fatalities. These fatalities arose in the course of either police pursuits or responses to emergency calls. The figures do not show the number of accidents in which fatalities occurred.

In the same period in the Metropolitan police district there were six civilian and one police officer fatalities.

Motor Insurance

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what figures are available to show the number of people without motor insurance in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: In 1989 there were 210,551 findings of guilt at all courts in England and Wales for the offence of using a motor vehicle uninsured against third party risks. Further information is contained in the Home Office publication, "Offences relating to motor vehicles England and Wales 1989, Supplementary tables", a copy of which is in the Library.

Mr. David Young: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what checks are made to ensure that all who drive carry the requisite motor insurance.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Police officers may check insurance details, along with other driver documents, when stopping vehicles and when investigating road traffic accidents or offences. If the driver concerned does not have evidence of insurance with him at the time, he is required under section 165 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 to produce it within seven days at a police station. Failure to produce the evidence within that period is an offence.

Asylum Bill

Mr. Bernie Grant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which organisations and individuals have made submissions concerning the Asylum Bill; and whether he will place copies of the major submissions in the Library.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Since July we have received representations from various organisations concerning the Asylum Bill. These include Amnesty International, Asylum Rights Campaign, Charter '87, citizens advice bureaux, church groups, the Council for Racial Equality, the General Council of the Bar, Justice, the Refugee Council and UNHCR. We have also received approximately 1000 letters from members of the Refugee Council and UNHCR. We have also received approximately 1,000 letters from members of the public many of whom are members of one of the above-named organisations and who have submitted pro-forma letters.

I have no plans to place items of correspondence in the Library.

HEALTH

Visual Handicap

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration he has given to the recent survey of the Royal National Institute for the Blind concerning provision for the needs of the blind; if he is proposing any new measures; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris), on 11 December at column *448*.

Executive Agencies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the quality of service performance indicators adopted by each of his Department's executive agencies since their establishment and separately identify those quality service performance indicators already operative prior to agency status.

Mr. Dorrell: Key quality of service performance indicators have been set for the Department's executive agencies as follows:

NHS Estate Management and Health Building Agency (NHS Estates)

—Delivery on time of contracts by number and value.

—Other quality of service indicators will be set to cover the level of NHS and other customer requirements and quality assurance systems to define and maintain high quality product and service standards. The quality of service will be reviewed periodically with those customers.

Before the establishment of NHS Estates, the estates directorate of the Department of Health was working to meet a number of objectives of which the key was to promote effectiveness, efficiency and economy in the NHS estate.

Medicines Control Agency (MCA)

Safety and Quality:

—Rate of response to reports and enquiries about adverse drug reactions.

—Number and frequency of inspection of manufacturers.

—Introduction of quality control processes.

Standard of Service:

—Waiting time from receipt of paid up abridged licences to start of professional assessments.

—Assessment time for abridges product licence applications.

—Assessment time for all new active substance licence applications.

Although the MCA has always sought to improve standards and efficiency, quality of service indicators were not established in this form before 1991-92.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will state the first degree obtained by the chief executive of each of his Department's executive agencies and from which university or polytechnic it was awarded.

Mr. Dorrell: The chief executive of the NHS Estate Management and Health Building Agency (NHS Estates) does not hold a degree but is a fellow of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors.

The first degree obtained by the chief executive of the Medicines Control Agency was a bachelor of medicine/bachelor of surgery from the university of Wales.

Dental Anaesthesia

Mr. Canavan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, for each year since 1965, the number of children under the age of 16 years who have died in England and Wales while undergoing, or shortly after undergoing, general anaesthesia for dental treatment in *(a)* dentists' surgeries and *(b)* hospitals.

Mr. Dorrell: The available information is set out in the table.

Child deaths associated with dental treatment England and Wales

Year	*Number of child deaths including general anaesthesia*	*Place of operation*	
		Dentists surgery	*Hospital*
1965	[1]0	0	0
1966	2	[2]n/a	n/a
1967	1	[3]1	0
1968	4	4	0
1969	1	1	0
1970	4	[3]1	1
1971	2	1	1
1972	3	3	0
1973	0	0	0
1974	4	[3]1	2
1975	1	1	0
1976	4	3	1
1977	3	2	1
1978	1	1	0
1979	0	0	0
1980	2	1	1
1981	1	1	0
1982	1	1	0
1983	1	1	0
1984	1	1	0
1985	4	1	3
1986	2	2	0
1987	2	1	1
1988	0	0	0
1989	3	1	2

[1] Figures relate to number of children,
(i) prior to 1982 under 15 years of age,
(ii) from 1982 under 16 years of age.
[2] Information not always available on place of operation.
[3] Nature of anaesthetic not always stated.

Source: Office of Population Censuses and Surveys.

Health Authority Chairman

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will announce the name of the new chairman of Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale health authority.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The new chairman of Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale health authority is Mr. William Ashworth, whose term of office runs up to 31 March 1994.

Complementary Therapies

Mr. Rost: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how he propose to circulate to health authorities, community health councils and family practitioners, his statement on the clarification for the provision of complementary therapies, which he has released in a letter to the hon. Member for Erewash on 3 December;

(2) if he will publish in the *Official Report* the clarification on the provision of complementary therapies through the family practitioner service which he has released in a letter to the hon. Member for Erewash on 3 December.

Mr. Dorrell: The clarification of the position of alternative and complementary therapies within the NHS, given in the letter to my hon. Friend of 3 December, was also publicised in a press release of the same date. Copies of the press release have been sent to each regional health authority. A copy of both the press release and the letter have been placed in the Library.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

EC Framework Programme

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions Her Majesty's Government and the European Community have had in relation to full membership for Switzerland of the European Community framework programme.

Mr. Leigh: Under the provisions of the European economic area treaty between the EC and EFTA which I hope will be signed shortly, all EFTA countries, including Switzerland, will be eligible to participate fully in the EC's research and development framework programme with effect from 1 January 1993. This will build on existing EFTA participation in individual EC R and D projects and programmes.

DEFENCE

Executive Agencies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what bonus scheme is in operation in the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, the Defence Research Agency, the Directorate General of Defence Accounts, the Hydrographic Office, the Meteorological Office, the Military Survey, Royal Air Force Maintenance and Service Children's Schools (NWE); and if he will state for each the cash amount per person awarded in the last year for which figures are available, and the conditions attached to its award.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The executive agencies and defence support agencies can participate in the special bonus scheme in operation in the Ministry of Defence. As participation is a matter for chief executives, I have asked the chief executives to write to the hon. Member about their use of this scheme and any others that they may have introduced in their particular agency.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the quality of service performance indicators adopted by Service Children's Schools (NWE), Royal Air Force Maintenance, the Military Survey, the Meteorological Office, the Hydrographic Office, the Directorate General of Defence Accounts, the Defence Research Agency and the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment since their establishment as executive agencies; and separately indentify for each those quality of service performance indicators already operative prior to agency status.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Quality of service performance indicators are included among the key targets which were set out when the individual agencies were established. I refer the hon. Member to the following *Hansard* entries:

Executive/Defence Support Agency	*Hansard*
Service Children's Schools (NWE)	23 April 1991, Column 380
Royal Air Force Maintenance	28 March 1991, Column 570-571
Military Survey	27 March 1991, Column 479-480
Hydrographic Office	25 July 1991, Column 935
Directorate General of Defence Accounts	23 April 1991, Column 379-380
Defence Research Agency	26 March 1991, Column 401
Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment	26 March 1991, Column 397-399

The key targets for the Meteorological Office, which were set out in *Hansard*, column *443-44* of 2 April 1990, have been refined since the establishment of this organisation as an executive agency. Current targets for the period 1992-97 which concern quality of service are as follows:

(a) To increase efficiency by an average of 3 per cent. per annum during the period, to be achieved through required improvements in quality of service, increased service volumes and reduced unit costs.

(b) To reduce by 15 per cent. cumulatively the standard error of 48-hour forecasts of mid-tropospheric pressure fields over the north Atlantic and north-west Europe.

(c) To provide authoritative advice on climate change issues to Ministers and the general public.

In overall terms there were no such formal targets in existence before the individual agencies were established, although most of the elements of performance review were included in departmental plans.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the new forms of alternative working patterns introduced into the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment, the Defence Research Agency, the Directorate General of Defence Accounts, the Hydrographic Office, the Meteorological Office, the Military Survey, Royal Air Force Maintenance and Service Children's Schools (NWE), since their establishment as executive agencies; and provide for each a breakdown by grade of the numbers of staff taking up each new working pattern.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: This a matter for the chief executives of the executive agencies and defence support agencies. I have asked them to write to the hon. Member.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will state the first degree obtained by the chief executive, along with the university or polytechnic from which it was awarded, of each of the agencies in his Departments.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: This is a personal matter for the chief executives of the executive agencies and defence support agencies. I have asked them to consider this question and write to the hon. Member as appropriate.

Submarines

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the decision was taken to place all four Upholder class submarines in dry dock for repair; whether all four vessels will be dry-docked simultaneously; what is the expected timescale and cost of the repair work; and what is the total cost so far of the Upholder programme.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The arrangements for docking Upholder class submarines in order to correct a design fault in the submarines weapon handling and discharge system were decided in March 1990. The modification work necessarily involves placing the submarines in dry dock. Only three vessels will need to be modified; the fourth will be built to the modified design. They will not all be docked simultaneously. HMS Upholder will be docked early in 1992 and is due to be completed by the end of that year. HMS Unseen and Ursula are both due to be docked in early 1993 and should be completed by the end of that year. The cost of the modification work is between £7 million and £9 million. The total cost of the Upholder programme is expected to remain within the figure shown in table 3.2 of volume 2 of the Statement on the Defence Estimates 1991.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what additional facilities are planned at Rosyth to support the sea trials of the Vanguard class submarines.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: No additional facilities are being provided at Rosyth solely to support the Vanguard class submarine sea trials. The docking facility (RD46) currently under construction is for use throughout the operational life of the Vanguard class submarine and could be used during sea trials if necessary.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on future plans for the British underwater test and evaluation centre.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: A study is being carried out into the value for money aspects of the British underwater test and evaluation centre. This study is a precursor to a wider-ranging review of Ministry of Defence test and evaluation facilities generally. Until that review is completed, I cannot comment on the future plans for any individual establishment.

Mr. Boyes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the in-service dates of *(a)* Tigerfish Mod. 0, *(b)* Tigerfish Mod. 1 and *(c)* Tigerfish Mod. 2; whether each variant is still in service; and what changes have been made to (i) the planned role of each variant, (ii) design requirements for each variant, as issued to contractors and (iii) numbers of each variant ordered.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: The in-service dates for the three Tigerfish torpedo variants were: Mod 0—1974; Mod 1—1980; Mod 2—1986. All current in-service Tigerfish torpedoes have been upgraded to Mod 2 standard. The Mod 0 was an anti-submarine weapon. The Mod 1 version added an anti-surface capability and the Mod 2 was the result of a consolidation programme to overcome technical shortcomings with the weapon. Appropriate design specification changes were issued to the prime contractor. Three hundred and sixty Mod 0 torpedoes and 300 Mod 1 torpedoes, including Mod 0s converted to Mod 1s, were ordered. Mod 2 torpedoes are conversions from the earlier Mod 0s and Mod 1s.

Territorial Army (Northern Ireland)

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he will review the proposed changes in the Territorial Army in Northern Ireland so as to ensure that the Province does not bear an unfair share of the cuts.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 10 December, *Official Report*, column 733. In reaching this position a wide range of factors were taken into account. Territorial balance was one consideration but, in reconciling the differing interests, decisions were taken in the context of the TA as a whole.

Defence Establishments

Mr. Robert Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in his review of defence establishments; and when he expects to make an announcement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The review of defence establishments is an ongoing process which involves a number of studies producing results to varying timescales. Announcements of decisions are made as and when appropriate.

ENERGY

"Making a Corporate Commitment"

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what response he has received from his campaign "Making a Corporate Commitment"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: The objective of the "Making a Corporate Commitment" campaign is to promote investment in energy efficiency by increasing the number of companies with formal management arrangements, including targets for energy savings, and by providing these companies with targeted information on energy efficiency.

I am encouraged by the response to the campaign. To date over 350 companies have requested details and 67 companies have signed the declaration of commitment to responsible energy management, which is the central feature of the campaign. I intend to raise awareness of the campaign in the months ahead through mailshots, seminars, exhibitions, presentation and targeted advertising.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Pesticides

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the pesticides advisory committee will report on pentachlorophenol.

Mr. Maclean: Under the EC Marketing and Use Directive restrictions have been placed on the use of pentachlorophenol (PCP) which will be implemented on 1 July 1992 in all member states. The Advisory Committee on Pesticides will be reviewing the remaining uses of PCP early in 1992.

Eggs

Mrs. Heal: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what controls and checks there are on the standard of imported eggs; and in how many cases batches of imported eggs have been found unfit in the last six months.

Mr. Curry: Port health authorities monitor imports of eggs for wholesomeness, including infection by salmonella enteritidis. Information available for the first six months of 1991 shows that six cases of salmonella enteritidis were identified. These have been brought to the attention of the member states concerned.

Executive Agencies

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the quality of service performance indicators adopted by each of his Department's executive agencies since their establishment; and separately identify those quality of service performance indicators already operative prior to agency status.

Mr. Gummer: Prior to its becoming an executive agency the Central Veterinary Laboratory's main quality of service performance indicator was peer assessment by external specialists of its research and development; since it achieved agency status the laboratory has continued with the peer review of its R and D, achieved National Measurement Accreditation Service (NAMAS) accreditation and is good laboratory practice (GLP) compliant.

The laboratory also participates in the standardisation programmes and international collaborative assays organised by the World Health Organisation, the International Association of Biological Standardisation and the EC.

The Intervention Board is a separate Department under the European Communities Act 1972. Its quality of service indicators for 1990-91 and 1991-92 are:

Percentage of external trade claims processed within deadlines
Percentage of external trade claims processed correctly
Percentage of payments to storekeepers of intervention stock made within 28 days
Percentage of intervention stock disposed of other than under EC schemes because of deterioration in quality
Percentage of non intervention internal market schemes for which regulatory payment periods are fully met
Percentage of UK accounts submitted within deadline
Percentage of EC accounts submitted within deadline
Percentage of accounts revised after submission
Percentage of guarantee applications dealt with inside 10 days.

All these indicators were in existence in some form prior to agency status, but they have been refined and improved. The agency's targets and performance in 1990-91 have been published in its annual report.

The quality of service indicators have been revised for 1992-93 and will be:

Percentage of all claims processed within deadline.
Percentage of all claims processed correctly.
Percentage of intervention stock disposed of other than under EC schemes because of deterioration in quality.
Percentage of EC accounts submitted within deadline.
Percentage of United Kingdom accounts submitted within deadline.
Percentage of accounts revised after submission.

In answer to a question by my hon. Friend, the Member for Corby, on 16 April 1991 at column *143*, I announced the 1991-92 targets for the veterinary medicines directorate. The quality of service performance indicator

DEFECTIVE PRINTING

included in those targets is for 100 per cent. of new licence applications to be issued within 120 clock days. This was operative prior to agency status.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is the maximum salary payable to the chief executive of each of his Department's executive agencies, including performance-related element, and the length of time of the chief executive's contract in each case.

Mr. Gummer: The chief executive of the Central Veterinary Laboratory receives the standard civil service pay for grade 3, and is subject to standard civil service terms and conditions including eligibility for performance pay. His contract is for four years.

The appointment of the chief executive of the Intervention Board, which is a separate Department under the European Communities Act 1972, is for three years ending in October 1992. He is paid standard civil service pay at grade 3 plus one discretionary increment under the standard civil service performance pay arrangements gained before his present appointment. He does not participate in civil service performance pay but is eligible for a performance bonus linked to the achievement of predetermined efficiency and quality of service targets, of up to 12·5 per cent. of his salary at the end of the financial year. The maximum payable for 1991-92 would therefore be £52,899.

The chief executive of the veterinary medicines directorate was appointed as director in April 1989 for a period of four years. He is employed as a grade 4 with standard civil service pay, terms and conditions of service and is eligible for performance related pay.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) when the last annual report for each of his Department's executive agencies was published; and when the next one is due;

(2) if he will list the post, grade and maximum salary payable, including performance-related element, in each case where appointments from the private sector have been made to his Department's executive agencies at grade 7 or above, since their establishment;

(3) if he will list those new facilities for staff including nurseries and health care schemes which have been introduced in each of his Department's executive agencies since their establishment;

(4) if he will list the new forms of alternative working patterns introduced into each of his Department's executive agencies since their establishment and provide a break-down by grade of the numbers of staff taking up each new working pattern for each new agency;

(5) what was the first degree obtained by the chief executive of each of his Department's executive agencies; and from which university or polytechnic it was awarded;

(6) whether a group bonus scheme is in operation in each of his Department's executive agencies;

(7) how many staff were in post on the date that each of his Department's executive agencies was established; and how many staff are in post now in each case.

Mr. Gummer: This is a matter for the chief executives of the appropriate agencies and they will be writing to the hon. Member shortly.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much was spent on events and publicity surrounding the launch of each of his Department's executive agencies; and whether the cost was borne by the parent department or the new agency.

Mr. Gummer: The cost of events and publicity surrounding the launch of the Central Veterinary Laboratory as an executive agency was £28,163 of which £25,000 was borne by my Department.

The amount spent by the Intervention Board on events and publicity surrounding its launch as an agency was £8,520. The cost was borne by the agency, which is a separate Department under the European Communities Act 1972.

The cost of events and publicity surrounding the launch of the veterinary medicines directorate as an executive agency was £13,088. This was borne by my Department.

Badgers

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he intends to take to ensure that licences issued under section 4 of the Badgers Act 1991 do not lead to indiscriminate violation of badger setts; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 12 December.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 28 November, *Official Report*, column *650*, what serious risk was involved in the circumstances which led to the granting of a licence under section 4 of the Badgers Act 1991; if the licence was issued to one named individual only; what conditions he attached to that licence; what action was taken under the licence; what steps he has taken to ensure that the licence conditions were complied with; and if he has yet formulated the criteria under which future licences will be issued.

Mr. Maclean: The licence issued by this Ministry under section 4 of the Badgers Act 1991 permitted a named individual to use exclusion techniques for a period of three weeks to prevent a badger digging into and undermining flood defence banking. This action was necessary in order to prevent the risk of flooding. A full report of action taken will be submitted on completion of the work. The criteria under which future licences will be issued will be decided after the consultation exercise is completed.

Set-aside Scheme

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the results of his study of the evaluation of set-aside conducted by the university of Reading.

Mr. Gummer: Reading university will be publishing its findings early next year.

Potatoes

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans there are to change the regime for potatoes in both the EC and the United Kingdom; what stage the proposed changes have reached; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I understand that European Commission officials are working on a proposal for a regime for

potatoes to come forward early in 1992. I will await these developments in Brussels before taking up a position on the future of our domestic arrangements.

Civil Servants (Outside Appointments)

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the positions of civil servants in his Ministry at grade 3 and above who have taken up appointments in outside organisations in 1991, giving the name of those organisations and giving in each case *(a)* the level at which their application for approval was considered, and *(b)* the conditions of approval which were imposed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: It is not Government practice to disclose details of individual applications under the business appointment rules.

Agriculture Council

Mr. Jopling: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the Agriculture Council held on 11 and 12 December; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: I represented the United Kingdom at this meeting of the Council accompanied by my hon. Friend, the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), Parliamentary Secretary in my Department.

The Council completed its first reading of the Commission's proposals for reform of the CAP. I emphasised that proposals should come forward for those sectors not yet covered such as wine, fruit and vegetables and sugar. It was clear that the Council is still some way from agreement and several Ministers pointed out that final decisions could not be taken until the outcome of the GATT round was known. Discussion is now expected to resume under the Portuguese Presidency in January.

The Commissioner reported on developments in the GATT negotiations which seem now to be coming to a climax. I made clear the United Kingdom aim of a lasting, balanced and genuine reform of agricultural policies worldwide.

The Council agreed by a qualified majority an increase in the maximum level of the suckler cow premium, with three member states, including the United Kingdom, voting against. I argued that increased premiums could be justified only by equivalent or greater savings on intervention, which were not proposed.

The Council noted agreement in principle to two directives on plant health. This represents a most satisfactory outcome to a long, difficult negotiation and a significant step towards the single market.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Slovenia and Croatia

Sir Russell Johnston: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the United Kingdom will recognise the independence of Slovenia and Croatia.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We accept that those Yugoslav republics which desire independence will have it. We have to judge whether recognition would exacerbate the situation in Croatia or increase the real danger of civil war in other republics. We are working towards recognition as part of a negotiated general settlement involving all Yugoslav parties. This is the only way of guaranteeing the rights of minorities.

Sensitive Technologies

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consideration he has given to the report prepared by the EC Directorate General for Customs on the status of EC member-state customs departments in regard to their adequacy to implement controls over sensitive technologies and military exports from EC member states from 1 January 1993.

Mr. Garel-Jones: No such report has been formally issued by the EC directorate general for customs.

The Commission has, however, been undertaking an informal fact-finding mission to collect information on the export control regime maintained by each member state for dual-use goods: we are closely involved in discussions with the Commission services. We will give careful consideration to the Commission's findings once these are available.

Disarmament

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will obtain for his departmental library a copy of the report by Thomas Schmalber for the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR/91/16) "In Pursuit of a Nuclear Test Ban treaty: A Guide to the Debate in the Conference on Disarmament, 1991."

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Yes. A copy has been ordered and will be added to the FCO departmental library in due course.

East Timor

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information Her Majesty's ambassador to the United Nations has received following the visit by the special rapporteur on arbitrary executions, of the United Nations Human Rights Commission to East Timor.

Mr. Lennox Boyd: The special rapporteur on arbitrary executions for the United Nations Human Rights Committee has not visited East Timor recently. A visit is still being considered.

INDEX TO THE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 200**

SESSION 1991–92

2nd December—13th December 1991

SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc, between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

Oral and Written Parliamentary Questions are indexed under subject headings and the names of Members asking and Ministers replying to them. Questions are not listed under the names of Departments replying. Departmental listings can be arrived at indirectly by looking under the names of the Minister(s) of that Department. There are, however, the headings 'Northern Ireland', 'Scotland', and 'Wales' under which one can find not only most Questions answered by the Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Office, Welsh Office but also Questions about these areas of the United Kingdom which are answered by other Departments. Ministerial statements are indexed under subject headings, under 'Ministerial statements' and the names of Ministers making them and Members speaking on them. General debates are indexed under broad subject headings and under the names of all Members and Ministers taking part. Debates on legislation (Bills, Orders, Regulations etc.) are indexed under the name of the Bill, Statutory Instrument etc, under subject headings and under the names of those taking part.

Rulings and Statements by Mr. Speaker and his deputies are brought together under the heading Speaker's rulings and statements.

Other contributions by Mr. Speaker and his deputies appear under the heading Speaker.

Opposition Day Debates, Estimates Day Debates and Standing Order No. 10 applications are listed under those respective headings and under subject headings too.

The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

Abbreviations

Bills 1R = first reading, 2R = second reading, Money res = money resolution, Com = Committee stage, Rep = Report stage, 3R = third reading, amendt/amendts = amendment/amendments, * = matter taken formally, without debate.

Column numbers followed by the letter W refer to Written Questions. These appear at the end of each daily part or volume with their own sequence of column numbers printed in italics.

A1
380
Road construction 343w
Road works 306-7w

A5
137w

A10
Road works 189-90w

A13
Road closures 309w

A45
Road traffic 358-60w

A48(M)
406-7w

A59
Speed limits 359w

A92
455w

A465
Road construction 20w

A470
436-8w

A483
137w, 436-8w

Aberdeen Royal Infirmary
(03:12:91) 145-62

Abortion
RU486 (06:12:91) 511

Absence abroad
Social security benefits rules 377w

Accommodation & Administration Subcommittee
402-3w

Adams, Mrs Irene
Debates etc.
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 457-9
Public expenditure, Scotland (04:12:91) 268
Questions
Devolution, Scotland 847

Adjournment debates
Speaker's rulings & statements (06:12:91) 588, (12:12:91) 1004

Adjudication officers
126-7w

Adley, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Transport & Works Bill, 2R (02:12:91) 41, 54-8, 65
Questions
Lebanon, Israel 496w
Railway accidents, Severn tunnel 612-3

Administration of justice
Northern Ireland 975-7

Adoption
329-30w
Romania 320-1w, 329-30w

Adult education
725, (12:12:91) 1025-7
Educational finance 724
Expenditure 565w
Welsh language 19-20w

Advertising
Cardiff Bay barrage 539w
Driver & Vehicle Licensing Agency 309w
EC action 12-3w
Electoral register 293-4w

Advisory Committee on School Teachers' Pay & Conditions
See Interim Advisory Committee on School Teachers' Pay

Advisory Council on Science & Technology
449w

Advocates for Animals
Animal experiments 216w

Africa
Democracy 496w

Aggravated Vehicle Taking Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 620-701

Agricultural Development & Advisory Service
539-40w

Agricultural marketing
28w

Agricultural research
Set-aside schemes 592w

Agricultural subsidies
Marginal land 851-2
Sheep 7

Agriculture
Income 517-20w
Northern Ireland 517-20w
Scotland 852

Agriculture Select Committee
208w

Aid financed trade
150w, 384-6w
Indonesia 385-6w

AIDS
(12:12:91) 1014-6
Health education 441w
Life insurance 443w
Scotland 457w
Wales 441w

Air ambulance services
131-2

Air fares
British Airways 304w
Europe 304w

Air force
391-2w
Military exercises 270w

Air pollution
Crops 548w

Air pollution control
Carbon dioxide 258-9w
Electricity generation 314w
Manufacturing industries 175w
Metalworking 9w
Nitrogen oxides 22w
Orimulsion 78-9w
Ozone layer 461w

Air safety
Fires 110w
Smoke hoods 110w

Air travel
Competition 304-5w

Airmisses
Shipping 57w

Airports
Public sector borrowing 188w

Aitken, Mr Jonathan
Questions
Business statements 406-7

Albania
Gold 95w

Alcohol advertising
EC action 13w

Alcoholic drinks
Consumption 61w

Alcoholic drinks duties
Beer 82-3w
Tax harmonisation 83w

Alcoholism
Liver diseases 61-2w

Alexander, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Prison Security Bill, 2R (03:12:91) 189-92
Questions
Bentley, Derek 388
East Timor 607
Tax yields, Motor vehicles 367-8w

Alison, Rt Hon Michael, Second Church Estates Commissioner
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 314-7, 362
Questions
British Coal Corporation, Productivity 334w

Allason, Mr Rupert
Questions
Business statements 405, 998
Planning & Compensation Act 1991, Enforcement 171-2w

Allen, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
Social security orders (11:12:91) 885, 886-7, 902, 912-5, 919, 920, 921
Questions
Attendance allowance, Local government services 354-5w
Bank notes, Design 277w
Career premium, Computer applications 351w
Civil service, Ministers 193w
Community care, Departmental coordination 352w
Family credit 469-70w
Family credit, Take-up 565w
Handicap benefits, Transitional arrangements 351-2w
House of Commons broadcasting, Dept of Employment 104w
House of Commons broadcasting, Dept of Energy 75w
House of Commons broadcasting, Dept of Health 116w
House of Commons broadcasting, Dept of the Environment 177w
House of Commons broadcasting, Dept of Trade & Industry 207w
House of Commons broadcasting, Dept of Transport 110w
House of Commons broadcasting, Leader of the Opposition 119w
House of Commons broadcasting, Prime Minister 151w
House of Commons broadcasting, Scottish Office 167w
House of Commons broadcasting, Treasury 83w
House of Commons broadcasting, Welsh Office 101w
Income support, Pensioners 221-2w
Invalid care allowances, Computer applications 376w
Invalid care allowances, Social security claims 352w
Low incomes 526w
Maastricht Summit, Parliamentary procedure 227w
Maastricht Summit, Parliamentary sovereignty & European Community 192w
National Insurance Fund 220-1w
Official visits, European Communities 223-4w
Opposition, Higher civil servants 190w, 192-3w
Pay 409w
Shadow Cabinet, Higher civil servants 192w
Social security, EC law 222w
Social security reform, Legislation 376w
Unemployment, Statistics 131w
Unemployment benefits, Social security benefits rules 241w
Wages councils, Prosecutions 526-32w
Working hours 241w

Almondbank
Naval bases 84w

Alternative energy
Conferences 336w
Planning authorities 185w
Planning permission 69w
Research finance 74-6w
Straw 594
Town & country planning 552-3w

Alternative medicine
Family doctors 585-7w

Alton, Mr David
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 876
Yugoslavia (12:12:91) 1016-20
Questions
Croatia, Refugees 96-7w
Electricity supply industry, Theft 540w
Empty property, Liverpool 244
Holloway Prison, Prison visitors 577w
Invalidity benefits, Clothing 566w
Prison medical services, Mothers 577w
Prison medical services, Prison visitors 577w

Amber Valley
New businesses 242w

Ambulance services
Car allowances 35-6w
Greater London 115w
Wales 3-4

Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 869

Amess, Mr David
Debates etc.
Secondary education, Basildon (12:12:91) 1038-9

Amos, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 347-51
Transport & Works Bill, 2R (02:12:91) 68-71
Questions
Agricultural marketing 28w
Air fares, Europe 304w
Air travel, Competition 304-5w
Bail, Offenders 214-5w
British Airways, Air fares 304w
Cars, Security equipment 59w
Common agricultural policy, EC reform 30w
Crime prevention, Housing estates 5w
Crime victims, Government grants 4-5w
Farmers, Early retirement 28w
Farmers, Environment protection 29w
Food labelling, Origin marking 29w
Motor insurance, Security equipment 5-6w
Motorways 107-8w
Motorways, Scotland 168w
Motorways, Wales 101w
Northern Regional Health Authority, Finance 112w
Pearl Harbour, Anniversaries 321w, 349w
Sheep premiums, Northumberland 29w
Smoking, Health education 154w
Smoking, Northumberland 158w
Smoking, Young people 158-9w
Smoking related diseases, Costs 158w
Smoking related diseases, Lost working days 159w
VAT, Small businesses 38w
Young offenders, Parental responsibility 4w
Young offenders, Police cautions 4w

Amusement Machines (Protection of Children) Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (10:12:91) 749

Anaesthetics
Death 585w
Dental services 380w, 585w

Anderson, Mr Donald
Debates etc.
Aggravated Taking Bill, 2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 620, 623-4, 630, 636, 640, 650-3, 681-2, 687, 693-4, 696-7, 699-700

Anderson, Mr Donald—continued
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 736
Questions
Bus services, Wales 11-2, 405w
Community charge, Administrative costs 194-5w
Community charge, Wales 195w
Local government reform, Wales 19w
Railway accidents, Severn tunnel 611-2

Anglo-Irish talks
513w

Angus
Redundancy 852

Animal experiments
Advocates for Animals 216w
Feldberg, Wilhelm 397-8w
Licensing 217w, 397-8w
Northern Ireland 210-1w

Animal housing
Pigs 246-7w

Animal Procedures Committee
397-8w

Animal welfare
(04:12:91) 279, (12:12:91) 1020-2

Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986
Questions
217w

Anniversaries
Pearl Harbour 321w, 349w

Annual reports
Civil service agencies 570w
Medical Research Council 418w
Welsh Office 570w

Apprentices
Building industry 24w

Arab League
see League of Arab States

Arab states
Balance of trade 204w
EC external trade 226w

Arbuthnot, Mr James
Debates etc.
Socialism (13:12:91) 1233, 1237-8, 1276
Questions
Estate Action, Broadmead Estate Redbridge 182w
School choice, Central London 416w

Archbishop's Commission on Rural Areas
277w

Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Debates etc.
Crime (12:12:91) 1047-52, 1064-5
Questions
Brixton Prison, Prison escapes 394-5w

Archives
Export licensing 12w

Area protection grant
184w

Areas of outstanding natural beauty
Wales 20w

Argyll & Clyde Health Board
Speech therapists 460w

Armed conflict
Somalia 391w
Yugoslavia 155w, (12:12:91) 1160-7

Armed forces
Blood sports 268-9w
Council tax 69w

Armed forces casualties
Compensation 349w, 391w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict 270w, (06:12:91) 583-90

Armed forces civilians
Redundancy 86-7w

Armed forces deployment
589w
Armoured fighting vehicles 544w
Defence equipment 88w, 544-5w
Defence review 84-6w, 545w
Nuclear submarines 542w

Armed forces discharges
Housing 227w

Armed forces housing
Eltham 473w
Empty housing 56w

Armed forces officers
Diesel vehicles 268w

Armed forces pensions
227w, (09:12:91) 708-14

Armed forces reserves
Ministerial statements (10:12:91) 733-48

Armed forces strength
Gibraltar 229w
NATO 180w

Armed forces training
Defence land 228-30w
HMS Raleigh 473w
Low flying 268w

Armed forces uniforms
87w

Armoured fighting vehicles
Armed forces deployment 544w

Arms control
Group of Seven 275w
Non-governmental organisations 32-3w

Arms control negotiations
497w
Warships 88w

Arms exports
Export licensing 39-40w

Arms trade
271-2w
Group of Seven 275w
Pakistan 321w
United Nations 498w

Armstrong, Ms Hilary
Questions
Business statements 1002
Children Act 1989 92-3w
Primary education, France 240w

Army
Operating costs 543w

Army cadet force
(10:12:91) 733-48

Army in Northern Ireland
514w
Compensation 228w

Army strength
Territorial Army 348w

Arnold, Mr Jacques
Debates etc.
Railway travel, Kent (12:12:91) 1133-5, 1140, 1144
Socialism (13:12:91) 1232, 1236, 1240, 1248, 1257, 1259-60, 1265, 1281-2, 1294-8
Questions
Air pollution control, Electricity generation 314w
Business statements 1000
Community service orders 215w
Export Credits Guarantee Department, Privatisation 11-2w

Arnold, Sir Thomas
Questions
Audit, Companies 10w

Arrests
Football 215w
Metropolitan Police 139-40w

Arrests—continued
Shoplifting 138w

Art education
Northern Ireland 451-2w
Overseas students 449w
Scotland 460w
Student numbers 440w, 449w, 451-2w, 460w
Wales 440w

Arts
Civil servants' secondment 19-20
Research finance 726-7
Teesside 48-9w

Arts Council
Government grants 14

Arts council grants
14-5

Arts festivals
Birmingham 48w
East Midlands 48w

Arts finance
15, 49w
Greater London 49w
North West Arts 48w
Wales 16

Ashby, Mr David
Debates etc.
Contempt of court (03:12:91) 223-5, 241
Regional government (06:12:91) 538-40
Questions
Child abuse, Leicestershire 23-4

Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 864-5
Questions
Mortgage defaulters 393-4, 989-90

Ashford station
Railway stations 105w

Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 870
Questions
Attendance allowance 126w
Attendance allowance, Home helps 156w
Fish, Radiation hazards 549w
Handicapped, Local government social services 114w
Health physics, Nuclear power 492w
X rays, Health hazards 484w
X rays, Radiation hazards 485w

Ashton, Mr Joseph
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 873
Private notice question point of order (05:12:91) 398

Associated British Ports
570-1w
Water abstraction 136w

Association of District Councils
544w

Asylum Bill 1991/92
Questions
216w, 583w

***Atkins, Mr Robert**, Under-Secretary of State, Department of Education & Science (Sport)*
Questions
Curriculum, HIV infection 416w
Dept of Education & Science, Disabled workers 154w
Football, Europe 416w
Foundation for Sport & the Arts 414w
Health education, Smoking 154w
Lotteries 721-2
Sex education, Training 92w
Sports 722
Sports, Departmental publications 511w
Sports, Finance 721-2

Atkins, Mr Robert—continued
Sports Council 418w, 722
Youth services 413w, 726

Atkinson, Mr David
Questions
Albania, Gold 95w
Higher education, Mandatory student grants 91w
Higher education, Tuition fees 17w
Kurdistan, Overseas aid 147w

Atlantic Computers
462w

Atomic Coordinating Office Washington
542w

Atomic Weapons Establishment
Verification 347w

Attachment of earnings
Community charge 172w

Attendance allowance
126w
Home helps 156w
Local government services 354-5w

Attorney General
Council of Ministers 8w
European Communities 7w

Au pairs
507-8w

Audit
Companies 10w

Audit Commission for Local Authorities in England & Wales
17w, 417w

Australia
Welsh Development Agency 102-3w

Average earnings
24-5w

Avimo
269-70w

Avon
Gypsies (13:12:91) 1229

Avon County Council
(13:12:91) 1229

AWE Aldermaston
Construction 543w
Health physics 269w

Badgers Act 1991
Questions
Licensing 548-9w, 592w

Bail
504w
Committal proceedings 582w
EC countries 393w
Habitual offenders 433-4w
Offenders 214-5w

Bail hostels
217-8w, 502-4w, 579-81w
Change of use 580w
Children Act 1989 580w
Crime 503w
Government grants 503w
Habitual offenders 503w
Management 579w
Operating costs 580w
Per capita costs 579-80w
Shropshire 580w
Unemployed 502w

Bail information schemes
Government grants 581-2w

Bailiffs
172w
Community charge 173w, 316w
Working hours 274w

***Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth**, Secretary of State for the Home Department*
Debates etc.
Aggravated Taking Bill, 2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 621-7, 630-1, 632, 636, 638

Baker, Rt Hon Kenneth—continued
Deportation, Ministerial statements (02:12:91) 30-5
Deportation, Points of order (02:12:91) 36-7
Prison Security Bill, 2R (03:12:91) 167-72, 174, 212
Questions
A1 380
Bentley, Derek 387-8
Brixton Prison, Prison escapes 122w, 394-5w
Chahal, Karamjit Singh, Deportation 508w
Confiscation orders, India 244-5w
Directorate of Telecommunications, Expenditure 393w
Directorate of Telecommunications, Public buildings 434w
Directorate of Telecommunications, Sonic Communications 393-4w
Drug prevention schemes 509-10w
EC immigration 384-5
Full Sutton Prison, Prison escapes 294w
Home Office, Disabled workers 138w
Home Office, European Communities 2w
Le Pen, Jean-Marie 384-6
Ministers' domestic visits, North Tyneside 218w
Police, Manpower 214w
Police, Northumberland 380-1
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 396w
Prisoner escorts, Contracts for services 219-20w
Terrorism, Legal representation 285-6w

Balance of trade
Arab states 204w

***Baldry, Mr Tony**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of the Environment*
Debates etc.
Hazardous wastes (12:12:91) 1156-9
Questions
Air pollution control, Electricity generation 314w
Air pollution control, Manufacturing industries 175w
Birds, Import of live animals 182w
British Nuclear Fuels, BATNEEC 176w
Chlorofluorocarbons, Chlorine 363-4w
Chlorofluorocarbons, Production 427-8w
Citizen's Charter, Rights of way 426w
Climate 490w
Coastal areas, Special protection areas 68w
Corine programme 314w
Dogs 71-2w
Druridge Bay, Extractive industries 259
EC environmental policy, EC law 76w
Environment Agency 236w
Environment protection, Government departments 492-3w
Environmental Protection (Prescribed Processes & Substances) Regulations 1991 177w
Greenhouse effect 366-7w
Hazardous materials 487w
Hazardous wastes, Industrial wastes 313w
Health physics, Nuclear power 492w
Hedges & ditches, Environment protection 79w
Import of live animals, EC action 490-1w
Incinerators, Tyne & Wear 173w
Nature Conservancy Council for England, Birds 170w
Nature conservation, International trade 432w
Noise abatement zones 311w
Orimulsion, Air pollution control 78-9w
Orimulsion, Pembroke power station 78w
Ozone layer 428w
Ozone layer, Civil service manpower 428w
Ozone layer, Research 364w, 428w
Ozone layer, Telecommunications industry 430w
Pollution, Disclosure of information 68-9w
Radioactive waste disposal 493w
Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee 494w

Baldry, Mr Tony—continued
Radioactivity, Licensing 493w
River pollution, Fish 318w
River Ribble, Pollution monitoring 238w
Squirrels, Surveys 182w
Waste disposal, EC law 491-2w
Waste disposal, Licensing 72w, 237w
Waste disposal, Prosecutions 491w
Water pollution, Ewelme 80w
Water pollution, Harmonisation of standards 431-2w
Water supply industry 171w
Water supply industry, Tree felling 69w

Baltic states
Foreign policy 420w
Know-how Fund 387w

Bangladesh
Political refugees 396w

Bank notes
Design 277w

Bank of Credit & Commerce International 142
Redundancy pay 104w

Banks, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 748
Questions
Armed forces deployment 589w

Banks, Mr Tony
Questions
Brixton Prison, Prisoners' mail 139w
Police vehicles, Road accidents 140w, 583w
Public expenditure 396
Wilton Park Executive Agency 227w

Bar Council
see General Council of the Bar

Bardsley, Kevin
Criminal appeals 140w

Barnes, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Electoral register (12:12:91) 1037-8
Questions
Alternative energy, Conferences 336w
Arms trade, Pakistan 321w
Citric acid, Respiratory diseases 465-7w
Corine programme 314w
Energy policy 335-6w
Environment protection, Exhibitions 348w
Euratom, Nuclear safeguards 336w
Euratom, Recruitment 336w
Greenhouse effect 366-7w
Group of Seven, Arms control 275w
Group of Seven, Arms trade 275w
Housing, Security 328w
International Atomic Energy Agency, Nuclear power 337w
International Politics of Nuclear Waste 337w
Iraq, Scientists 321w
Northern Ireland Airports, Privatisation 212w
Northern Ireland Airports, Profits 212w
Nuclear accidents, Radioactive wastes 338w
Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty 276w, 348w
Nuclear power, EC action 336w
Nuclear weapons tests 347-8w
Science & technology research, Sponsorship 295w
Scientists against Nuclear Arms, Books 347w
Transport of radioactive materials, Packaging 361w
Transport of radioactive materials, Shipping accidents 361w
United Nations, Disaster relief 275-6w
Wind power, International conferences 335w
Work permits, Nuclear physics 340w

Barnes, Mrs Rosie
Debates etc.
Stillbirth (Definition) Bill, 1R (04:12:91) 280

Barnsley
Standard spending assessments (12:12:91) 1022-4

Barron, Mr Kevin
Debates etc.
Coal mining (10:12:91) 794, 803, 807, 813-8
Questions
British Coal Corporation, Privatisation 333w
Coal Task Force 75w
Combined heat & power 599
Electricity generation 75w
Kidneys, Transplant surgery 199w

Basildon
Rents to mortgages scheme 313-4w, 363w
Secondary education (12:12:91) 1038-9
Shops (12:12:91) 1038-9

Batiste, Mr Spencer
Questions
Mandatory student grants, Leeds 723
Music education, Curriculum 16w
Music education, Musical instruments 15-6w
Police civilians 213w, 505w
West Yorkshire Police Authority, Police civilians 505w

BATNEEC
175w
British Nuclear Fuels 176w

Battle, Mr John
Questions
Council tax benefits 551w
MFV Ocean Hound, Salvage 306w
Patient's Charter 157w
Pay 341-2w
Prisoners, Hepatitis 287w
Special education, Primary education 727
Special training needs, Training & enterprise councils 340w
Taking & driving away, Young people 382

BBC
434w

BCCI
see Bank of Credit & Commerce International

Beaumont-Dark, Mr Anthony
Debates etc.
Contempt of court (03:12:91) 224-5
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 878
Mirror Group Newspapers, Points of order (09:12:91) 617
Questions
School buildings, Birmingham 415w

Beck, Frank
23-4, (03:12:91) 223-42

Beckett, Mrs Margaret
Debates etc.
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 440, 446, 485-91, 494

Bedding
Cot deaths 330w

Beer
Alcoholic drinks duties 82-3w

Beggs, Mr Roy
Debates etc.
Public expenditure, Scotland (04:12:91) 272
Questions
Contracts, Company liquidations 322w
Dyslexia, Northern Ireland 515-6w
Dyslexia, Scotland 567w
Dyslexia, Teacher training 446-8w
Dyslexia, Teachers 413w
Employment level, Northern Ireland 513w
Ferries, Stranraer 459w
Freshwater fish, Northern Ireland 521-2w
Government contracts, Northern Ireland 210w
Handicapped drivers, Parking 519w
Hearing therapists, Manpower 521w

Beggs, Mr Roy—continued
Pupil-teacher ratios, Northern Ireland 980

Beith, Mr A J
Debates etc.
British Railways Bill, 3R (02:12:91) 79
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 313
Common fisheries policy (11:12:91) 931
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 430, 439, 441-5
Regional government (06:12:91) 526-7, 545-50
Questions
Druridge Bay, Extractive industries 259
Employment level, Northumberland 24w
House of Commons Commission 118-9w
House of Commons Library, Recruitment 403w
House of Commons staff, Payroll deduction scheme 31w
Low pay 22-4w
Police, Northumberland 381
VAT, Environment protection 436w

Belfast
Bombings 981-2
Business premises 982
Caravan sites 327w

Belfast Airport
EC grants & loans 514w
Government grants 210w, 514w

Bell, Mr Stuart
Questions
Dock labour scheme 575w
Dock labour scheme, Redundancy pay 555w
Dock workers, Redundancy 556w
Tees & Hartlepool Port Authority, Dock labour scheme 555w
Tees & Hartlepool Port Authority, Redundancy 555w

Bellingham, Mr Henry
Questions
Public expenditure, Northern Ireland 515w

Bellotti, Mr David
Debates etc.
Residential care (10:12:91) 769-72
Questions
Child abuse, Leicestershire 27-8
Civil defence 6w
Council tax 252

Belmarsh Prison Woolwich
Departmental correspondence 509w

Belorussia
496-7w

Benefits Agency
see Social Security Benefits Agency

Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Debates etc.
Commonwealth of Europe Bill, 1R (09:12:91) 618
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 868

Bennett, Mr Andrew F
Debates etc.
Prison Security Bill, 2R (03:12:91) 167-70, 175, 192-4, 222
Transport & Works Bill, 2R (02:12:91) 43, 46, 47, 52-3, 57, 58-62, 76
Questions
A1, Road works 306-7w
Citizen's Charter, Rights of way 283w, 426w
Health & Safety Executive, Offices 575w
Level crossings, Public footpaths 307-8w, 405w
Metropolitan Police, Police records 219w
Patient's Charter, Hospital waiting lists 110w
Police custody 396w
Prostitution, Police records 508-9w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, National Criminal Intelligence Service 389w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Police national computer 89w

***Bennett, Mr Nicholas**, Under-Secretary of State for Wales*
Questions
AIDS, Health education 441w
Ambulance services, Wales 3-4
Bryn Estyn Community Home, Child abuse 440w
Bus stations, Oystermouth 101w
Cancer, Medical treatments 134w
Community care, Wales 195w
Community charge, Administrative costs 194-5w
Community charge, Wales 195w
Community councils, Wales 21w
Cremation, Wales 407w
Crime prevention, Wales 407w
Defence industries, Wales 12
Deprivation indicators, Wales 407-8w
East Glamorgan General Hospital 20w
Environmental policy, Wales 13
Family doctors, Pay 100-1w
Geriatric patients, Wales 5
Health services, Wales 249w, 283-4w
Homelessness, Temporary accommodation 441w
Homelessness, Wales 19w
Hospital consultants, Pay 136-7w
Hospital patients, Wales 198w
Hospital waiting lists, Mid Glamorgan 537-8w
Hospital waiting lists, Wales 21w, 194w, 403-4w
Housing, Wales 9-10
Local government finance, Wales 9
Medical treatments, Women 4-5
Mental health community care, Wales 439-40w
Mentally handicapped, Respite care 102w
Mentally handicapped, Wales 137-8w
Minor works grants, Community charge 283w
Mortgage defaulters, Wales 13-4
National Association for the Care & Resettlement of Offender, Training 442w
NHS, Public expenditure 99-100w
NHS, Wales 248w
NHS administration, Wales 22w
NHS & private practice, Contracts for services 101w
NHS trusts, Wales 408w, 438w
Nitrogen oxides, Air pollution control 22w
Non-departmental public bodies, Contracts for services 284w
Rented housing, Wales 19w
River pollution, Wales 18-9w
Secure accommodation, Wales 102w, 137w, 195-8w
Special education, Wales 248w
Sports facilities, Rate rebates 538-9w
Tranquillisers, Prescriptions 135w

Bentley, Derek
388
Prerogative of mercy 387-8

Benton, Mr Joe
Questions
Environmental impact assessment 182w

Bermingham, Mr Gerald
Debates etc.
Socialism (13:12:91) 1243, 1247, 1251, 1255, 1258, 1262, 1266, 1274-9
Questions
Business statements 407
Shops, Theft 389

Betting & gaming duties
566w

Bexley
British National Party 990

Biffen, Rt Hon John
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 866
Questions
Common agricultural policy, Fraud 165w

Biological & Toxin Weapons Convention
474w
International conferences 474w

Birds
Import of live animals 182w
Nature Conservancy Council for England 170w
Northern Ireland 450-1w
Theft 138w

Birmingham
Arts festivals 48w
School buildings 415w

Birmingham Airport
188w

Bishopsgate Investment Management
462-3w

Blakenhurst Prison
Contracts for services 219-20w

Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Questions
East Timor 606

Blind
Mobility allowance 52w

"Blind & Partially Sighted Adults in Britain"
93-4w, 446w, 584w

Blood sports
Armed forces 268-9w

Blood tests
Cholesterol 60w

Blood transfusions
HIV infection (12:12:91) 1014-6

Blunkett, Mr David
Questions
City Challenge, Urban programme 236w
Community charge benefits 248-9
Council tax 494w
Council tax, Valuation 477-8w
EC social policy 730
Local Government Finance Bill 1991/92, Orders & regulations 489w
Local government reform 79w
Rate support grants, Local government expenditure 554w
Unpaid taxes 37-8w

Boateng, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Socialism (13:12:91) 1273, 1275

Body searches
Maghaberry Prison 323-4w

Bolsover
Dioxins 112w

Bombings
Belfast 981-2
Lockerbie 95w, 321-2w, 389w, 857-8

Books
Scientists against Nuclear Arms 349w

Boots
Industrial accidents 341w

Borders region
Common agricultural policy 344w
Economic situation 456w

Boscawen, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 741-2

Botswana
Nature conservation 551w

Bottomley, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
British Railways Bill, 3R (02:12:91) 79-81
Transport & Works Bill, 2R (02:12:91) 74, 76
Questions
Armed forces housing, Eltham 473w
Armed forces officers, Diesel vehicles 268w
Bus services, Greater London 105w
Car allowances, Ambulance services 35-6w

***Bottomley, Mr Peter**—continued*
Child care 13w
East London river crossing, Environmental impact assessment 309w
Economic models, Finance 190w
Eltham Palace 473w
Fu[illegible] Wood 338w
Hospitals, Construction 157w
Hospitals, Parking 482w
Lotteries 14w
Nazi war crimes, Prosecutions 603
Overseas aid 151w
Oxleas Wood 250
Road accidents, Northern Ireland 515w
Road tolls, Greater London 105w
Road works, Cost effectiveness 357-8w
Tax yields, Tobacco duties 190w
Territorial Army, Army strength 348w
Young people 142

***Bottomley, Mrs Virginia**, Minister of State, Department of Health*
Questions
Adoption 329-30w
Adoption, Romania 329-30w
AIDS, Life insurance 443w
Attendance allowance, Home helps 156w
Breast cancer, Screening 64w
Burnley Pendle & Rossendale Health Authority, Public appointments 585w
Cervical cancer, Screening 63-4w
Childbirth, Medical records 62w
Children Act 1989, Expenditure 199w
Children in care, Refugees 115w
Community care, Finance 331-2w
Community care, Local government social services 137
Community nurses, Manpower 111w
Cot deaths, Bedding 330w
Cot deaths, Health education 378w
Drugs, Licensing 486w
Eye disorders, Young people 156w
Family doctors, Alternative medicine 587w
Family doctors, Pay 113w
Family doctors, Women 112w
Family health services authorities 111w
Foetal tissue, Waste disposal 482-3w
Health authorities 112-3w
Hospital waiting lists 246w, 481-2w
Hospital waiting lists, Leicestershire 112w
Hospital waiting lists, North East Thames Regional Health Authority 444w
Local government social services 113w, 137-8
Lung diseases, Medical equipment 156w
Martin House Hospice, Government grants 443-5w
Medical equipment, Prescriptions 63w
"Must Babies Still Die" 330w
National disability information project 483-4w
NHS, Capital investment 127
NHS & private practice 113w
NHS charges exemptions 328-9w
NHS finance 127-8
NHS trusts 111w, 136
NHS trusts, Sheffield 136
Nurses Midwives & Health Visitors Act 1979 117-8w
Patient's Charter, Hospital waiting lists 110w
Perinatal mortality 443-4w
Personal social services, Fees & charges 113w
Quest for a Test for Cancer, Research finance 159w, 330w
Secure accommodation, Government grants 118w, 157-8w
Secure accommodation, Young offenders 157-8w
Skin disorders 377-8w
Speech therapists 116w
Speech therapists, Recruitment 117w
Speech therapists, Training 116w
Speech therapists, Yorkshire Regional Health Authority 117w
Speech therapy, Dewsbury Health Authority 116w

Bovine somatotropin
EC action 207w

Bowden, Mr Andrew
Questions
Cold weather payments, Publicity 350w
Home energy efficiency scheme, Publicity 258w
Hypothermia, Elderly 200w
Retirement age 50w
Retirement pensions 350-1w

Bowden, Mr Gerald
Debates etc.
Socialism (13:12:91) 1238, 1245, 1251, 1258, 1260-5

Bowis, Mr John
Questions
Adult education, Expenditure 565w
Bus services, Contracts for services 556w
Bus services, Greater London 556w
Civil servants' secondment, Arts 19-20
Council tax 250
EC Education Council 18w
Employment level, Northern Ireland 513w
Gambling, EC action 394w
Intergovernmental conference, EC integration 263w
Passenger transport executives, Greater London 556w
Polytechnics' & Colleges' Funding Council, Expenditure 239-40w

Boyes, Mr Roland
Debates etc.
Contempt of court (03:12:91) 235
Questions
Nuclear submarines, Decommissioning 543w
Torpedoes 588w
Underwater Test & Evaluation Centre 588w
Upholder class submarines, Repairs & maintenance 587-8w
Vanguard submarines, Rosyth Dockyard 588w
Warships, Tactical nuclear weapons 543w

Bradford
City action teams 70-1w
Inner cities initiative 70-1w, 375w
Ministers' domestic visits 17w
School buildings 415w

Bradley, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
Residential care (10:12:91) 777-81
Questions
Au pairs 507-8w
European central bank 391
Income support, Young people 352w
Manchester Central Hospitals & Community Care NHS Trust 114w
Severe hardship provision, Costs 354w
Social security benefits, Young people 353-4w

Braithwaite, Mark
181w

Brand, Frank
Dismissal (13:12:91) 1299-306

Brandon-Bravo, Mr Martin M
Debates etc.
Contempt of court (03:12:91) 228
Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill (04:12:91) 281
Questions
Council tax 253
Djanogly College 717

Bray, Dr Jeremy
Questions
Arts, Research finance 726-7
Iron & steel industry, Dalzell 851

Brazier, Mr Julian
Questions
Criminal investigation, Genetics 434w
Patient's Charter 129
USSR 732

Brazil
Rain forests 386-7w
Technical assistance 148-50w

Breast cancer
Screening 64w

Brent Walker
285w

Brewing industry
Public houses 10-1w

Bridging allowances
339w

British Academy
726-7

British Airways
Air fares 304w

British & Commonwealth Group
Dept of Trade inquiries 462w

British Broadcasting Corporation
see BBC

British citizenship
Electoral register 231w

British Civil Uranium Procurement Directorate
381w

British Coal Corporation
44w, (10:12:91) 751-823
Privatisation 333w
Productivity 334w

British embassies
Civil service manpower 261w
Cyprus 262w

British Footwear Manufacturers' Federation
410w

British Library
16-7

British merchant fleet
Defence review 554w

British National Party
Bexley 990

British Nuclear Fuels
BATNEEC 176w
Springfields 165w

"British Overseas Aid 1991"
280w, 387w

British Rail
11, (02:12:91) 78-9, 105w, 234w, (13:12:91) 1299-306

British Railways Bill 1990/91
Debates etc.
Rep* & 3R (02:12:91) 78-9

British Railways Board
Citizen's Charter 59w

British residents abroad
Handicap benefits 377w

British School of Motoring
309w

British Security Industry Association
286w

British Telecom
393
Privatisation 299-300w

British Tourist Authority
473w

British Virgin Islands
Debts written off 279w

British Waterways Board
Privatisation 363w

British Youth Council
14w, 447-8w

British-Irish Interparliamentary Body
981

Brixton Prison
Prison escapes 122w, 394-5w
Prison staff 2-3w
Prisoners' mail 139w
Staffordshire Police 395w

Broadcasting
Ethnic minorities 122-3w

Broadmead Estate Redbridge
Estate Action 182w

Broadwater Farm Estate
Housing improvement 169w

Brooke, Rt Hon Peter, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Questions
Administration of justice, Northern Ireland 975-7
Anglo-Irish talks 513w
British-Irish Interparliamentary Body 981
Local government reform, Northern Ireland 986
Northern Ireland government 512w, 515w
Northern Ireland Office, Ministerial duties 387-9w
Public expenditure, Northern Ireland 324w
Sunday trading, Northern Ireland 983-4
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 513w, 980-1
Voting methods, Northern Ireland 515w

Brown, Mr Gordon
Questions
British & Commonwealth Group, Dept of Trade inquiries 462w
Maxwell companies, Company investigations 274w, 372-3w

Brown, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Regional government (06:12:91) 553, 557, 559, 579-81
Questions
EC Labour & Social Affairs Council 225-6w
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, External financing limits 141w
Waste disposal, Sea pollution 281w

Brown, Mr Nicholas
Questions
Business expansion scheme 252w
Capital gains tax 81w
Income tax, Low incomes 160-1w
Income tax, Personal tax allowances 254-6w
Income tax, Tax rates & bands 161w
Income tax, Tax yields 301w
Inheritance tax 162w
Inheritance tax, Tax yields 160w, 250w
Low incomes 251-2w
National insurance contributions, Fringe benefits 301-2w
Pay 342w
Tax allowances 250w
Tax allowances, Health insurance 251w
Tax allowances, Tax yields 191w
VAT 300-1w, 371w, 436w
VAT, Tax yields 371w
VAT zero rated goods 370-1w

Brown, Mr Ron
Questions
Business statements 409-10

Browne, Mr John
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 744
Questions
Armed forces casualties, Compensation 349w, 391w
Business statements 408-9, 1003
Cot deaths, Bedding 330w
Defence expenditure, Eastern Europe 473w
Defence review, Household Division 349w
Family doctors, Computer applications 331w

Browne, Mr John—continued
Grant maintained schools, Hampshire 418w
Household Division, Tourism 473w
"Must Babies Still Die" 330w

Bruce, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
NHS trusts, Scotland (03:12:91) 157
Questions
Army in Northern Ireland 514w
EC social policy, Scotland 853
NHS, Expenditure 133
Working hours, EC action 144

Bruce, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Coal mining (10:12:91) 800-4, 809, 819
NHS trusts, Scotland (03:12:91) 149
Questions
School boards, Scotland 455w

Bryn Estyn Community Home
Child abuse 440w

Budgen, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 869

Budget
395-6

Budgeting
Family doctors 132
School administration 410-4w

Building industry
Apprentices 24w
Industrial training board levies (02:12:91) 83-96

Building regulations
365-6w

Building Regulations 1991
Questions
365-6w

Buoyancy aids
EC action 57-8w
EC law 461w
Safety standards 57w

Burglar alarms
Cars 99w, 383

Burglary
213w

Burley
Listed buildings 431w

Burnley Pendle & Rossendale Health Authority
Public appointments 585w

Burns, Mr Simon
Debates etc.
Contempt of court (03:12:91) 230-1, 239, 241
Labour Party, Points of order (09:12:91) 616
Members' conduct, Points of order (03:12:91) 166
Questions
British Telecom, Privatisation 299-300w
Carbon dioxide, Air pollution control 258-9w
Hospital waiting lists, North East Thames Regional Health Authority 444w
Parliamentary constituencies, Scotland 453w
Parliamentary questions, Costs 369-70w
Public holidays 133w
Rent arrears, Chelmsford Borough Council 430w
Set-aside schemes, Fraud 165-6w, 282w
Skillcentres, Privatisation 134w

Burt, Mr Alistair
Questions
Arts Council, Government grants 14
Equal opportunities, Training 18
Foetal tissue, Waste disposal 482-3w

Bus services
Contracts for services 556w
Franchising 188w
Greater London 105w, 188w, 556w
Railway stations 11
Wales 11-2, 405w

Bus stations
Oystermouth 101w

Buses
Factory closures (09:12:91) 615

Business
Competition 94w
Northern Ireland 983

Business & the Environment Advisory Committee
162w

Business expansion scheme
252w

Business motions
(06:12:91) 582, (13:12:91) 1298

Business premises
Belfast 982

Business questions
Speaker's rulings & statements (05:12:91) 402

Business statements
400-12, 991-1004

Butcher, Mr John
Questions
Business statements 993
Coventry City Council, Government grants to local authorities 427w
Curriculum, HIV infection 416w

Butler, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Nuclear physics, Daresbury (11:12:91) 969-71
Questions
AIDS, Scotland 457w
Community charge capping 430w
EC internal trade, EC law 32w
EC social policy 987
Housing estates, Warrington 314-5w
Lung diseases, Medical equipment 156w
Schools, Wales 19w
Valleys initiative 248w
Valleys initiative, Expenditure 194w
Voting methods, Northern Ireland 515w

Butterfill, Mr John
Debates etc.
Pension funds (12:12:91) 1071, 1073, 1077, 1079, 1081, 1088
Questions
Business statements 999-1000
Local education authorities, Expenditure 718-9
Standard spending assessments, Tourists 69w
Yugoslavia 731-2

Buy outs
Trust ports 360w

Bwlch Llyn Bach Valley
Low flying 265w

Bypasses
Lancashire 359w

Cabora, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Regional government (06:12:91) 528, 536-45, 561-2
Questions
Enterprise allowance scheme, New businesses 132-3w
Enterprise allowance scheme, Small businesses 133w
Enterprise allowance scheme, Take-up 133w
Self-employed 132w

Cadw: Welsh Historic Monuments
100w

Caerphilly
Social Security Contributions Agency 469w

Calder Hall power station
381w
Uranium 541w

Calderdale
Community charge benefits 253-4
Flood damage 176w

Callaghan, Mr Jim
Questions
Youth services 413w

Calling of Members
Speaker's rulings & statements (02:12:91) 35, (03:12:91) 141, 160, 165, (05:12:91) 405, 412, 414, (11:12:91) 864, (13:12:91) 1260, 1265

Cambrian Coast railway line
Railway travel 439w

Cambridgeshire
Educational finance 719-20

Campbell, Mr Menzies
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 738
Craigtoun Hospital, Points of order (03:12:91) 164
Freedom of Information Bill, 1R (04:12:91) 280
Home Rule (Scotland) Bill, 1R (04:12:91) 280
Questions
Hercules aircraft, Defence procurement 180w
NATO, Armed forces strength 180w
Radio engineering, Defence procurement 180w
Sports, Finance 721

Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Questions
Local government social services 113w
Passports 382

Campbell-Savours, Mr D N
Debates etc.
Business questions intervention (12:12:91) 995
Business questions point of order (12:12:91) 995
Common fisheries policy (11:12:91) 925
Iraq, Human rights (12:12:91) 1218
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 874
Oral question time intervention (03:12:91) 130
Sunday trading (12:12:91) 1205, 1207
Volvo, Standing Order No 20 applications (09:12:91) 615
Questions
Aid financed trade 150w
Business statements 409, 1004
Findhorn Foundation, Energy conservation 333-4w
Guyana, Overseas aid 96w
Guyana, World Bank 96w
Iraq, Overseas aid 97w
Postal services, Privatisation 179w
Theatres, Keswick 48w

Canada
Chemical & biological warfare 474w
Lobsters 28w

Canavan, Mr Dennis
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 877
NHS trusts, Scotland (03:12:91) 151
Public expenditure, Scotland (04:12:91) 270
Questions
Anaesthetics, Dental services 585w
Asylum Bill 1991/92 216w
Hospital waiting lists, Scotland 841-2
Patient's Charter 129-30

Cancellation rights
Timesharing (04:12:91) 279, 281

Cancer
Medical treatments 134w
North Wales 134w

Capital gains tax
81w

Capital rules
Interest rates 243w

Car allowances
Ambulance services 35-6w
Members 35-6w
Voluntary work 475-7w

Car industry
Monopolies & Mergers Commission 10w

Car tax
Imports 478w

Caravan sites
Belfast 327w
Northern Ireland 327-8w
Transient people 327-8w

Carbon dioxide
Air pollution control 258-9w

Carbon tetrachloride
427-8w

Cardiff Airport
21w

Cardiff Bay barrage
570-1w
Advertising 539w
Disclosure of information 135w
Ground water 570w
Investment 135w

Cardiff Bay Development Corporation
136w, 539w
Government grants 539w, 570-1w

Carers' premium
Computer applications 351w

Carlile, Mr Alex
Debates etc.
Aggravated Taking Bill, 2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 620, 623, 634-5
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 289-90, 310
Contempt of court (03:12:91) 233-4
Deportation, Judgments (02:12:91) 33
Questions
AIDS, Health education 441w
Art education, Overseas students 449w
Art education, Student numbers 440w, 449w, 451-2w, 460w
Arts finance, Wales 16
Bail hostels 217-8w
Baltic states, Foreign policy 420w
Bryn Estyn Community Home, Child abuse 440w
Cambrian Coast railway line, Railway travel 439w
Cremation, Wales 440w
Crown Prosecution Service, Manpower 420w
Homelessness, Temporary accommodation 441w
Homicide, Law reform 433w
Homicide, Prison sentences 433w
Legal aid, Taxation 419w
Magistrates, Cost effectiveness 420w
Magistrates, Manpower 419-20w
Magistrates' courts, Rural areas 432-3w
Mental health community care, Wales 439-40w
Negligence, Law reform 420w
NHS, Procurement 99w
Railway accidents, Severn tunnel 611
Ukraine, Foreign policy 320w
VAT, Horses 162-3w, 191w
Wide load vehicles, Trees 137w

Carlisle
Council housing 170-1w
Suckler cow premiums 207w

Carlisle, Mr Kenneth, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Armed Forces
Questions
Air force, Military exercises 270w

Carlisle, Mr Kenneth—continued
Airmisses, Shipping 57w
AWE Aldermaston, Construction 543w
Calder Hall power station, Uranium 541w
Defence Quality Assurance Directorate, Civil service dispersal 545w
Environment protection, Exhibitions 348w
Frigates, International cooperation 88-9w
HMS Revenge 349w
Low flying 265w, 267w
Low flying, Bwich Llyn Bach Valley 265w
Low flying, Chepstow 267-8w
Low flying, Complaints 267w
Low flying, Germany 265-6w
Low flying, Military exercises 267w
Low flying, Nature conservation 267w
Ministry of Defence, Directors 587w
Ministry of Defence, Disabled workers 270w
Ministry of Defence, Environmental policy 84w
Ministry of Defence, Pay incentives 586w
Ministry of Defence, Performance indicators 586-7w
Ministry of Defence, Working hours 587w
Pugwash Conference on Science & World Affairs 474w
Royal ordnance factories, Health physics 269w
Torpedoes 588w
Underwater Test & Evaluation Centre 588w
Upholder class submarines, Repairs & maintenance 587-8w
Vanguard submarines, Rosyth Dockyard 588w

Carr, Mr Michael
Questions
A59, Speed limits 359w
British Nuclear Fuels, BATNEEC 176w
British Nuclear Fuels, Springfields 165w
Bypasses, Lancashire 359w
River Ribble, Pollution monitoring 238w

Carrington, Mr Matthew
Questions
Council housing, Empty property 139-40
Legal profession, Civil service recruitment 273w

Cars
Burglar alarms 99w, 383
Driving licences 310w
Security equipment 59w

Cartwright, Mr John
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 740-1
Questions
Telephone systems, Standardisation 204-5w
Telephone systems, Telephones 205w

Cash, Mr William
Questions
Advertising, EC action 12-3w
Alcohol advertising, EC action 13w
Direct selling, EC action 13w
Low incomes, Statistics 521-3w

Castlereagh
975
Detention centres 389w
Police interrogation 985-6

Cattle
Northern Ireland 516w
Prices 516w

Central Electricity Generating Board
541w

Central heating
334-5w

Central institutions
Capital investment 346-7w
Scotland 346-7w

Central London
School choice 416w

Central Veterinary Laboratory
591-2w

Centre for Policy Studies
146-7w
Disclosure of information 273w
Manpower 273w

Cervical cancer
Screening 63-4w

CFE Treaty
USSR 496-7w

Chahal, Karamjit Singh
Deportation 508w

Chairman of Committee of the Whole House
Debates etc.
Amendments & new clauses (09:12:91) 686, 690, 694, 698

Chalker, Rt Hon Lynda, Minister for Overseas Development
Questions
Africa, Democracy 496w
Aid financed trade 150w, 384-6w
Baltic states, Know-how Fund 387w
Botswana, Nature conservation 551w
Brazil, Rain forests 386-7w
Brazil, Technical assistance 148-50w
"British Overseas Aid 1991" 280w, 387w
British Virgin Islands, Debts written off 279w
Croatia, Refugees 96-7w
Developing countries, Debts 147-8w
Developing countries, Official visits 277w
Development aid 151w
East Timor 606-7
EC aid 278w
EC Development Council 278w, 512w
Global environmental facility 608
Guyana, Overseas aid 96w
Guyana, World Bank 96w
Indonesia, Aid financed trade 385-6w
Indonesia, Human rights 605-6
Iraq, Overseas aid 97w
Kurdistan, Overseas aid 147w, 151w
Mauritius, Overseas aid 278w
Overseas aid 96w, 151w
Overseas aid, Expenditure 385w
Overseas aid, Legal profession 278-9w, 387w
Overseas aid, OECD countries 607-8
Somalia, Armed conflict 391w
Somalia, Diplomatic relations 421-2w
Somalia, International aid from international bodies 391w
Somalia, Overseas aid 388w, 421w
United Nations, South Africa 279-80w
Yugoslavia, Overseas aid 277w

Challenger tanks
Navigational aids 54-5w

Chancellor of the Exchequer
see Treasury

Change of use
Bail hostels 580w

Channel tunnel
Fire prevention 553-4w
Railway network 188-9w, 357w
Railway travel 106-7w

Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Questions
Local government reform 245

Chapelcross power station
381w

Chapman, Mr Sydney, Lord Commissioner of the Treasury
Debates etc.
Homelessness (12:12:91) 1092

Charities
Computer privacy 120w
Political activities 273w

Charity Commission
273w

Chelmsford Borough Council
Rent arrears 430w

Chemical & biological warfare
Canada 474w
Defence research 474w
Disclosure of information 474w

Chemicals
Exports 461w
Ozone layer 461w

Chepstow
Low flying 267-8w

Cheques Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (09:12:91) 618-9

Child abuse
Bryn Estyn Community Home 440w
Leicestershire 23-9

Child benefit
469w
Northern Ireland 263-4w
Social security benefits rates 263-4w
Social security benefits uprating 152w

Child care
13w
EC action (02:12:91) 96

Child protection registers
South Down 326-7w

Child Support Agency
Offices 525w

Childbirth
Medical records 62w
Prisoners' rights 577w

Children
Dental services 204w
Gaming machines (10:12:91) 749
Tobacco advertising (02:12:91) 97-126
Vaccination 62-3w

Children Act 1989
Questions
92-3w
Bail hostels 580w
Expenditure 199w
Judiciary 73w

Children in care
Refugees 115w

Children's Homes Staff Selection Inquiry
23-4

Chilver Committee
see Interim Advisory Committee on School Teachers' Pay

Chipboard
175w

Chlorine
Chlorofluorocarbons 363-4w

Chlorofluorocarbons
Chlorine 363-4w
Consumption 427-8w
Overseas trade 279-80w
Production 427-8w

Cholesterol
Blood tests 60w

Chope, Mr Christopher, Under-Secretary of State for Transport
Debates etc.
Brand, Frank, Dismissal (13:12:91) 1303-6
Questions
A1, Road works 306-7w
A10, Road works 189-90w
A13, Road closures 309w
A45, Road traffic 358-60w
A59, Speed limits 359w
Bypasses, Lancashire 359w
Cars, Security equipment 59w
Driver & Vehicle Licensing Agency, Advertising 309w

Chope, Mr Christopher—continued
Driving licences 59-60w
Driving licences, Cars 310w
Driving licences, Elderly 309-10w
Driving licences, Lorry drivers 59w
East London river crossing, Environmental impact assessment 309w
M20, House purchase 109w
Motorways 107-8w
Motorways, Lighting 306w
Parking 189w
Road construction, Contracts 108w, 308-9w
Road tolls, Greater London 105w
Road works, Cost effectiveness 357-8w
Road works, Direct labour departments 108-9w
Roads, Outdoor advertising 310w
Transport of radioactive materials, Motorways 57w

Christmas
Homelessness 173w

Christmas bonus
Departmental correspondence 51w

Chronically Sick & Disabled Persons Act 1970
Questions
113-4w, 137

Church schools
Educational finance 345w
Scotland 345w

Churchill, Mr Winston
Questions
Army, Operating costs 543w
Mirror Group Newspapers 392-3

Citizen's Charter
129, 257w, 730
British Railways Board 59w
Environment protection 167w
Rights of way 283w, 426w
Social security claims 53w
Wales 283w

Citric acid
Respiratory diseases 465-7w

City action teams
Bradford 70-1w
Cumbria 205-6w

City Challenge
Urban programme 236w

City of Edinburgh District Council Order Confirmation Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
Rep* (03:12:91) 127
3R* (04:12:91) 243

City technology colleges
717
Educational finance 716-7
Nottingham 717

Civil Aviation Authority
110w, 304w

Civil defence
6w

Civil proceedings
Community charge 172w
Rate arrears 139w

Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (04:12:91) 280

Civil servants
Means tested benefits 349-50w

Civil servants' background
Civil service agencies 569w
Welsh Office 569w

Civil servants' box
Speaker's rulings & statements (13:12:91) 1240

Civil servants' business appointments
94w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 593w

Civil servants' secondment
26w
Arts 19-20
Scotland 20
Training & enterprise councils 25-6w
Wales 20

Civil servants' visits abroad
Europe 95w

Civil service
Equal opportunities 18, 20-2, 435w
Job satisfaction 567w
Ministers 193w
Pay 36w
Social Fund inspectors 472w

Civil service agencies
27-8w
Annual reports 570w
Civil servants' background 569w
Civil service manpower 569w
Day care of children 569-70w
Dept of Health 481-2w
Directors 584w, 587w
Higher civil servants 568-9w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 591-2w
Parliamentary questions 152w
Pay incentives 568w, 586w
Performance indicators 569w, 584w, 586-7w, 590-1w
Publicity 569w
Treasury 435w
Working hours 570w, 587w

Civil service dispersal
163-4w
Defence Quality Assurance Directorate 545w
Health & Safety Executive 575w
Home Office 393w

Civil service manpower
British embassies 261w
Civil service agencies 569w
Dept of Social Security local offices 52w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 247w
Ozone layer 428w
Social Fund inspectors 224w, 472w
Social security abuse 224w
Welsh Office 569w

Civil service recruitment
Legal profession 273w
Travelling expenses 435-6w
Universities 18-9

Clackmannan District Council (Vesting of Central Regional Council Land) (Scotland) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(03:12:91) 162

Clark, Rt Hon Alan, Minister of State for Defence Procurement
Questions
Armed forces civilians, Redundancy 86-7w
Arms trade 271-2w
Challenger tanks, Navigational aids 54-5w
Defence procurement 269w
Direct fire weapons effect system, Defence procurement 228w
Guided weapons, USA 87-8w
Hercules aircraft, Defence procurement 180w
Military vehicles, Defence procurement 541w
Nuclear submarines, Decommissioning 543w
Nuclear weapons, Iraq 268w
Nuclear weapons, Nuclear safety 542w
Nuclear Weapons Safety Working Group 542w
Radio engineering, Defence procurement 180w

Clark, Rt Hon Alan—continued
Tanks, Navigational aids 55-6w
Thermal observation & gunnery sights, Defence procurement 269-70w
Uranium, South Africa 541w

Clark, Dr David
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 285, 295-305, 359
Questions
Civil servants' business appointments 94w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food, Civil servants' business appointments 593w
Potatoes, EC action 592-3w
Set-aside schemes 546-7w
Set-aside schemes, Agricultural research 592w
Set-aside schemes, EC grants & loans 546-7w
Set-aside schemes, Fraud 571-2w, 575w
Set-aside schemes, Inspections 547-8w
Set-aside schemes, Northern Ireland 573-4w
Set-aside schemes, Sports facilities 571-2w, 574w
Set-aside schemes, Wales 571w

Clark, Dr Michael
Debates etc.
Coal mining (10:12:91) 787-91
Questions
North Sea oil 593

Clark, Rt Hon Sir William
Debates etc.
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 437-41

Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth, Secretary of State for Education & Science
Questions
EC Education Council 18w
Education, Exhibitions 559w
Educational assessment, Primary education 18w
Educational assessment, Wolverhampton 719
Educational finance, Cambridgeshire 719-20
Educational standards, Primary education 414w
Interim Advisory Committee on School Teachers' Pay 416w
Local education authorities, Expenditure 416w, 718-9
School Teachers' Review Body 717-8
"Science & Technology" 449w
Special education 719
Teachers, Pay 718
Teachers, Performance appraisal 413-4w

Clarke, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
NHS trusts, Scotland (03:12:91) 161-2
Questions
Civil servants' secondment, Scotland 20
Income tax, Personal tax allowances 252-4w
Income tax, Tax allowances 302w
Income tax, Tax rates & bands 254w
Income tax, Tax yields 302-3w
Inheritance tax, Tax thresholds 160w
Iron & steel industry, Lanarkshire 851
National insurance contributions, Fringe benefits 301w, 376w
National insurance contributions, Health insurance 250-1w
Retirement pensions, Northern Ireland 450w

Class sizes
715-6

Clay, Mr Bob
Questions
Means tested benefits, Low incomes 523-4w

Clelland, Mr David
Debates etc.
Aggravated Taking Bill, 2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 654-7, 664, 666-7, 671-2
Questions
Police, Northumberland 380

Clenbuterol
Convictions 211w
Northern Ireland 211w

Cleveland
Electricity distribution 592

Climate
490w

Clinical trials
Zidovudine 449w

Closed circuit television
Courts 7w

Clothing
Invalidity benefits 566w

Club licensing
Northern Ireland 66w
Prosecutions 66w

Clwyd
Housing construction 5-6

Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Debates etc.
Iraq, Human rights (12:12:91) 1217, 1219-20
Questions
British Virgin Islands, Debts written off 279w
Corporation tax, Tax yields 251w
Developing countries debts 303w
East Timor 606-7
Overseas aid, Expenditure 385w
Overseas aid, Legal profession 278-9w, 387w

Clyde submarine base
Trident 472w

Coal
Estimates days (10:12:91) 751-823

Coal mining
333w, 591, 594
Duration of unemployment 340w
Productivity 591
Scottish Trades Union Congress 333w
Subsidence 44w

Coal Task Force
75w

Coastal areas
Special protection areas 68w

Cohen, Mr Harry
Questions
Atomic Coordinating Office Washington 542w
AWE Aldermaston, Construction 543w
British Civil Uranium Procurement Directorate 381w
Calder Hall power station, Uranium 541w
Community charge, Non-payment 285w
Government buildings, Repairs & maintenance 181w
Hospital waiting lists 246w
Military vehicles, Defence procurement 541w
Military vehicles, M25 511-2w, 542w
NHS reform, Costs 245w
Nuclear power stations, Construction 381w
Nuclear submarines, Armed forces deployment 542w
Nuclear weapons, Nuclear safety 542w
Nuclear Weapons Safety Working Group 542w
Offensive weapons, Amnesties 146w, 434w
Offensive weapons, Crime prevention 3w
Offensive weapons, Prosecutions 506w
Pension funds, Fraud 260w
Uranium, Imports 381w

Cohen, Mr Harry—continued
Uranium, South Africa 541w
Westminster underground station 30w

Cold weather payments
Pensioners 242-3w
Publicity 350w, 471w
Scotland 471w

Collins Committee
see Business & the Environment Advisory Committee

Colvin, Mr Michael
Questions
Alternative energy, Research finance 74-6w
Disabled workers, Dept of Education & Science 154w
Disabled workers, Dept of Energy 141w
Disabled workers, Dept of Health 199-200w
Disabled workers, Dept of Social Security 221w
Disabled workers, Dept of the Environment 182w
Disabled workers, Dept of Trade & Industry 177w
Disabled workers, Dept of Transport 109w
Disabled workers, Foreign & Commonwealth Office 154w
Disabled workers, Home Office 138w
Disabled workers, Minister for the Civil Service 84w
Disabled workers, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 246w
Disabled workers, Ministry of Defence 270w
Disabled workers, Northern Ireland Office 264w
Disabled workers, Office of Arts & Libraries 83-4w
Disabled workers, Scottish Office 345-6w
Disabled workers, Treasury 81-2w
Disabled workers, Welsh Office 194w
Family doctors, Pay 113w
NHS finance 485-6w

Combined heat & power
598-9, 602

Combined Heat & Power Association
602

Commercial & Private Bank Bill (HL) 1990/91
Debates etc.
3R (10:12:91) 715

Commission for the New Towns
363w

Commission of the European Communities
see European Commission

Committal proceedings
Bail 582w
Police misconduct 139w

Commodity markets
Electricity 382w

Common agricultural policy
(04:12:91) 283-370
Borders region 344w
EC reform 30w
Fraud 165w
Scottish Agricultural College 344w

Common fisheries policy
(11:12:91) 922-67
Guide prices (06:12:91) 582

Commonwealth of Europe Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (09:12:91) 618

Community care
Departmental coordination 352w
Finance 331-2w
Law reform 331-2w
Local government social services 137
Northern region 64w
Wales 195w

Community care grants
355-6w
Prisoners' release 50w

Community charge
254
Administrative costs 194-5w, 429-30w
Attachment of earnings 172w
Bailiffs 173w, 316w
Civil proceedings 172w
East Anglia 69-70w
Holiday accommodation 429w
Income support 172w
Judgments 285w
Liability 172w
Local government revenue 185-6w
Magistrates 361w
Minor works grants 283w
Non-payment 172-3w, 285w, 294w, (10:12:91) 831-40
Social security benefits reductions 153w
Tax collection 317w
Wales 194-5w
Waveney 70w

Community charge benefits
70w, 248-9
Calderdale 253-4

Community charge capping
170w, 430w

Community councils
Wales 21w

Community nurses
Manpower 111w

Community service orders
215w

Companies
Audit 10w
Energy conservation 589w

Company disclosure of information
(04:12:91) 281

Company investigations
Maxwell companies 274w, 372-3w, 422w, 462-3w

Company liquidations
Contracts 322w

Compensation Recovery Unit
Social security benefits 468-9w

Competition
Air travel 304-5w
Business 94w

Complaints
EC environmental policy 226-7w
Low flying 267w
Professional organisations 97-8w

Complaints against police
Crimes of violence 292-3w
Metropolitan Police 286-7w, 292-3w

Comptroller & Auditor General
see National Audit Office

Computer applications
Carers' premium 351w
Family doctors 331w, 379-80w, (05:12:91) 504-10
Invalid care allowances 376w

Computer privacy
Charities 120w

Concessionary television licences
214w

Confederation of British Industry Scotland
852-3

Confederation of Health Service Employees
129

Conference on Security & Cooperation in Europe
see European Security Conference

Confiscation orders
India 244-5w
Indictable offences 502w
International cooperation (09:12:91) 707

Conservation
Land 454w
Scotland 454w

Conservative Party
102w

Consolidated Fund Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (10:12:91) 823
2R* & 3R* (12:12:91) 1046

Consolidated Fund debates
Crime (12:12:91) 1047-68
Croatia (12:12:91) 1160-7
EC grants & loans (12:12:91) 1184-95
Gypsies (12:12:91) 1176-83
Hazardous wastes (12:12:91) 1145-59
Homelessness (12:12:91) 1090-110
Iraq (12:12:91) 1212-20
Pension funds (12:12:91) 1069-89
Railway travel (12:12:91) 1124-44
Speaker's rulings & statements (05:12:91) 413, (09:12:91) 616-8
Sunday trading (12:12:91) 1196-211
Territorial Army (12:12:91) 1111-23
Western Sahara (12:12:91) 1168-75

Consolidation bills
Radioactive Substances Act 1960 475w

Construction
VAT (09:12:91) 706

Construction costs
Council housing 362-3w

Construction Industry Training Board
(02:12:91) 83-96

Construction materials
Harmonisation of standards 364-5w
Listed buildings 181-2w

Construction Products Regulations 1991
Questions
364-5w

Consultants
Financial services 204w

Consumer credit
Marketing 206w
Sales methods 9w
Unfair trading practices 499-500w

Consumer protection
Timesharing 206-7w

Consumers' Committee for Great Britain
164w

Contempt of court
(03:12:91) 223-42

Contract cleaning
Schools 174w

Contracts
Company liquidations 322w
Northern Ireland 322w
Road construction 108w, 308-9w, 439w, 458w

Contracts for services
Blakenhurst Prison 219-20w
Bus services 556w
Educational assessment 449w
Hospital ancillary staff 111-2w
Hospitals 134-6
Local government services 250-1, 260
NHS 139
NHS & private practice 101w
Non-departmental public bodies 284w
Prisoner escorts 219-20w
Wolds Remand Prison 392-3w

Contributions Agency
see Social Security Contributions Agency

Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazard Regulations
Questions
531-2w

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species
432w, 490-1w

Conway, Mr Derek
Questions
Bail 504w
Bail, Committal proceedings 582w
Bail, EC countries 393w
Bail, Habitual offenders 433-4w
Bail hostels 502-4w, 579-81w
Bail hostels, Change of use 580w
Bail hostels, Children Act 1989 580w
Bail hostels, Crime 503w
Bail hostels, Government grants 503w
Bail hostels, Habitual offenders 503w
Bail hostels, Management 579w
Bail hostels, Operating costs 580w
Bail hostels, Per capita costs 579-80w
Bail hostels, Unemployed 502w
Bail information schemes, Government grants 581-2w
Custodial treatment, Costs 504w
Probation committees 578-9w
Probation officers, Public relations 578w
Remand in custody, Prison accommodation 504w

Cook, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 284, 326, 352-3
Questions
Environment Agency, National Rivers Authority 548w
Sea pollution, Radiation hazards 549-50w

Cook, Mr Robin
Questions
Dental services, Children 204w
Home energy efficiency scheme, Government grants 42w
Hospital waiting lists 481-2w
Hospitals, Contracts for services 135
Hospitals, Fees & charges 445w
NHS trusts, Debts 62w, 331w, 445w

Coombs, Mr Anthony
Questions
Council housing 246
Medical Research Council, Annual reports 418w
Primary education 716
Water supply industry 171w

Coombs, Mr Simon
Questions
Air ambulance services 131
Arts finance 49w
House renovation grants, Wales 6
Unemployment, Wales 20w

Cope, Rt Hon Sir John
Questions
Railway accidents, Severn tunnel 609-10

Corbett, Mr Robin
Debates etc.
Prison Security Bill, 2R (03:12:91) 179, 188, 207
Questions
Anglo-Irish talks 513w
Crown Prosecution Service, Administrative delays 140w
Faulkner, AP, Prison medical services 218w
Metropolitan Police, Arrests 139-40w
Metropolitan Police, Overtime 139w
Police, Manpower 390
Pre-trial procedures, Administrative delays 146-7w
Quest for a Test for Cancer, Research finance 159w, 330w

Corby
Regional selective assistance 373w

Corbyn, Mr Jeremy
Debates etc.
Deportation, Judgments (02:12:91) 33
Le Pen, Jean Marie, Points of order (02:12:91) 38
Western Sahara (12:12:91) 1168-71, 1174-5
Questions
Tottenham Three, Prosecutions 181w

Corine programme
314w

Cormack, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 746
Contempt of court (03:12:91) 231-2, 238
Croatia (12:12:91) 1160-2
Questions
Business statements 402
Lotteries 721-2

Cormorants
450-1w

Corporate Safety & Environmental Information Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (04:12:91) 281

Corporation tax
Passenger transport executives 161w
Tax yields 251w

Cost of living
Young people 54w

Cost per student
93w
Universities 89-90w

Cot deaths
Bedding 330w
Health education 378w

Couchman, Mr James
Debates etc.
Railway travel, Kent (12:12:91) 1127-9

Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
322-3w

Council house sales
Cumbria 77-8w
Debts 79w
Northamptonshire 488-90w
Wandsworth 235w

Council house waiting lists
425w

Council housing
245-6
Carlisle 170-1w
Construction costs 362-3w
Cumbria 486w
Empty property 139-40
Homelessness 310-2w
Housing construction 245

Council of Ministers
33-5w
Attorney General 8w
Dept of Energy 43-4w
Dept of Health 60w
Dept of the Environment 67-8w
Dept of Trade & Industry 98w
Northern Ireland Office 66w
Scottish Office 47w
Voting methods 95w

Council on Tribunals
280-1w

Council tax
169-70w, 235-6w, 250, 252-4, 494w, 732
Administrative costs 169w
Armed forces 69w
Local authority powers 253
Property values 250
Valuation 477-8w

Council tax benefits
551w

County Hall
171w

Court of Appeal
Hong Kong 154-5w

Courts
Closed circuit television 7w
Working hours 475w

Cousins, Mr Jim
Questions
Eye disorders, Northern region 111w
Financial services, Consultants 204w
Insurance companies 259-60w
Research councils, Income 298w

Coventry
Homelessness 80w
Magistrates 361w
Redundancy 26-7w

Coventry City Council
Government grants to local authorities 427w

Cox, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
Homelessness (12:12:91) 1090-6, 1105
Questions
Council house sales, Wandsworth 235w
Diplomatic bags, Wandsworth Prison 399
Hearnville School 417w
Hospitals, NHS finance 118w
Prison staff, Leave 502w
Prison staff, Manpower 502w
Sleeping rough 552w

Craft industries
Scotland 501w

Craigtoun Hospital St Andrews
Hospital closures 119w

Cran, Mr James
Questions
EC Social Charter 141
Industrial production, Scotland 453w
School administration, Budgeting 410-4w
Unemployment, Northern Ireland 515w
Yorkshire Regional Health Authority, Expenditure 113w

Cranes
Industrial accidents 340w

Crawfordsburn
Environmentally sensitive areas 519w

Credit cards
National insurance contributions 250-1w

Cremation
Wales 440w

Crime
Bail hostels 503w
Consolidated Fund debates (12:12:91) 1047-68
Scotland 399-400w
Strathclyde 344-6w

Crime prevention
213w
Housing estates 5w
Motor vehicle theft 216w
Offensive weapons 3w
Shops 388-9
Wales 407w

Crime victims
Government grants 4-5w

Crimes of violence
Complaints against police 292-3w
Scotland 842-3

Criminal appeals
Bardsley, Kevin 140w
Tottenham Three 181w

Criminal Injuries Compensation Board
393w

Criminal investigation
Genetics 434w

Criminal Jurisdiction Act 1975
Questions
13w

Criminal Justice Act 1988
Questions
842

Criminal Justice Act 1988 (Designated Countries & Territories) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(09:12:91) 707

Criminal law
International law (12:12:91) 1033-7

Criminal proceedings
Republic of Ireland 13w

Criminal statistics
Police 394w

Crisis loans
355-6w

Croatia
593-4w, (12:12:91) 1016-20
Consolidated Fund debates (12:12:91) 1160-7
Refugees 96-7w

Crops
Air pollution 548w

Crosville Bus Company
11

Crown Estate Commissioners
120w

Crown lands & estates
Land acquisition 494w

Crown Proceedings (Armed Forces) Act 1987
Questions
391w

Crown Prosecution Service
605
Administrative delays 140w
Manpower 420w
Vacancies 604

Crowther, Mr Stan
Questions
Industrial diseases, Harmonisation of legislation 377w

Cryer, Mr Bob
Debates etc.
Community charge, Non-payment (10:12:91) 831, 833-4
Deportation, Points of order (02:12:91) 37
Maxwell, Robert, Points of order (05:12:91) 415
Social security orders (11:12:91) 881, 894
Tobacco advertising, Children (02:12:91) 99, 103-9
Transport & Works Bill, 2R (02:12:91) 41-2, 60, 71-4
Questions
Bentley, Derek 388
Boots, Industrial accidents 341w
Business statements 999
City action teams, Bradford 70-1w
Cold weather payments, Publicity 471w
Dogs 71-2w
Health & Safety Executive, Interviews 342w
House of Commons accommodation, Theft 258w
House of Commons debates, Orders & regulations 168-9w
Industrial accidents, Cranes 340w
Local government services, Contracts for services 250-1
Ministers' domestic visits, Bradford 17w
Nuclear disarmament 421w
Nuclear weapons tests, USA 322w
Plutonium, International conferences 421w
Pugwash Conference on Science & World Affairs 474w
Revenue support grant, Yorkshire & Humberside 184w
Transport policy, Railway transport 422w
Westwood Hospital, Hospital closures 63w

Cryptosporidia
Humberside 487w

CSCE
see European Security Conference

Cuba
Economic sanctions 497w

Cumbria
City action teams 205-6w
Council house sales 77-8w
Council housing 486w
Government grants to local authorities 489-90w
Local government revenue 78w

"Cumbrias Economy Strategic Needs & Opportunities in the 1990s"
Costs 464w

Cunningham, Dr John
Debates etc.
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 424
Ministerial & Other Salaries Order 1991 (10:12:91) 824-5, 829
Mirror Group Newspapers, Points of order (09:12:91) 618
Questions
Business statements 400-2
City action teams, Cumbria 205-6w
"Cumbrias Economy Strategic Needs & Opportunities in the 1990s", Costs 464w
Electoral register, Advertising 293-4w
Government grants to local authorities, Cumbria 489-90w
Suckler cow premiums, Carlisle 207w

Currencies
EC action 191w

Curriculum
560-5w
HIV infection 416w
Music education 16w
USA 16w

Currie, Mrs Edwina
Debates etc.
Education (School Premises) Bill, 1R (04:12:91) 282
Members' conduct, Points of order (03:12:91) 165-6
Questions
British Youth Council 14w
Hospitals, Contracts for services 135

***Curry, Mr David**, Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture*
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 342, 365-9
Common fisheries policy (11:12:91) 922-8, 929, 930, 932, 933, 938
Questions
Agricultural marketing 28w
British Nuclear Fuels, Springfields 165w
Common agricultural policy, EC reform 30w
Common agricultural policy, Fraud 165w
Consumers' Committee for Great Britain 164w
Deer farming, Orders & regulations 246w
Eggs, Import controls 590w
Environmentally sensitive areas, Exmoor 165w
Farmers, Early retirement 28w
Farmers, Environment protection 29w
Food, Expenditure 247-8w
Food labelling, Origin marking 29w
"Good Irrigation Practice" 164w
Lobsters, Canada 28w
Milk deliveries, Refrigeration 388w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food, Civil service manpower 247w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food, Disabled workers 246w
Set-aside schemes 545-6w
Sheep premiums, Northumberland 29w
Suckler cow premiums, Carlisle 207w
Wind power, Conferences 281-2w

Custodial treatment
Costs 504w
Young offenders 6-7w, 217w

Customs & Excise
39-40w, 303-4w, 321w

Customs Duties (ECSC) (Amendment No 6) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(09:12:91) 706

Cyprus
British embassies 262w
Missing persons 262w
Overseas aid 262w

Dalai Lama
191w

Dalyell, Mr Tam
Questions
Brazil, Technical assistance 148-50w
Business statements 404
EC grants & loans 12w
Heveningham Hall 176w, 367w
Lockerbie, Bombings 857-8
Science & technology research, EC action 586w

Dalzell
Iron & steel industry 851

Dangerous Dogs Act 1991
Questions
121w

Daresbury
Nuclear physics (11:12:91) 969-74

Darling, Mr Alistair
Debates etc.
NHS trusts, Scotland (03:12:91) 157
Questions
House renovation grants, Scotland 843-4
Le Pen, Jean-Marie 385-6

Data banks
Television licences 434w

Data Protection Registrar
Welsh language 293w

Davies, Rt Hon Denzil
Questions
EC regional policy, Wales 18w
Geriatric patients, Wales 5
National income 370w

Davies, Mr Quentin
Questions
Social Fund, Departmental publications 355-6w

Davies, Mr Ron
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 306, 358-65
Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill, 1R (04:12:91) 279
Questions
Advocates for Animals, Animal experiments 216w
Agricultural Development & Advisory Service 539-40w
Animal experiments, Licensing 217w
Animal experiments, Northern Ireland 210-1w
Badgers Act 1991, Licensing 548-9w, 592w
Farm incomes, Wales 7-8
Food hygiene, Goods vehicles 332w
Hearing aids, Design 443w
Homelessness, Wales 19w
Nature Conservancy Council for England, Birds 170w
Pets, Waste disposal 207w
Set-aside schemes, Departmental correspondence 547w
Social Security Contributions Agency, Caerphilly 469w

Davis, Mr Terry
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 872
Questions
Anaesthetics, Dental services 380w

Davis, Mr Terry—continued
British Overseas Aid 1991 387w
Driving licences 59-60w
Driving licences, Cars 310w
Hewell Grange Young Offender Institution, Prisoners' transfers 217w
Medical equipment, Prescriptions 63w
Public expenditure 304w
Social Fund inspectors, Manpower 224w, 472w

Day, Mr Stephen
Questions
Air safety, Fires 110w
Air safety, Smoke hoods 110w
Council of Ministers 33-5w
NHS, Expenditure 138-9

Day care of children
Civil service agencies 569-70w
Welsh Office 569-70w

Day Committee
see School Teachers' Review Body

Death
Anaesthetics 585w

Debts
Council house sales 79w
Developing countries 147-8w, 303w
NHS trusts 62w, 331w, 445w

Debts written off
British Virgin Islands 279w

Decca navigator system
358w

Decommissioning
Nuclear power stations 541w
Nuclear submarines 543w
Warships 473w

Deer farming
Northern Ireland 211w
Orders & regulations 246w

Defence equipment
Armed forces deployment 88w, 544-5w

Defence expenditure
88w, 544w
Eastern Europe 473w
Royal Naval Reserve 349w

Defence industries
Scotland 855
Wales 12

Defence land
Armed forces training 228-30w
Scotland 229-30w

Defence procurement
269w
Direct fire weapons effect system 228w
Hercules aircraft 180w
Military vehicles 541w
Radio engineering 180w
Thermal observation & gunnery sights 269-70w

Defence Quality Assurance Directorate
Civil service dispersal 545w

Defence research
Chemical & biological warfare 474w

Defence review
55w, 73-4w
Armed forces deployment 84-6w, 545w
British merchant fleet 554w
Helicopters 84w
Household Division 349w

Defence support agencies
586w

Demerara Woods
96w

Democracy
Africa 496w

Dental Practice Board
201w

Dental services
Anaesthetics 380w, 585w
Children 204w

Dentists
Pay 201w

Departmental circulars
NHS trusts 62w

Departmental coordination
Community care 352w

Departmental correspondence
Administrative delays 445w
Belmarsh Prison Woolwich 509w
Christmas bonus 51w
Immigration 243w
Nuclear weapons 543w
Set-aside schemes 547w

Departmental forms
Social security benefits 221w

Departmental publications
Social Fund 355-6w
Sports 511w

Deportation
Chahal, Karamjit Singh 508w
Judgments (02:12:91) 30-5
Ministerial statements (02:12:91) 30-5
Prisoners 287w

Deprivation indicators
Wales 407-8w

Dept of Education & Science
208w, 560-5w
Disabled workers 154w

Dept of Employment
193w
House of Commons broadcasting 104w

Dept of Energy
Council of Ministers 43-4w
Disabled workers 141w
European Communities 43w
House of Commons broadcasting 75w
Technology transfer 384w

Dept of Health
584w
Civil service agencies 4[illegible]-2w
Council of Ministers [illegible]w
Disabled workers 199-200w
European Communities 60w
House of Commons broadcasting 116w
Performance indicators 584w

Dept of Social Security
223-4w, 349-50w
Disabled workers 221w
European Communities 50w
Overtime 52-3w

Dept of Social Security local offices
Civil service manpower 52w
Market Harborough 224w
Opening hours 521w

Dept of the Environment
Council of Ministers 67-8w
Disabled workers 182w
European Communities 173-4w
House of Commons broadcasting 177w

Dept of Trade & Industry
281w
Council of Ministers 98w
Disabled workers 177w
House of Commons broadcasting 207w

Dept of Trade inquiries
British & Commonwealth Group 462w
Liechtenstein 498w
Switzerland 498w

Dept of Transport
555w
Disabled workers 109w
House of Commons broadcasting 110w

Detention centres
Detention centres—continued
Castlereagh 389w

Deutsche Bundesbank
Sterling 164w

Developing countries
Debts 147-8w, 303w
Official visits 277w

Development aid
151w

Development plans
367w

Devlin, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Aggravated Taking Bill, 2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 626, 629, 672-3
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 736
Prime Minister's questions, Points of order (05:12:91) 415
Public houses, Public petitions (05:12:91) 502-3
Regional government (06:12:91) 515, 521, 524-37, 540, 543, 565, 567
Questions
A1 380
Business statements 1002-3
Consumer credit, Unfair trading practices 499-500w
Electric cables, Teesside 334w
Housing improvement, Stockton on Tees 169w

Devolution
Scotland (04:12:91) 280, 847-50
Scottish Assembly 847-8

Dewar, Mr Donald
Debates etc.
NHS trusts, Scotland (03:12:91) 146-8
Public expenditure, Scotland (04:12:91) 263-4
Questions
Devolution, Scotland 849
EC social policy, Scotland 853
Enterprise zones, Lanarkshire 44w
Higher education, Age participation rates 299w

Dewsbury Health Authority
Speech therapy 116w

DHL
179w

Dickens, Mr Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Public expenditure, Scotland (04:12:91) 273
Questions
Council tax 254
EC Industry Council, Textile industry 464w
North Sea oil 598
Sports 722
Straw 594-5

Diesel vehicles
Armed forces officers 268w

Dioxins
Bolsover 112w

Diplomatic bags
Wandsworth Prison 397-9

Diplomatic relations
Somalia 421-2w

Dir85/337/EEC
67w, 182w

Dir89/106/EEC
364-5w

Dir89/686/EEC
461w

Direct fire weapons effect system
Defence procurement 228w

Direct labour departments
Road works 108-9w

Direct selling
EC action 13w

Director General of Electricity Supply
see Office of Electricity Regulation

Director General of Fair Trading
see Office of Fair Trading

Director General of Gas Supply
see Office of Gas Supply

Director General of Telecommunications
see Office of Telecommunications

Director of Public Prosecutions
Public appointments 159w

Directorate of Telecommunications
Expenditure 393w
Public buildings 434w
Sonic Communications 393-4w

Directors
Civil service agencies 584w, 587w
Local enterprise companies 45-7w
Maxwell companies 463w
Ministry of Defence 587w
NHS Estate Management & Health Building Agency 584w

Disability Appeal Tribunals
128-9w

Disability living allowance
52w, 126-8w, 573-4w, (11:12:91) 881-921

Disability Living Allowance & Disability Working Allowance (Consequential Provisions) Regulations 1991
Debates etc.
(11:12:91) 881-921

Disability working allowance
127-8w, 573-4w, (11:12:91) 881-921

Disability Working Allowance (General) Regulations 1991
Debates etc.
(11:12:91) 881-921

Disabled facilities grants
313w

Disabled workers
Dept of Education & Science 154w
Dept of Energy 141w
Dept of Health 199-200w
Dept of Social Security 221w
Dept of the Environment 182w
Dept of Trade & Industry 177w
Dept of Transport 109w
EC action 276w
Foreign & Commonwealth Office 154w
Government departments 14w
Home Office 138w
Minister for the Civil Service 84w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 246w
Ministry of Defence 270w
Northern Ireland Office 264w
Office of Arts & Libraries 83-4w
Scottish Office 345-6w
Treasury 81-2w
Welsh Office 194w

Disaster relief
United Nations 275-6w

Disasters
Mental health services (04:12:91) 282

Discretionary student grants
Postgraduate students 720
Vocational training 603

Discrimination
Handicapped (04:12:91) 280

Dismissal
Brand, Frank (13:12:91) 1299-306

District health authorities
Expenditure 282-4w
Wales 282-4w

Dixon, Mr Don
Debates etc.
Level crossings, Newton Garths (12:12:91) 1007-10
Socialism (13:12:91) 1240, 1277-8, 1296
Questions
Government grants to local authorities 317-8w

Djanogly College
717

Dobson, Mr Frank
Questions
Dept of Energy, Technology transfer 384w
Electricity supply industry, Privatisation 592
Energy research, Expenditure 141-4w, 383w
Nuclear power 383w
Opencast mining 601

Dock labour scheme
575w
Humberside 555w
Redundancy pay 555w
Tees & Hartlepool Port Authority 555w

Dock workers
Immingham 556w
Redundancy 556w

Docklands Light Railway
233w
London Docklands Development Corporation 233w, 236-7w

Documents
Speaker's rulings & statements (10:12:91) 734, 736, 738

Dog registration scheme
71-2w

Dog wardens
71-2w

Dogs
71-2w

Doherty, Daniel
Compensation 228w

Domestic appliances
Energy conservation 186w

Domestic service
Overseas workers 509w

Domestic wastes
Electricity generation 314w

Domicil
Law reform 146w

Doran, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
Common fisheries policy (11:12:91) 938-41
Questions
Natural gas 597

***Dorrell, Mr Stephen**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Health*
Debates etc.
Family doctors, Computer applications (05:12:91) 506-10
Tobacco advertising, Children (02:12:91) 110, 123-6
Questions
Air ambulance services 131-2
Alcoholic drinks, Consumption 61w
Alcoholism, Liver diseases 61-2w
Ambulance services, Greater London 115w
Anaesthetics, Dental services 380w, 585w
Blind & Partially Sighted Adults in Britain 446w, 584w
Cholesterol, Blood tests 60w
Community care, Northern region 64w
Departmental correspondence, Administrative delays 445w
Dept of Health, Council of Ministers 60w
Dept of Health, Civil service agencies 481-2w

***Dorrell, Mr Stephen**—continued*
Dept of Health, Disabled workers 199-200w
Dept of Health, European Communities 60w
Dept of Health, House of Commons broadcasting 116w
Dept of Health, Performance indicators 584w
Dioxins, Bolsover 112w
Ethnic minorities 115-6w
Eye disorders, Northern region 111w
Eye disorders, Surgery 65w
Family doctors, Alternative medicine 585-6w
Family doctors, Computer applications 331w, 379-80w
Fluoridation, Costs 114w
Food hygiene, Goods vehicles 332w
Guy's & Lewisham NHS Trust, Finance 203w
Guy's & Lewisham NHS Trust, Hospital admissions 203w
Guy's & Lewisham NHS Trust, Hospital beds 203w
Guy's & Lewisham NHS Trust, Hospital staff 202w
Guy's & Lewisham NHS Trust, Hospital waiting lists 202-3w
Guy's & Lewisham NHS Trust, Patients 203w
Guy's & Lewisham NHS Trust, Surgery 203-4w
Handicapped, Local government social services 114w
Hearing aids, Design 443w
Heart diseases, Surgery 64w
Hospital ancillary staff, Contracts for services 111-2w
Hospital closures, Property transfer 378-80w
Hospitals, Construction 157w
Hospitals, Contracts for services 134-6
Hospitals, Fees & charges 445w
Hospitals, NHS finance 118w
Hospitals, Parking 482w
Hypothermia, Elderly 200w
Incontinence aids, NHS charges 202w
Kidney patients 118w
Kidneys, Transplant surgery 65w, 199w
Manchester Central Hospitals & Community Care NHS Trust 114w
Maternity hospitals, Hospital closures 445-6w
Medway Health Authority, Expenditure 155-6w
Medway Hospital, Capital investment 201-2w
Mental health services, Young people 114-5w
NHS, Contracts for services 139
NHS administration 115w
NHS Estate Management & Health Building Agency, Directors 584w
NHS finance 485-6w
NHS reform, Costs 245w
NHS reform, NHS finance 245w
NHS trusts, Debts 62w, 331w, 445w
NHS trusts, Departmental circulars 62w
NHS trusts, Official hospitality 445w
Northern Regional Health Authority, Finance 112w
Patient's Charter 129-31, 157w
Schizophrenia, Mental health community care 482w
Smoking, Northumberland 158w
Smoking, Young people 158-9w
Smoking related diseases, Costs 158w
Smoking related diseases, Lost working days 159w
Speech therapists, Training 117w
Surgery 446w
Tomography 63w
Trafalgar Medical Services, NHS complaints 379w
Vaccination, Children 62-3w
Westwood Hospital, Hospital closures 63w
X rays, Health hazards 484w
X rays, Radiation hazards 485w

***Dorrell, Mr Stephen**—continued*
Yorkshire Regional Health Authority, Expenditure 113w

Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Czechoslovakia) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(09:12:91) 706

Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Denmark) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(09:12:91) 706

Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Finland) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(09:12:91) 706

Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Iceland) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(09:12:91) 706

Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Isle of Man) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(09:12:91) 706

Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Morocco) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(09:12:91) 706

Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Papua New Guinea) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(09:12:91) 706

Douglas, Mr Dick
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 743
Members' conduct, Points of order (03:12:91) 163
Questions
Business statements 998
Community charge, Non-payment 172w

***Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James**, Under-Secretary of State for Scotland*
Questions
A1, Road construction 343w
A92 455w
Citizen's Charter, Environment protection 167w
Crime, Strathclyde 344-6w
Crimes of violence, Scotland 842-3
Electoral register, British citizenship 231w
Erskine bridge 856
Ferries, Stranraer 459w
Fish farming, Scotland 120w
Fish Farming Advisory Committee 120w
Highlands & Islands Airports 400w
Homelessness, Dumbarton 854
Homelessness, Scotland 846-7, 854
House renovation grants, Scotland 843-4
Justice Charter, Legal aid 168w
Land, Conservation 454w
Legal aid, Scotland 168w
Lockerbie, Bombings 857-8
Motorways, Scotland 168w
Offensive weapons, Injuries 842
Operation Scotcheck 232w
Parliamentary constituencies, Scotland 453w
Police, Scotland 399-400w
Radiation, Holy Loch 501w
Railway travel, Strathclyde 457w
Road construction, Contracts 458w
Road works, Expenditure 459w
Scottish Bus Group, Privatisation 44-6w
Sentencing, Scotland 843
Sites of special scientific interest, Scotland 454w
Strathclyde Buses, Privatisation 232w

Dover, Mr Den
Debates etc.
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 418
Industrial Training Levy (Construction Board) Order 1992 (02:12:91) 92-3

Dover, Mr Den—continued
Socialism (13:12:91) 1280-1, 1283
Questions
Employment level, Northern Ireland 513w

Drift nets
144

Drinking Water Inspectorate
487w

Driver & Vehicle Licensing Agency
Advertising 309w

Driving licences
59-60w
Cars 310w
Elderly 309-10w
Lorry drivers 59w

Driving offences
Motor insurance 583w

Drug prevention schemes
509-10w

Drugs
Licensing 486w

Druridge Bay
Extractive industries 259

Du Pont
451w

Duffy, Sir Patrick
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 867
Questions
British-Irish Interparliamentary Body 981
NHS trusts, Sheffield 136
South Yorkshire Police, Manpower 379
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 513w

Dumbarton
Homelessness 854

Dundee Royal Infirmary
858

Dunn, Mr Bob
Debates etc.
Railway travel, Kent (12:12:91) 1125-7, 1139-40
Questions
Armed forces strength, Gibraltar 229w
Business statements 994
Maxwell companies, Directors 463w
Neighbourhood watch schemes 387
River Darent 247

Dunnachie, Mr Jimmy
Questions
Cold weather payments, Scotland 471w

Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Debates etc.
Contempt of court (03:12:91) 228-9
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 424, 438
Tobacco advertising, Children (02:12:91) 101-3
Questions
Equal opportunities 19
NHS reform, NHS finance 245w
Railway accidents, Severn tunnel 612

Durant, Sir Anthony
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 876

Duration of unemployment
Coal mining 340w

Durham
Housing investment programmes 488w
School meals 448w

Dwyfor
Training 100w
Youth unemployment 100w

Dyfed Family Health Services Authority
438-9w

Dykes, Mr Hugh
Questions
Business statements 994-5

Dyslexia
413w
Northern Ireland 515-6w
Scotland 567w
Teacher training 446-8w
Teachers 413w

Eadie, Mr Alexander
Debates etc.
Coal mining (10:12:91) 788, 807-11, 821
NHS trusts, Scotland (03:12:91) 155
Public expenditure, Scotland (04:12:91) 268
Timeshare Contracts (Time for Reconsideration) (Scotland) Bill, 1R (04:12:91) 281
Questions
British Coal Corporation, Privatisation 333w
Devolution, Scotland 850
Monktonhall colliery, Manpower 337w
Monktonhall colliery, Ministers 337w
NHS trusts, Scotland 455w

Early retirement
Farmers 28w
Local government pensions 478w
Unemployment benefits 566w

Earnings limits
152-3w
National insurance contributions 242w, 388w

Earnings rules
524w
Fire services 471w

East Anglia
Community charge 69-70w

East coast railway line
357w

East Glamorgan General Hospital
20w

East London river crossing
Environmental impact assessment 309w
Oxleas Wood 249

East Midlands
Arts festivals 48w

East Timor
606-7
Human rights 594w
UN resolutions 479w

Eastern Europe
Defence expenditure 473w
Open University 209w

Eastham, Mr Ken
Questions
NHS finance 139

EC action
Advertising 12-3w
Alcohol advertising 13w
Bovine somatotropin 207w
Buoyancy aids 57-8w
Child care (02:12:91) 96
Currencies 191w
Direct selling 13w
Disabled workers 276w
Financial services 260w
Gambling 394w
Import of live animals 490-1w
Indirect taxation (09:12:91) 707
Nuclear power 336w
Potatoes 592-3w
Science & technology research 586w
Working hours 144

EC Agriculture Council
33-5w, 47w, 66w, 593w

EC aid
278w
USSR 989

EC Commission
see European Commission

EC Cons Doc 6762/89
(09:12:91) 707

EC Cons Doc 7485/91
(02:12:91) 96

EC Cons Doc 7570/91
(04:12:91) 283-370

EC countries
Bail 393w
Educational finance 447w
Higher education 447-8w
Light dues 553w
Public holidays 339-40w
Retirement pensions 523w
Tax allowances 36-7w

EC defence policy
(11:12:91) 859-78

EC Development Council
278w, 512w, 607-8

EC Draft 6641/90
(09:12:91) 707

EC Draft 6642/90
(09:12:91) 707

EC Draft 8356/90
(04:12:91) 283-370

EC Draft 9670/90
(09:12:91) 707

EC Draft 8886/91
(04:12:91) 283-370

EC Draft 8950/91
(04:12:91) 283-370

EC Draft 9134/91
(11:12:91) 922-67

EC Draft 9136/91
(04:12:91) 283-370

EC Education Council
18w

EC Energy Council
33-5w, 43-4w

EC Environment Commissioner
Town & country planning 366w

EC Environment Council
33-5w, 43-4w, 47w, 67-8w, 182w

EC environmental policy
314w
Complaints 226-7w
EC law 76w

EC external trade
Arab states 226w
Gulf Cooperation Council 226w
High technology 594w

EC Finance Council
33-5w

EC Fisheries Council
33-5w, 47w, 66w

EC Foreign Affairs Council
33-5w, 262-3w

EC grants & loans
12w
Belfast Airport 514w
Consolidated Fund debates (12:12:91) 1184-95
EC regional policy 178w
RENAVAL 178w
Set-aside schemes 546-7w
Textile industry 346w

EC Health Council
60w

EC immigration
384-5

EC Industry Council
Textile industry 464w

EC institutions
Members' visits abroad (06:12:91) 582

EC integration
143, 392, 730-1
EC nationals 389-90w
Intergovernmental conference 263w
Maastricht Summit 192w
Subsidiarity 318w

EC Internal Market Council
33-5w, 98w

EC internal trade
EC law 32w
Gambling 507w
Lotteries 507w, 568w
Offshore suppliers 599
Tax yields 41-2w

EC Labour & Social Affairs Council
33-5w, 225-6w

EC law
Buoyancy aids 461w
EC environmental policy 76w
EC internal trade 32w
Environmental impact assessment 67w
Social security 222w
Waste disposal 491-2w

EC nationals
EC integration 389-90w
Voting rights 215w

EC reform
Common agricultural policy 30w

EC regional policy
18w
EC grants & loans 178w
Wales 18w

EC Social Charter
141, 464-6w

EC social policy
728-30, 987-90
Legislation 575-6w
Scotland 853

EC Telecommunications Council
33-5w, 98w

EC Transport Council
33-5w

Ecolabelling
259-60

Economic & monetary union
38w, 395
Intergovernmental conference 252w
Scotland 852-3

Economic Commission for Europe
see UN Economic Commission for Europe

Economic League
Oil industry 593-4

Economic models
Finance 190w
Local government finance 235-6w

Economic sanctions
Cuba 497w

Economic situation
392
Borders region 456w
Northern Ireland (12:12:91) 1010-1
Opposition days (05:12:91) 416-502
Paisley 455-6w

Edinburgh District Council
843-4

Education
Exhibitions 559w

Education Act 1944
Questions
17w

Education of children at home
School discipline 294w

Education Reform Act 1988
Questions
239-40w

Education (School Government) Regulations 1989
Questions
299w

Education (School Premises) Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (04:12:91) 282

Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981
Questions
17w

Education Support Grants (Amendment) Regulations 1991
Debates etc.
(02:12:91) 38

Educational advisers
Manpower 406w
Wales 406w

Educational assessment
416w, 557w, 718-9
Contracts for services 449w
General certificate of secondary education 89w
Primary education 18w, 143, 298w, 417w
Wolverhampton 719

Educational finance
Adult education 724
Cambridgeshire 719-20
Church schools 345w
City technology colleges 716-7
EC countries 447w
Educational policy 297-8w
Northern Ireland 979-80
Pay settlements 297w
Wolverhampton 298w

Educational policy
Educational finance 297-8w

Educational standards
Primary education 414w
Reading 298w
Secondary education 154w

Edwards, Mr Huw
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 356-8
Questions
Areas of outstanding natural beauty, Wales 20w
Housing, Wales 10

EEC
see European Economic Community

EFTA
see European Free Trade Association

Eggar, Mr Tim, Minister of State, Dept of Education & Science
Questions
Adult education 725
Adult education, Educational finance 724
Adult education, Expenditure 565w
City technology colleges 717
City technology colleges, Educational finance 716-7
Curriculum 560-5w
Djanogly College 717
Educational assessment 557w
Educational assessment, Contracts for services 449w
Educational assessment, General certificate of secondary education 89w
Educational assessment, Primary education 298w, 417w
Educational finance, EC countries 447w
Educational finance, Pay settlements 297w
Educational finance, Wolverhampton 298w

Eggar, Mr Tim—continued
Educational policy, Educational finance 297-8w
Educational standards, Secondary education 154w
General certificate of secondary education, School administration 296w
General certificate of secondary education, Teaching aids 296w
Grammar schools 558-9w
Grant maintained schools, Finance 414w
Grant maintained schools, Hampshire 418w
Grant maintained schools, Hillingdon 724
HM Inspectorate of Schools, Manpower 210w
Intelligence tests, Research finance 90w
Ministers' domestic visits, Bradford 17w
Music education, Curriculum 16w
Music education, Musical instruments 15-6w
Primary education, France 240w
Reading, Educational standards 298w
Special education, Further education 92w, 510w

Eggs
Import controls 590w
Supermarkets 464w

Elderly
Driving licences 309-10w
Hypothermia 200w

Electoral register
218w, (12:12:91) 1037-8
Advertising 293-4w
British citizenship 231w
Scotland 231w

Electric cables
Teesside 334w

Electricite de France
44w

Electricity
Commodity markets 382w

Electricity distribution
Cleveland 592

Electricity generation
75w, 423w
Air pollution control 314w
Domestic wastes 314w
Gas fired power stations 73-4w
Imports 44w

Electricity supply industry
Northern Ireland 513w
Northern Ireland Electricity 513w
Privatisation 592
Theft 540w

Electricity tariffs
382w

Elephants
Nature conservation 551w

Elmbridge County Infants School
296w

Eltham
Armed forces housing 473w

Eltham Palace
473w

Emery, Sir Peter
Debates etc.
Family doctors, Computer applications (05:12:91) 504-10

Emigration
Scotland 456w

Employment action
Training & enterprise councils 240w
Wales 137w

Employment level
Northern Ireland 513w
Northumberland 24w

Employment opportunities
Glasgow 855
London Docklands Development Corporation 76w
Lotteries 509w

Employment schemes
Marketing 103w

Employment training
26w

Empty housing
Armed forces housing 56w
Shops 79w

Empty property
Council housing 139-40
Liverpool 244
PSA Services 361-2w
Public sector housing 311-2w

Energy Action Grants Agency
43w

Energy conservation
42w, 334w, 598-600
Companies 589w
Domestic appliances 186w
Findhorn Foundation 333-4w
Gas consumption 382w

Energy policy
335-6w

Energy prices
Privatisation 335w

Energy research
Expenditure 141-4w, 383w
Wave power 601-2

Energy Select Committee
(10:12:91) 751-823

Energy Technology Support Unit
335-6w

English Heritage
see Historic Buildings & Monuments Commission for England

English Industrial Estates Corporation
205-6w

English Nature
see Nature Conservancy Council for England

Enright, Mr Derek
Debates etc.
Coal mining (10:12:91) 818
Common fisheries policy (11:12:91) 963
EC grants & loans (12:12:91) 1184-7, 1191-3, 1195
Questions
EC integration 143
Uniform business rate 175w

Enterprise allowance scheme
New businesses 132-3w
Sheffield 133w
Small businesses 133w
Strathclyde 401-2w
Take-up 133w

Enterprise zones
Lanarkshire 44w

Entry clearances
Nigeria 123w

Environment
Conferences 313w

Environment Agency
236w
National Rivers Authority 548w

Environment protection
Citizen's Charter 167w
Exhibitions 348w
Farmers 29w
Government departments 492-3w
Hedges & ditches 79w

Environment protection—continued
Scotland 257w
Taxation 162w
VAT 436w

Environmental education
Open University 209w

Environmental impact assessment
182w, 494-5w
Conferences 175w
East London river crossing 309w
EC law 67w

Environmental policy
Ministry of Defence 84w
Wales 13

Environmental Protection Act 1990
Questions
68-9w, 237w

Environmental Protection (Prescribed Processes & Substances) Regulations 1991
Questions
177w

Environmentally sensitive areas
Crawfordsburn 519w
Exmoor 165w

Equal opportunities
18-9
Civil service 18, 20-2, 435w
Local enterprise companies 45-7w
Northern Ireland Electricity 513-4w
Training 18
Women 20-2

Eritrea
Refugees 115w

Erskine bridge
856

Essex County Council
394

Established Church Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (10:12:91) 749-50

Estate Action
Broadmead Estate Redbridge 182w
Northfield House Peckham 68w

Estimates days
Coal (10:12:91) 751-823
Residential care (10:12:91) 751-823

Estonia
387w

Estuaries
Special protection areas 68w

Ethnic minorities
115-6w
Broadcasting 122-3w
Government grants to local authorities 508w

Euratom
35w, 187w
Nuclear safeguards 336w
Recruitment 336w

Europe
Air fares 304w
Civil servants' visits abroad 95w
Football 416w
Government (09:12:91) 618
Racial discrimination 276-7w

European Assembly
see European Parliament

European Atomic Energy Community
see Euratom

European central bank
391, 852-3

European Coal & Steel Community
35w

European Commission
18w, 28w, 226-7w

European Communities
Attorney General 7w
Dept of Energy 43w
Dept of Health 60w
Dept of Social Security 50w
Dept of the Environment 173-4w
Home Office 2w
Ministers' visits abroad 280w
Ministry of Defence 56w
Northern Ireland Office 65w
Official visits 223-4w
Scottish Office 47w
Terminology 35w

European Conference of Postal & Telecommunications Admins
99w

European Convention on Human Rights
249-50w

European Council
191w, 389-90w
Ministerial statements (11:12:91) 859-78

European Court of Human Rights
249-50w
Gibraltar 155w

European Court of Justice
76w

European Economic Community
35w

European Free Trade Association
586w

European Legislation Select Committee
Speaker's rulings & statements (11:12:91) 922

European monetary system
Norway 42w

European Parliament
33w, 389w, (11:12:91) 859-78

European Parliament members
Gibraltar 33w, 389w, 497w
House of Commons (Services) Select Committee (06:12:91) 582

European Parliamentary Constituencies (England) (Miscellaneous Changes) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(10:12:91) 750

European Parliamentary Constituencies (Scotland) (Miscellaneous Changes) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(09:12:91) 619

European Regional Development Fund
178w

European Security Conference
497w

Evans, Mr David
Debates etc.
Socialism (13:12:91) 1230-42, 1274, 1277
Questions
EC aid 278w
Forestry Commission, Land acquisition 857
Local government services, Privatisation 171w
Parliamentary furnishings, Removal services 257w

Evans, Mr John
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 878
Questions
Council tax, Property values 250
Indonesia, Human rights 605-6

Evennett, Mr David
Questions
Channel tunnel, Railway network 188-9w
Educational assessment, Primary education 143

Evennett, Mr David*—*continued
Incinerators, South East region 430w
Wave power, Energy research 601-2

Ewelme
Water pollution 80w

Ewing, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 744
House of Commons stationery, Points of order (10:12:91) 750
Transfer of questions, Points of order (11:12:91) 880
Questions
Sunday trading, Scotland 845
Transport of radioactive materials, Scotland 422w

Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 356
Common fisheries policy (11:12:91) 925
House of Commons division of time, Points of order (03:12:91) 165
NHS trusts, Scotland (03:12:91) 153
Questions
Business statements 993
Emigration, Scotland 456w
NHS trusts, Scotland 144

Exercise Highland Cardinal
267w

Exercise OSEX 91
267w

Exhibitions
Education 559w
Environment protection 348w

Exmoor
Environmentally sensitive areas 165w

Export Credits Guarantee Department
205w, 260-1w
Privatisation 11-2w

Export licensing
Archives 12w
Arms exports 39-40w

Exports
Iraq 499w

Exservicemen
(09:12:91) 708-14
Housing 544w

Extractive industries
Druridge Bay 259

Extracurricular activities
School buildings (04:12:91) 282

Extradition
Libyan Arab Republic 389w

Eye disorders
377-8w
Northern region 111w
Surgery 65w
Young people 156w

Factories
Welsh Development Agency 248w

Factory closures
Buses (09:12:91) 615

Fair Employment Commission for Northern Ireland
Press releases (12:12:91) 1027-9

Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas
Debates etc.
Aggravated Taking Bill, 2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 639, 641, 642
NHS trusts, Scotland (03:12:91) 160
Public expenditure, Scotland (04:12:91) 267
Questions
Business statements 410
EC immigration 385
European Communities, Terminology 35w

Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas*—*continued
Scottish Assembly 454w

Fairgrounds
Planning permission 237w

"Faith in the Countryside"
277w

Fallon, Mr Michael, Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Education & Science
Debates etc.
Teachers' Pay & Conditions Act 1987 (Continuation) Order 1991 (09:12:91) 702-3, 705-6
Questions
Children Act 1989 92-3w
Class sizes 715-6
Dyslexia 413w
Dyslexia, Teacher training 446-8w
Dyslexia, Teachers 413w
Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981 17w
Elmbridge County Infants School 296w
Free school meals 295w
Free school meals, Family credit 295w
Free school meals, Take-up 416-7w
Hearnville School 417w
Local education authorities, Capital investment 415w
Primary education 716
Pupil-teacher ratios 715
St Anne's School Birkenhead, Capital investment 511w
School administration, Budgeting 410-4w
School buildings, Birmingham 415w
School buildings, Bradford 415w
School buildings, Capital investment 415w, 559-60w
School choice, Central London 416w
School discipline 289-90w
School discipline, Education of children at home 294w
School governors, Teachers 299w
School governors, Training 239w
School governors, Vacancies 238-9w
School meals, Durham 448w
School meals, Nutrition 238w
School meals, Subsidies 295w
School meals, Water 238w
School population 295w
School transport 17w, 417w
School transport, Expenditure 557-8w
Schools, Plymouth 510w
Special education 16w
Special education, Primary education 727
Teacher training, Costs 239w
Teachers' pensions 16w, 446w

Family credit
469-70w
Free school meals 295w
Housing benefits 470w
Northern Ireland 573w
One parent families 573w
Owner occupied housing 352w
Take-up 565w

Family doctors
132-3
Alternative medicine 585-7w
Budgeting 132
Computer applications 331w, 379-80w, (05:12:91) 504-10
Pay 100-1w, 113w
Wales 100-1w
Women 112w

Family health services authorities
111w

Farm incomes
Wales 7-8

Farmers
Early retirement 28w
Environment protection 29w

Farmers' Union of Wales
7

Farr, Sir John
Debates etc.
Adult education (12:12:91) 1027
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 740
British Railways Bill, 3R (02:12:91) 81-2
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 354
Contempt of court (03:12:91) 228
Prison Security Bill, 2R (03:12:91) 184-7
Questions
Dept of Social Security local offices, Market Harborough 224w
Midland main railway line, Railway electrification 190w
Police interrogation, Video recordings 391
Postgraduate education 720-1

Fatchett, Mr Derek
Debates etc.
Teachers' Pay & Conditions Act 1987 (Continuation) Order 1991 (09:12:91) 703-4
Questions
Class sizes 715-6
Schools, Plymouth 510w
Youth unemployment 104w

Faulds, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Deportation, Judgments (02:12:91) 34
NHS trusts, Scotland (03:12:91) 160

Faulkner, AP
Prison medical services 218w

Favell, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Mirror Group Newspapers, Standing Order No 20 applications (04:12:91) 277
Questions
Development plans 367w
EC integration 392
Maastricht Summit, EC integration 192w

Fearn, Mr Ronnie
Debates etc.
Transport & Works Bill, 2R (02:12:91) 42, 66-8
Questions
Channel tunnel, Railway network 357w
Community charge, Holiday accommodation 429w
Driver & Vehicle Licensing Agency, Advertising 309w
Drugs, Licensing 486w
Homelessness 318w
Jobclubs, North West region 339w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food, Government department reorganisation 545w
Motorways, Lighting 306w
Passenger transport executives, Corporation tax 161w
Pigs, Animal housing 246-7w
River pollution, Fish 318w
Tourism, Government grants 408-9w
Tourist boards, Government grants 338w
Youth training, North West region 338w

Federal Express
179w

Feldberg, Wilhelm
Animal experiments 397-8w

Feltham Young Offenders Institution
Solitary confinement 510w

Fenner, Dame Peggy
Debates etc.
Railway travel, Kent (12:12:91) 1124-5, 1142
Questions
Medway Hospital, Capital investment 201-2w

Ferries
Stranraer 459w

Field, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 283-4
Transport & Works Bill, 2R (02:12:91) 48, 59, 62-6

Field, Mr Barry—continued
Questions
Buoyancy aids, EC action 57-8w
Buoyancy aids, EC law 461w
Buoyancy aids, Safety standards 57w
Bus services, Franchising 188w
EC Foreign Affairs Council 262-3w
Educational assessment 557w
Light dues, EC countries 553w
Navigational aids 358w
PSA Services, Empty property 361-2w
School transport, Expenditure 557-8w
Whitbread, Tenancy agreements 498w

Field, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
Residential care (10:12:91) 751-5, 783, 785-6
Questions
AIDS, Life insurance 443w
Clyde submarine base, Trident 472w
Pay, Merseyside 27w
St Anne's School Birkenhead, Capital investment 511w

Financial services
Consultants 204w
EC action 260w

Fladbora Foundation
Energy conservation 333-4w

Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Questions
Entry clearances, Nigeria 123w

Fire prevention
Channel tunnel 553-4w
Furniture (12:12:91) 1020-2

Fire services
Earnings rules 471w

Firearms
Northern Ireland 89w, 213w
Theft 89w, 213w

Firearms (Amendment) Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (04:12:91) 282

Fires
Air safety 110w

Firth of Clyde
Petroleum exploration 43w

Fish
Radiation hazards 549w
River pollution 318w

Fish farming
Planning permission 494-5w
Scotland 120w

Fish Farming Advisory Committee
120w

Fisher, Mr Mark
Questions
Arts finance 15

Fisheries
Nature conservation (04:12:91) 282

Flannery, Mr Martin
Questions
City technology colleges 717

Flight simulation
385-6w

Flood damage
Calderdale 176w
Government grants to local authorities 176w

Floods
Sizewell A 337-8w

Fluoridation
Costs 114w

Flynn, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Social security orders (11:12:91) 908-10, 914
Questions
Air pollution control, Manufacturing industries 175w

Flynn, Mr Paul—continued
Arms exports, Export licensing 39-40w
Business statements 993-4
Civil service, Job satisfaction 567w
East Timor, Human rights 594w
East Timor, UN resolutions 479w
EC Development Council 512w
EC environmental policy, Complaints 226-7w
EC environmental policy, EC law 76w
Electricity generation, Imports 44w
Environment protection, Government departments 492-3w
Environment protection, Taxation 162w
Environmental impact assessment, Conferences 175w
Export licensing, Archives 12w
Exports, Iraq 499w
High technology, EC external trade 594w
"In Pursuit of a Nuclear Test Ban Treaty" 594w
International Atomic Energy Agency, Iraq 497w
Iraq, Petrochemicals 480-1w
Metalworking, Air pollution control 9w
Ministry of Defence, Environmental policy 84w
Nuclear disarmament, USSR 228w
Nuclear Electric, Radioactive wastes 541w
Nuclear power stations, Decommissioning 541w
Nuclear power stations, Nuclear safeguards 187w
Nuclear safeguards 141w
Nuclear weapons, Departmental correspondence 543w
Pollution, Disclosure of information 68-9w
Prime Minister 480w
"Radioactive Heaven & Earth" 375-6w
Radioactive Substances Act 1960, Consolidation bills 475w
Radioactive waste disposal 493w
Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee 494w
Radioactivity, Licensing 493w
Refuse derived fuel 333w
Semiconductor devices, Research 208w
Solar power, Research finance 187w
THORP, Radiation hazards 382w
Town & country planning, Alternative energy 552-3w
United Nations 497w
USSR, CFE Treaty 496-7w
USSR, Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty 479-80w
USSR, Nuclear weapons policy 496w

Foetal tissue
Waste disposal 482-3w

Food
Expenditure 247-8w

Food hygiene
Goods vehicles 332w

Food Hygiene (Market Stalls & Delivery Vehicles) Regulations) 1966
Questions
332w

Food labelling
Origin marking 29w

Food surpluses
(12:12:91) 1032-3

Fookes, Dame Janet
Questions
Educational assessment, Primary education 298w

Football
Arrests 215w
Europe 416w
Police powers 219w

Footwear
Import duties 374w
Labelling 374-5w

Footwear industry
National vocational qualification 410w

Foreign adoptions
320-1w, 329-30w

Foreign & Commonwealth Office
95w
Disabled workers 154w

Foreign exchange
14w

Foreign investment in UK
987-8
Northern Ireland 986-7
Wales 10-1, 20-1w, 102-3w
Welsh Development Agency 10-1

Foreign policy
Baltic states 420w
Ukraine 320w

Forestry Commission
167w, (04:12:91) 261-76
Land acquisition 857

Forestry Commission regional advisory committees
457-8w

Forman, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 873
Questions
European Communities, Attorney General 7w
European Communities, Dept of Energy 43w
European Communities, Dept of Health 60w
European Communities, Dept of Social Security 50w
European Communities, Dept of the Environment 173-4w
European Communities, Home Office 2w
European Communities, Ministers' visits abroad 280w
European Communities, Ministry of Defence 56w
European Communities, Northern Ireland Office 65w
European Communities, Scottish Office 47w
Warren, Gordon, Ex gratia payments 217w

Former Members
House of Commons (Services) Select Committee (06:12:91) 582

Former Prime Ministers
15w

Forsyth, Mr Michael, Minister of State for Scotland
Debates etc.
Common fisheries policy (11:12:91) 962-5
Questions
Agriculture, Scotland 852
AIDS, Scotland 457w
Art education, Student numbers 460w
Central institutions, Capital investment 346-7w
Church schools, Educational finance 345w
Craigtoun Hospital St Andrews, Hospital closures 119w
Dyslexia, Scotland 567w
Emigration, Scotland 456w
Forestry Commission, Land acquisition 857
Foundation for Sport & the Arts, Scotland 568w
Further education, Local government expenditure 167w
Government grants to voluntary organisations, Scotland 453-4w
Heart diseases, Scotland 455w
Hospital beds, Scotland 255-6w
Hospital waiting lists, Scotland 841-2
Lotteries, EC internal trade 568w
Marginal land, Agricultural subsidies 851-2
NHS finance, Scotland 229-31w
NHS trusts, Scotland 455w
Patient's Charter, Scotland 459w
Redundancy, Angus 852

Forsyth, Mr Michael—continued
Ruchill Hospital, Hospital closures 841
School boards, Scotland 455w
School buildings, Capital investment 256-7w
School population, Scotland 343-4w
Scottish health boards, Finance 858
Scottish health boards, Repairs & maintenance 402w
Speech therapists, Argyll & Clyde Health Board 460w
Speech therapists, Scotland 568w
Squirrels, Surveys 167w
Stobhill Hospital, Urology 345w
Tree planting, Government grants 457-8w

Forsythe, Mr Clifford
Debates etc.
Residential care (10:12:91) 758-9
Questions
Belfast Airport, Government grants 514w
Business premises, Belfast 982

Forth, Mr Eric, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment
Debates etc.
Industrial Training Levy (Construction Board) Order 1992 (02:12:91) 83-4, 94-6
Questions
Average earnings 24-5w
Bank of Credit & Commerce International, Redundancy pay 104w
Dept of Employment, House of Commons broadcasting 104w
Dock labour scheme 575w
EC social policy, Legislation 575-6w
Employment schemes, Marketing 103w
Enterprise allowance scheme, New businesses 132-3w
Enterprise allowance scheme, Small businesses 133w
Enterprise allowance scheme, Take-up 133w
Health & Safety Executive, Offices 575w
Low incomes 526w
Low pay 22-4w
Maternity pay 103-4w
Ministers' domestic visits, North Tyneside 225w
Pay, Merseyside 27w
Pay, Women 103w
Public holidays 133w
Public holidays, Netherlands 27w
Self-employed 132w
Training & enterprise councils, Employment action 240w
Training & enterprise councils, Rural areas 103w
Training & enterprise councils, Special training needs 240w
Training & enterprise councils, Wakefield 240-1w
Training Enterprise & Education Directorate, Expenditure 131w
Unemployment 225w
Unemployment, Statistics 131w
VAT registration 242w
Wages councils, Prosecutions 526-32w
Work permits, Nuclear physics 340w
Working hours 241w
Youth training scheme, Wakefield 104w
Youth unemployment 104w

Foster, Mr Derek
Debates etc.
Contempt of court (03:12:91) 235-6

Foulkes, Mr George
Debates etc.
Calling of Members, Points of order (05:12:91) 414
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 428
NHS trusts, Points of order (03:12:91) 166
NHS trusts, Scotland (03:12:91) 152, 160
Questions
Agriculture, Scotland 852
British embassies, Civil service manpower 261w
Dalai Lama 191w

Foulkes, Mr George—continued
Home energy efficiency scheme, Government grants 258w
Low flying, Complaints 267w
Pensioners, Cold weather payments 242-3w

Foundation for Sport & the Arts
414w
Scotland 568w

Foundation for the Study of Infant Deaths
378w

Foundry industry
175w

Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 867

France
Frigates 88-9w
Government assistance to industry 464w
HM Inspectorate of Schools 240w
Primary education 240w
Textile industry 464w

Franchising
Bus services 188w
Television (12:12:91) 1039-42

Franks, Mr Cecil
Debates etc.
Contempt of court (03:12:91) 240
Questions
Trident submarines 141

Fraser, Mr John
Questions
Charities, Political activities 273w
Domicil, Law reform 146w
Government securities 191w
Law Commission, Law reform 8-9w
Police misconduct, Committal proceedings 139w
Vocational training, Discretionary student grants 603

Fraud
Common agricultural policy 165w
Pension funds 260w
Prosecutions 8w
Set-aside schemes 165-6w, 282w, 571-2w, 575w

Free school meals
295w, 470-1w
Family credit 295w
Northern Ireland 324w
Scotland 343-4w
Take-up 416-7w

Freedom of Information Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (04:12:91) 280

Freeman, Mr Roger, Minister for Public Transport
Debates etc.
Railway travel, Kent (12:12:91) 1141-4
Questions
British Railways Board, Citizen's Charter 59w
Bus services, Contracts for services 556w
Bus services, Franchising 188w
Bus services, Greater London 105w, 556w
Channel tunnel, Fire prevention 553-4w
Channel tunnel, Railway network 357w
Channel tunnel, Railway travel 106-7w
Docklands Light Railway 233w
Docklands Light Railway, London Docklands Development Corporation 233w
Level crossings, Public footpaths 307-8w
London Underground, Capital investment 357w
Midland main railway line, Railway electrification 190w
Passenger transport executives, Greater London 556w
Railway electrification, West Yorkshire 57w, 233w

Freeman, Mr Roger—continued
Railway travel, West Yorkshire 233w
Thameslink 234w
Transport policy, Railway transport 422w

Freight transport
Western Isles 845-6

French, Mr Douglas
Debates etc.
Road safety (12:12:91) 1029-32
Questions
Family doctors, Women 112w
North Sea oil, Oil reserves 597

Freshwater fish
Northern Ireland 521-2w

Frigates
France 88-9w
International cooperation 88-9w

Fringe benefits
National insurance contributions 301-2w, 376w

Fuels
Wood 333w

Full Sutton Prison
Prison escapes 294w

Furniture
Fire prevention (12:12:91) 1020-2
Probate Registry Cardiff 9w, 77w, 146w

Further & Higher Education Bill (HL) 1991/92
Questions
726

Further education
Local government expenditure 167w
Scotland 167w
Special education 92w, 510w

Further education teachers
Pay 90-1w

Fyfe, Mrs Maria
Debates etc.
Calling of Members, Points of order (11:12:91) 879
NHS trusts, Scotland (03:12:91) 156
Public expenditure, Scotland (04:12:91) 267
Questions
Ruchill Hospital, Hospital closures 841

G7
see Group of Seven

Galbraith, Mr Sam
Debates etc.
NHS trusts, Scotland (03:12:91) 161
Questions
NHS trusts, Scotland 856
Patient's Charter, Scotland 459w
Unemployment 392-3

Gale, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Deportation, Points of order (02:12:91) 36-7
Ministerial & Other Salaries Order 1991 (10:12:91) 827-8
Railway travel, Kent (12:12:91) 1129-33
Questions
Council tax, Armed forces 69w
Mobility allowance, Social security appeals 126-7w
Northern Ireland Office, Ministerial duties 387-9w
School transport 417w

Galloway
228-9w

Galloway, Mr George
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 743
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 876

Gambling
EC action 394w
EC internal trade 507w

Gaming Board for Great Britain
394w

Gaming machines
Children (10:12:91) 749

Gardiner, Sir George
Debates etc.
Deportation, Judgments (02:12:91) 33
Questions
Planning & Compensation Act 1991, 171-2w

Garel-Jones, Mr Tristan, Minister of State, Foreign & Commonwealth Office
Debates etc.
Socialism (13:12:91) 1293
Questions
Arab states, EC external trade 226w
Council of Ministers 33-5w
Cyprus, British embassies 262w
Cyprus, Missing persons 262w
EC environmental policy, Complaints 226-7w
EC integration, Subsidiarity 318w
EC internal trade, EC law 32w
European Communities, Terminology 35w
European Court of Human Rights, Gibraltar 155w
Gibraltar, European Parliament members 33w, 497w
Gulf Cooperation Council, EC external trade 226w
High technology, EC external trade 594w
Maastricht Summit, Parliamentary procedure 227w

Garrett, Mr Ted
Questions
Incinerators, Tyne & Wear 173w

Gas consumption
Energy conservation 382w

Gas fired power stations
Electricity generation 73-4w

GATT
143, 374w, 502w
Multifibre arrangement 499w

General certificate of secondary education
Educational assessment 89w
School administration 296w
Teaching aids 296w

General Council of the Bar
602-3

Genetics
Criminal investigation 434w

George, Mr Bruce
Questions
Wolds Remand Prison, Contracts for services 392-3w
Wolds Remand Prison, Prison staff 392w

Geriatric patients
Wales 5

Germany
Low flying 265-6w

Gibraltar
Armed forces strength 229w
European Court of Human Rights 155w
European Parliament members 33w, 389w, 497w

Gill, Mr Christopher
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 343-5
Questions
British Railways Board, Citizen's Charter 59w
EC integration 730-1

Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Questions
National insurance contributions 129-30w
Pensioners, Personal income 51w
Social security benefits, Administrative costs 127w
Tax allowances, Travelling expenses 36-7w

Glasgow
Employment opportunities 855

Global environmental facility
608

Glyn, Sir Alan
Questions
Overseas workers, Domestic service 509w

Godman, Dr Norman A
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 747
Common fisheries policy (11:12:91) 922-3
NHS trusts, Scotland (03:12:91) 158-9
Public expenditure, Scotland (04:12:91) 271-2
Questions
Business statements 1000-1
Defence land, Armed forces training 228-30w
Enterprise allowance scheme, Strathclyde 401-2w
Northern Ireland government 515w
Offshore structures, Shipping safety 335w
Open University 209w
Open University, Eastern Europe 209w
Open University, Environmental education 209w
Police, Scotland 399-400w
Scottish Arts Council 16-7
Self-employed, Strathclyde 401-2w
Shipbuilding, Northern Ireland 978
Speech therapists, Argyll & Clyde Health Board 460w
Speech therapists, Scotland 568w
Youth training, Administrative delays 232w

Gold
Albania 95w

Golding, Mrs Llin
Debates etc.
Contempt of court (03:12:91) 242
Homelessness (12:12:91) 1100-1, 1105, 1108

"Good Irrigation Practice"
164w

Goods vehicles
Food hygiene 332w

Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 742
Questions
Computer privacy, Charities 120w
Dyslexia 413w

Gordon, Ms Mildred
Debates etc.
Tobacco advertising, Children (02:12:91) 104
Questions
Immigration, Departmental correspondence 243w

Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Debates etc.
Prison Security Bill, 2R (03:12:91) 180
Socialism (13:12:91) 1263
Questions
A13, Road closures 309w
Bombings, Belfast 981-2
Climate 490w
Environment, Conferences 313w
Environment Agency 236w
Greenhouse effect, Press advertising 174w
Higher civil servants, Women 28w
Medical treatments, Women 4-5
Ozone layer, Telecommunications industry 430w
Rents to mortgages scheme, Television advertising 363w
Sunday trading, Scotland 844-5

Gould, Mr Bryan
Questions
Council tax, Local authority powers 253
Housing improvement, North Tyneside 238w
Local government pensions, Early retirement 478w
Local government services 251

Gould, Mr Bryan—continued
Ministers' domestic visits, North Tyneside 218w, 225w, 238w
Police, North Tyneside 218w
Prison sentences 244w
Unemployment 225w
Young offenders 219w

Government
Europe (09:12:91) 618

Government assistance to industry
France 464w

Government buildings
Greater London 181w
Repairs & maintenance 181w

Government contracts
Northern Ireland 210w

Government department reorganisation
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 545w

Government departments
Disabled workers 14w
Environment protection 492-3w
Law enforcement 94w

Government grants to local authorities
317-8w
Coventry City Council 427w
Cumbria 489-90w
Ethnic minorities 508w
Flood damage 176w
Greater Manchester 70w
Wandsworth 70w

Government grants to voluntary organisations
Scotland 453-4w

Government information services
Northern Ireland 324w

Government securities
191w

Graham, Mr Thomas
Questions
Erskine bridge 856
Hedges & ditches, Environment protection 79w

Grammar schools
558-9w

Grant, Sir Anthony
Debates etc.
Aggravated Taking Bill, 2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 634, 635, 657-9

Grant, Mr Bernie
Questions
Asylum Bill 1991/92 583w
Business statements 404
Housing improvement, Broadwater Farm Estate 169w
London Underground, Capital investment 357w
Low pay, Greater London 341w
Metropolitan Police, Racial discrimination 122w
Racial discrimination, Europe 276-7w

Grant maintained schools
Finance 414w
Hampshire 418w
Hillingdon 724

Grants for education support & training
92w

Greater Glasgow Health Board
841

Greater London
Ambulance services 115w
Arts finance 49w
Bus services 105w, 188w, 556w
Government buildings 181w
Greenbelt 171w
Hospitals 157w
Low pay 341w

Greater London—continued
Passenger transport executives 556w
Road tolls 105w

Greater Manchester
Government grants to local authorities 70w
Local government revenue 184w
Police custody 578w

Green flag exercises
270w

Greenbelt
Greater London 171w

Greenhouse effect
366-7w
Press advertising 174w

"Greenhouse Effect & its Implications for the European Community"
366-7w

"Greening Government"
492-3w

Greenway, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
RU486, Public petitions (06:12:91) 511
Questions
Ambulance services, Greater London 115w
Arts finance, Greater London 49w
Central heating 334-5w
Civil service dispersal 163-4w
Greenbelt, Greater London 171w
Mauritius, Overseas aid 278w
Official engagements 192w, 375w, 481w
Parking 189w
Pension funds, Investment 525-6w
Pupil-teacher ratios 715
Pupil-teacher ratios, Northern Ireland 979
Whales, Nature conservation 144

Greenway, Mr John
Debates etc.
Prison Security Bill, 2R (03:12:91) 171, 175, 194-200, 203
Questions
Council tax 252
National parks 257

Gregory, Mr Conal
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 748
Cheques Bill, 1R (09:12:91) 618-9
Questions
Hospitals, Contracts for services 135-6
Sports Council 418w, 722
Tourism, Northern Ireland 512w
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 31w
Voting rights, EC nationals 215w
Whisky, Production 456w

Grieve Committee
see Fish Farming Advisory Committee

Griffiths, Sir Eldon
Questions
Electricity generation, Gas fired power stations 73-4w
Police, Helicopters 121-2w
Turks & Caicos Islands 31w

Griffiths, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
NHS trusts, Scotland (03:12:91) 157
Public expenditure, Scotland (04:12:91) 272, 274, 278
Tobacco advertising, Children (02:12:91) 117-23
Questions
Council tax 732
NHS trusts, Scotland 855-8
Telephone operator services, House of Commons 258w
Telephone services, Codes of practice 178w

Griffiths, Mr Win
Debates etc.
Hazardous wastes (12:12:91) 1153-6
Railway travel, Kent (12:12:91) 1142
Questions
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 11

Griffiths, Mr Win—continued
Planning permission 255
River pollution, Wales 18-9w

Grist, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 747
Questions
A48(M) 406-7w
Railway accidents, Severn tunnel 612
Training & enterprise councils, Wales 2
Welsh Assembly 19w

Grocott, Mr Bruce
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 874
Public holidays (12:12:91) 1039-42
Questions
Business statements 991-2
City technology colleges, Educational finance 716-7
Community charge capping 170w
Public holidays, EC countries 339-40w
Public holidays, Netherlands 27w, 339w

Ground, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Deportation, Judgments (02:12:91) 34

Ground water
Cardiff Bay barrage 570w

Group of Seven
Arms control 275w
Arms trade 275w

Grylls, Mr Michael
Questions
Defence review, British merchant fleet 554w
Tax yields, EC internal trade 41-2w

Guaranteed Minimum Pensions Increase Order 1991
Debates etc.
(11:12:91) 881-921

Guide prices
Common fisheries policy (06:12:91) 582

Guided weapons
USA 87-8w

Gulf Cooperation Council
EC external trade 226w

Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 283-95, 298-9, 302-4, 352
Questions
EC Agriculture Council 593w
Livestock, Waste disposal 208w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food, Civil servants' business appointments 593w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food, Civil service agencies 591-2w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food, Performance indicators 590-1w
Potatoes, EC action 592-3w
Set-aside schemes 546-7w
Set-aside schemes, Agricultural research 592w
Set-aside schemes, EC grants & loans 546-7w
Set-aside schemes, Fraud 165-6w, 282w
Set-aside schemes, Inspections 547-8w
Waste disposal, Sea pollution 281w

Guyana
Overseas aid 96w
World Bank 96w

Guyanese National Timber Company
96w

Guy's & Lewisham NHS Trust
Finance 203w
Hospital admissions 203w
Hospital beds 203w

Guy's & Lewisham NHS Trust—continued
Hospital staff 202w
Hospital waiting lists 202-3w
Patients 203w
Surgery 203-4w

Guy's Hospital
202-4w

Gypsies
Avon (13:12:91) 1229
Consolidated Fund debates (12:12:91) 1176-83
Hampshire (12:12:91) 1176-83
Public petitions (13:12:91) 1229

Habitual offenders
Bail 433-4w
Bail hostels 503w

Hackney
Inner cities initiative 373-4w

Hague, Mr William
Questions
Arts, Teesside 48-9w
Electricity distribution, Cleveland 592
Equal opportunities, Women 20-2

Hain, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 484-5
Questions
A465, Road construction 20w
Mirror Group Newspapers 393
Office of Telecommunications, Industrial disputes 280-1w
Telephones, Households 178-9w

Hallmarking
Metals 372w

Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie, Minister of State for the Armed Forces
Debates etc.
Exservicemen (09:12:91) 710-4
Territorial Army (12:12:91) 1119-23
Thompson, Lee (06:12:91) 588-90
Questions
Air force 391-2w
Armed forces, Blood sports 268-9w
Armed forces casualties, Compensation 349w, 391w
Armed forces deployment 589w
Armed forces discharges, Housing 227w
Armed forces housing, Eltham 473w
Armed forces housing, Empty housing 56w
Armed forces officers, Diesel vehicles 268w
Armed forces pensions 227w
Armed forces strength, Gibraltar 229w
Armed forces uniforms 87w
Armoured fighting vehicles, Armed forces deployment 544w
Arms control negotiations, Warships 88w
Army, Operating costs 543w
Atomic Coordinating Office Washington 542w
Atomic Weapons Establishment, Verification 347w
Biological & Toxin Weapons Convention, International conferences 474w
Chemical & biological warfare, Canada 474w
Chemical & biological warfare, Defence research 474w
Chemical & biological warfare, Disclosure of information 474w
Clyde submarine base, Trident 472w
Defence equipment, Armed forces deployment 88w, 544-5w
Defence expenditure 88w, 544w
Defence expenditure, Eastern Europe 473w
Defence land, Armed forces training 228-30w
Defence review, Armed forces deployment 84-6w, 545w
Defence review, Helicopters 84w
Defence review, Household Division 349w
Doherty, Daniel, Compensation 228w
Eltham Palace 473w

Hamilton, Rt Hon Archie—continued
Exservicemen, Housing 544w
Household Division, Tourism 473w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Armed forces casualties 270w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Navigational aids 56-7w
Low flying, Armed forces training 268w
Low flying, Skyguard radar 269w
Military vehicles, M25 511-2w, 542w
Ministry of Defence, European Communities 56w
NATO, Armed forces strength 180w
Naval bases, Almondbank 84w
Nuclear disarmament, USSR 228w
Nuclear non proliferation, USSR 87w
Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty, International conferences 348w
Nuclear submarines, Armed forces deployment 542w
Nuclear test ban, Verification 543w
Nuclear weapons, Departmental correspondence 543w
Nuclear weapons tests 347-8w
Peace keeping operations 87w
Pearl Harbour, Anniversaries 349w
Red Arrows, Operating costs 268w
Royal Naval Reserve 55w
Royal Naval Reserve, Defence expenditure 349w
Scientists against Nuclear Arms, Books 347w
Territorial Army, Army strength 348w
Territorial Army, Northern Ireland 589w
Terrorism, Compensation 228w
Warships, Decommissioning 473w
Warships, Tactical nuclear weapons 543w

Hamilton, Mr Neil, An Assistant whip
Debates etc.
Socialism (13:12:91) 1243, 1282

Hampshire
Grant maintained schools 418w
Gypsies (12:12:91) 1176-83

Handicap benefits
470w
British residents abroad 377w
Northern Ireland 573-4w
Publicity 127-8w
Transitional arrangements 351-2w

Handicapped
(12:12:91) 1011-3, 1043
Discrimination (04:12:91) 280
House renovation grants (04:12:91) 372-8
Local government social services 114w

Handicapped drivers
Northern Ireland 519w
Parking 519w

Hanley, Mr Jeremy, Under-Secretary of State Northern Ireland Office
Questions
Agriculture, Income 517-20w
Animal experiments, Northern Ireland 210-1w
Cattle, Prices 516w
Child benefit, Social security benefits rates 263-4w
Child protection registers, South Down 326-7w
Clenbuterol, Convictions 211w
Deer farming, Northern Ireland 211w
Family credit, One parent families 573w
Freshwater fish, Northern Ireland 521-2w
Handicap benefits, Northern Ireland 573-4w
Hearing therapists, Manpower 521w, 572-3w
Housing, Security 328w
National insurance contributions, Earnings limits 388w
National insurance contributions, Northern Ireland 264w
One parent families, South Down 328w
Personal pensions, National Insurance Fund 325-6w
Retirement pensions, Northern Ireland 450w

Hanley, Mr Jeremy—continued
Set-aside schemes, Fraud 575w
Set-aside schemes, Northern Ireland 573-4w
Set-aside schemes, Sports facilities 574w
Social Fund, South Down 325w
Social security abuse, Northern Ireland 520w
Social security recipients, Northern Ireland 573w

Hannam, Mr John
Questions
Nuclear power 595
Special education, Further education 510w
USSR, EC aid 989

Hanover Square Bradford
House purchase 236w
Property development 183-5w

Hardy, Mr Peter
Questions
Children Act 1989, Judiciary 73w
Educational assessment, General certificate of secondary education 89w
Educational standards, Secondary education 154w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Armed forces casualties 270w
Manufacturing industries, Ministers' domestic visits 178w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food, Civil service manpower 247w
Opencast mining, Production 187w
Pesticides, Hazardous materials 281w

Hargreaves, Mr Andrew
Questions
Arts festivals, Birmingham 48w

Hargreaves, Mr Ken
Questions
Cot deaths, Health education 378w
Nature conservation, International trade 432w
Victim support schemes, Lancashire 244w

Harland & Wolff
977

Harman, Ms Harriet
Questions
Estate Action, Northfield House Peckham 68w
Guy's & Lewisham NHS Trust, Finance 203w
Guy's & Lewisham NHS Trust, Hospital admissions 203w
Guy's & Lewisham NHS Trust, Hospital beds 203w
Guy's & Lewisham NHS Trust, Hospital staff 202w
Guy's & Lewisham NHS Trust, Hospital waiting lists 202-3w
Guy's & Lewisham NHS Trust, Patients 203w
Guy's & Lewisham NHS Trust, Surgery 203-4w
Hospital waiting lists 128-9
Maternity hospitals, Hospital closures 445-6w

Harmonisation of legislation
Industrial diseases 377w

Harmonisation of standards
Construction materials 364-5w
Water pollution 431-2w

Harris, Mr David
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 285, 332-4
Common fisheries policy (11:12:91) 935-8, 948
Questions
HM Coastguard 105-6w
Livestock, Waste disposal 208w
Lobsters, Canada 28w

Haselhurst, Mr Alan
Questions
Adult education 725

Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Debates etc.
Aggravated Taking Bill, 2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 628-36
Deportation, Judgments (02:12:91) 30-1, 35
Prison Security Bill, 2R (03:12:91) 170, 172-7, 218
Questions
Hospital waiting lists 140

Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Questions
House of Commons staff, Payroll deduction scheme 31w

Haynes, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 461
Social security orders (11:12:91) 891, 903
Territorial Army (12:12:91) 1118
Questions
Arts festivals, East Midlands 48w
Coal mining 594
Community charge, Income support 172w

Hayward, Mr Robert
Questions
Railway accidents, Severn tunnel 612

Hazardous materials
487w
Pesticides 281w

Hazardous wastes
Consolidated Fund debates (12:12:91) 1145-59
Industrial wastes 313w
Northern Ireland 984-5

Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Questions
Educational assessment, Primary education 417w
Educational finance, EC countries 447w
Eggs, Import controls 590w
Patient's Charter 130-1

Health & Safety Executive
232w, 340-1w, 465-7w, 531-2w
Civil service dispersal 575w
Interviews 342w
Offices 575w

Health authorities
112-3w

Health education
AIDS 441w
Cot deaths 378w
Smoking 154w

Health hazards
X rays 484w

Health insurance
National insurance contributions 250-1w
Tax allowances 251w

Health physics
AWE Aldermaston 269w
Nuclear power 492w
Royal ordnance factories 269w

Health Select Committee
(10:12:91) 751-823

Health services
Wales 249w, 283-4w

Hearing aids
Design 443w

Hearing therapists
Manpower 521w, 572-3w
Northern Ireland 521w, 572-3w

Hearnville School
417w

Heart diseases
Scotland 455w
Surgery 64w

Heathcoat-Amory, Mr David, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Energy
Debates etc.
Coal mining (10:12:91) 801, 818-21

Heathcoat-Amory, Mr David—continued
Questions
British Civil Uranium Procurement Directorate 381w
Central heating 334-5w
Coal mining 333w
Coal mining, Scottish Trades Union Congress 333w
Coal mining, Subsidence 44w
Coal Task Force 75w
Combined heat & power 598-9, 602
Electric cables, Teesside 334w
Electricity, Commodity markets 382w
Electricity distribution, Cleveland 592
Electricity generation 75w
Electricity generation, Imports 44w
Electricity supply industry, Privatisation 592
Electricity supply industry, Theft 540w
Electricity tariffs 382w
Energy conservation 42w
Energy conservation, Domestic appliances 186w
Euratom, Nuclear safeguards 336w
Euratom, Recruitment 336w
Findhorn Foundation, Energy conservation 333-4w
Home energy efficiency scheme, Government grants 42-3w, 258w
Home energy efficiency scheme, Publicity 258w
International Atomic Energy Agency, Nuclear power 337w
"International Politics of Nuclear Waste" 337w
Monktonhall colliery, Manpower 337w
Monktonhall colliery, Ministers 337w
National Grid Company, Nationalisation 591-2
Nuclear accidents, Radioactive wastes 338w
Nuclear Electric, Nuclear safety 540-1w
Nuclear Electric, Radioactive wastes 541w
Nuclear power, EC action 336w
Nuclear power stations, Construction 381w
Nuclear power stations, Decommissioning 541w
Nuclear power stations, Nuclear safeguards 187w
Nuclear safeguards 141w
Opencast mining 600-1
Opencast mining, Production 187w
Sizewell A 338w
Sizewell A, Floods 337-8w
Sizewell A, Nuclear safety 338w
Sizewell B, construction 596-7
Ten years cold 76w
THORP, Radiation hazards 382w
Uranium, Imports 381w

Hedges & ditches
Environment protection 79w

Helicopters
Defence review 84w
Police 121-2w

Henderson, Mr Doug
Debates etc.
Aggravated Taking Bill, 2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 622

Hepatitis
Prisoners 287w

Hercules aircraft
Defence procurement 180w

Herons
450-1w

Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael, Secretary of State for the Environment
Questions
Council tax 250
Council tax, Property values 250
Dept of the Environment, Council of Ministers 67-8w
Dept of the Environment, Disabled workers 182w
Dept of the Environment, European Communities 173-4w

Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael—continued
Dept of the Environment, House of Commons broadcasting 177w
EC Environment Commissioner, Town & country planning 366w
Greenhouse effect, Press advertising 174w
Heveningham Hall 176w, 367w
Housing, Non-metropolitan districts 170w
Housing improvement, North Tyneside 238w
Local government reform 244-5
Ministers' domestic visits, North Tyneside 238w
Radiation hazards, Sellafield 364w

Heveningham Hall
176w, 367w

Hewell Grange Young Offender Institution
Prisoners' transfers 217w

Hicks, Mrs Maureen
Questions
Business statements 406
Educational assessment, Wolverhampton 719
Foreign investment in UK 987-8
Inner city school compacts, Finance 342w

Hicks, Mr Robert
Questions
Concessionary television licences 214w

Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 870-1
Questions
Capital rules, Interest rates 243w

High technology
EC external trade 594w

Higher civil servants
Civil service agencies 568-9w
Opposition 190w, 192-3w
Shadow Cabinet 192w
Welsh Office 568-9w
Women 28w

Higher education
Age participation rates 299w, 447-8w
EC countries 447-8w
Mandatory student grants 91w
Scotland 299w
Tuition fees 17w

"Higher Education White Paper"
414w

Highland Fabricators
599

Highlands & Islands Airports
400w
Monopolies & Mergers Commission 375w

Hill, Mr James
Questions
Railway accidents, Severn tunnel 610-1

Hillingdon
Grant maintained schools 724

Hinchliffe, Mr David
Debates etc.
Prison Security Bill, 2R (03:12:91) 200-2
Residential care (10:12:91) 762-7, 782, 784
Questions
Foundation for Sport & the Arts 414w
Hospital closures, Property transfer 378-80w
NHS finance 127-8
Roads, Outdoor advertising 310w
Training & enterprise councils, Employment action 240w
Training & enterprise councils, Special training needs 240w
Training & enterprise councils, Wakefield 240-1w

Hind, Mr Kenneth
Debates etc.
Pension funds (12:12:91) 1069-75, 1083
Protection of Pension Funds & Investments Bill, 1R (12:12:91) 1004

Hind, Mr Kenneth—continued
Regional government (06:12:91) 517, 525, 532, 581
Questions
Business statements 407
Civil service, Equal opportunities 435w
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 20-1w
HMS Revenge 349w
Prosecutions 273w
Yugoslavia, Overseas aid 277w

Hip replacements
65w

Historic Buildings & Monuments Commission for England
181-2w

Historic Buildings Trust
183w

HIV infection
Blood transfusions (12:12:91) 1014-6
Curriculum 416w
Prisoners 214w
Social security benefits 129w

HM Coastguard
105-6w

HM Inspectorate of Pollution
238w, 493w

HM Inspectorate of Prisons
395w

HM Inspectorate of Probation
579w

HM Inspectorate of Schools
France 240w
Inquiries 566w
Manpower 210w, 405w
Public appointments 538w
Wales 405-6w, 438w, 538w

HMS Raleigh
Armed forces training 473w

HMS Revenge
349w

Hoey, Ms Kate
Questions
County Hall 171w
Sports, Finance 721

Hogg, Mr Douglas, Minister of State, Foreign & Commonwealth Office
Debates etc.
Croatia (12:12:91) 1165-7
Western Sahara (12:12:91) 1173-5
Questions
Arms control, Non-governmental organisations 32-3w
Arms control negotiations 497w
Baltic states, Foreign policy 420w
Bombings, Lockerbie 321-2w, 389w
International Atomic Energy Agency, Iraq 497w
Japan, Plutonium 320w
Lebanon, Israel 496w
Romania, Adoption 320-1w
Ukraine, Foreign policy 320w
Ukraine, Recognition of states 320w
United Nations, Arms trade 498w
USA, Nuclear weapons tests 322w
USSR, CFE Treaty 496-7w
USSR, Nuclear weapons policy 496w
Western Sahara, Referenda 319w
Yugoslavia, Mercenaries 33w
Yugoslavia, Recognition of states 593-4w

Hogg, Mr Norman
Questions
Free school meals 295w
Free school meals, Family credit 295w
Local government reform, Scotland 119-20w
School meals, Subsidies 295w
School population 295w
School population, Northern Ireland 324w
School population, Scotland 343-4w

Hogg, Mr Norman—continued
Strathclyde Buses, Privatisation 232w

Holiday accommodation
Community charge 429w

Holloway Prison
Prison visitors 577w

Holy Loch
Radiation 501w

Home energy efficiency scheme
Government grants 42-3w, 258w
Publicity 258w

Home helps
Attendance allowance 156w

Home Office
(02:12:91) 30-5
Civil service dispersal 393w
Disabled workers 138w
European Communities 2w

Home Robertson, Mr John
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 741
Coal mining (10:12:91) 810
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 289, 295, 306
Public expenditure, Scotland (04:12:91) 269
Questions
A1, Road construction 343w
Challenger tanks, Navigational aids 54-5w
Foundation for Sport & the Arts, Scotland 568w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Navigational aids 56-7w
Royal Naval Reserve 55w
Tanks, Navigational aids 55-6w
Warships, Decommissioning 473w

Home Rule (Scotland) Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (04:12:91) 280

Home Service Force
(10:12:91) 733-48

"Home to School Transport"
17w, 417w

Homelessness
318w, 425w, (12:12:91) 1011-3, 1043
Christmas 173w
Consolidated Fund debates (12:12:91) 1090-110
Council housing 310-2w
Coventry 80w
Dumbarton 854
Leicester 365w
Liverpool 243-4
Local authorities 362w
Scotland 140-1, 846-7, 854
Temporary accommodation 441w
Wales 19w, 441w

Homes Over the Shop
79w

Homicide
Law reform 433w
Prison sentences 433w

Hong Kong
Court of Appeal 154-5w

Hood, Mr Jimmy
Debates etc.
Coal mining (10:12:91) 805
Questions
Homelessness, Scotland 846
Oil industry, Economic League 593-4

Hordern, Sir Peter
Debates etc.
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 445-9

Hormone treatments
Wales 4-5

Horses
VAT 162-3w, 191w

Hospital admissions
Guy's & Lewisham NHS Trust 203w

Hospital ancillary staff
Contracts for services 111-2w

Hospital beds
Guy's & Lewisham NHS Trust 203w
Scotland 255-6w

Hospital closures
Craigtoun Hospital St Andrews 119w
Maternity hospitals 445-6w
Property transfer 378-80w
Ruchill Hospital 841
Westwood Hospital 63w

Hospital consultants
Pay 136-7w
Wales 136-7w

Hospital patients
Wales 198w

Hospital staff
Guy's & Lewisham NHS Trust 202w

Hospital waiting lists
128-9, 140, 246w, 481-2w
Guy's & Lewisham NHS Trust 202-3w
Leicestershire 112w
Merseyside 134
Mid Glamorgan 537-8w
North East Thames Regional Health Authority 444w
Patient's Charter 110w
Scotland 841-2
Wales 21w, 194w, 403-4w
West Midlands 128

Hospitals
Construction 157w
Contracts for services 134-6
Fees & charges 445w
Greater London 157w
NHS finance 118w
Parking 482w

House of Commons
30-2w
Telephone operator services 258w
Telephones 220w

House of Commons accommodation
New parliamentary building 460-1w
Theft 258w

House of Commons broadcasting
Dept of Employment 104w
Dept of Energy 75w
Dept of Health 116w
Dept of the Environment 177w
Dept of Trade & Industry 207w
Dept of Transport 110w
Leader of the Opposition 119w
Prime Minister 151w
Scottish Office 167w
Treasury 83w
Welsh Office 101w

House of Commons catering
Members' facilities 512w

House of Commons Commission
118-9w

House of Commons debates
Orders & regulations 168-9w
Speaker's rulings & statements (05:12:91) 414-5

House of Commons Library
Recruitment 403w

House of Commons procedure
Speaker's rulings & statements (09:12:91) 620

House of Commons questions
Speaker's rulings & statements (03:12:91) 164

House of Commons (Services) Select Committee
European Parliament members (06:12:91) 582

House of Commons (Services) Select Committee—continued
Former Members (06:12:91) 582

House of Commons staff
Payroll deduction scheme 31w

House of Commons Standing Committees
Speaker's rulings & statements (04:12:91) 253

House of Commons stationery
Speaker's rulings & statements (02:12:91) 38, (10:12:91) 749-50

House of Fraser
605
Takeovers 8w, 177w

House of Lords
30-2w

House purchase
Hanover Square Bradford 236w
M20 109w

House renovation grants
Handicapped (04:12:91) 372-8
Northern Ireland (04:12:91) 372-8
Scotland 843-4
Wales 6

Household Division
Defence review 349w
Tourism 473w

Housing
Armed forces discharges 227w
Exservicemen 544w
Local government expenditure 552w
Non-metropolitan districts 170w
Security 328w
Wales 9-10

Housing action trusts
(04:12:91) 370

Housing associations
Housing construction 362-3w
Rural areas 185w

Housing benefits
Family credit 470w
Landlord & tenant 351w
Young people 354w

Housing construction
Clwyd 5-6
Council housing 245
Housing associations 362-3w
Public sector housing 257, 424-5w
Wales 5-6

Housing Corporation
423-4w

Housing estates
Crime prevention 5w
Design 5w
Outer estates 170w
Property transfer 314-5w
Warrington 314-5w

Housing (Fitness Standard) (Amendment) Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (04:12:91) 282

Housing for Wales
19w
Finance 540w

Housing improvement
Broadwater Farm Estate 169w
North Tyneside 238w
Stockton on Tees 169w

Housing insulation
334-5w

Housing investment programmes
Durham 488w

Housing occupancy
425w

Housing standards
Public sector housing 312-3w

***Howard, Rt Hon Michael**, Secretary of State for Employment*
Questions
EC Labour & Social Affairs Council 225-6w
Skillcentres, Privatisation 134w

***Howarth, Mr Alan**, Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science*
Debates etc.
Nuclear physics, Daresbury (11:12:91) 971-4
Questions
Art education, Overseas students 449w
Art education, Student numbers 449w
Arts, Research finance 726-7
Cost per student 93w
Curriculum, USA 16w
Further education teachers, Pay 90-1w
Higher education, Age participation rates 299w, 447-8w
Higher education, Mandatory student grants 91w
Higher education, Tuition fees 17w
"Higher Education White Paper" 414w
Mandatory student grants, Leeds 723
Medical Research Council, Annual reports 418w
Open University 209w
Open University, Eastern Europe 209w
Open University, Environmental education 209w
Polytechnics 413w
Polytechnics, Staff-student ratios 91w
Polytechnics' & Colleges' Funding Council, Expenditure 239-40w
Postgraduate education 720-1
Postgraduate students, Discretionary student grants 720
Research councils, Income 298w
Science & technology research, Sponsorship 295w
Semiconductor devices, Research 208w
Student grants 415w
Student loans 15w, 91-2w, 722-4
Universities, Cost per student 89-90w
Zidovudine, Clinical trials 449w

Howarth, Mr George
Questions
Council house sales, Debts 79w
Council house waiting lists 425w
Council housing, Construction costs 362-3w
Homelessness 425w
Homelessness, Council housing 310-2w
Homelessness, Local authorities 362w
Housing, Local government expenditure 552w
Public sector housing, Capital investment 423-4w
Public sector housing, Empty property 311-2w
Public sector housing, Housing construction 424-5w
Public sector housing, Housing standards 312-3w
Temporary accommodation 425-6w

Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Questions
House of Commons Commission 118-9w

Howell, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 865

Howell, Rt Hon Denis
Debates etc.
Calling of Members, Points of order (11:12:91) 879
Questions
Sports, Finance 722

Howell, Mr Ralph
Questions
Community charge, Administrative costs 429-30w
Council tax 235-6w

***Howell, Mr Ralph**—continued*
Training, Expenditure 409-10w

Howells, Mr Geraint
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 309-14, 332, 343, 366
Questions
Defence industries, Wales 12
Welsh language, Adult education 19-20w

Howells, Dr Kim
Questions
East Glamorgan General Hospital 20w
Nuclear power 595

Howle, Mr Doug
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 875
Questions
New parliamentary building, House of Commons accommodation 460-1w
NHS trusts, Official hospitality 445w

Hughes, Mr John
Debates etc.
Thompson, Lee (06:12:91) 583-8

Hughes, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
NHS trusts, Scotland (03:12:91) 150
Public expenditure, Scotland (04:12:91) 269
Socialism (13:12:91) 1251, 1253, 1254-5
Questions
Electoral register 218w
Electoral register, British citizenship 231w

Hughes, Mr Robert G
Debates etc.
House of Commons stationery, Points of order (02:12:91) 38, (10:12:91) 749
Questions
Le Pen, Jean-Marie 384-5
Local government services 251
London Arts Board 17

Hughes, Mr Roy
Questions
"Blind & Partially Sighted Adults in Britain" 584w
Railway accidents, Severn tunnel 610
Road construction, Wales 198w
Unemployment, Wales 8

Hughes, Mr Simon
Debates etc.
Ministerial & Other Salaries Order 1991 (10:12:91) 825-7
Questions
Bentley, Derek, Prerogative of mercy 387-8
Birds, Import of live animals 182w
Botswana, Nature conservation 551w
Bovine somatotropin, EC action 207w
Chemicals, Exports 461w
Chlorofluorocarbons, Chlorine 363-4w
Chlorofluorocarbons, Overseas trade 279-80w
Chlorofluorocarbons, Production 427-8w
Citizen's Charter, Environment protection 167w
Coastal areas, Special protection areas 58w
Crops, Air pollution 548w
Disability Appeal Tribunals 128-9w
EC Environment Commissioner, Town & country planning 366w
Energy conservation 598
Environment protection, Scotland 257w
Europe, Civil servants' visits abroad 95w
Handicap benefits, Publicity 127-8w
Hydrofluorocarbons 462w
Import of live animals, EC action 490-1w
Nuclear Electric, Nuclear safety 540-1w
Oxleas Wood 249
Ozone layer 428w
Ozone layer, Air pollution control 461w
Ozone layer, Civil service manpower 428w
Ozone layer, Research 364w, 428w
Squirrels, Surveys 167w, 182w
Theft, Birds 138w
Waste disposal, EC law 491-2w
Waste disposal, Licensing 72w

***Hughes, Mr Simon**—continued*
Waste disposal, Prosecutions 491w
Youth services 726

Human rights
East Timor 594w
India 261-2w, 390w
Indonesia 605-6
Iraq (12:12:91) 1212-20

Humberside
Cryptosporidia 487w
Dock labour scheme 555w

Hume, Mr John
Questions
Economic & monetary union 395

***Hunt, Rt Hon David**, Secretary of State for Wales*
Questions
Agricultural Development & Advisory Service 539-40w
Agricultural subsidies, Sheep 7
Associated British Ports, Water abstraction 136w
Bus services, Railway stations 11
Bus services, Wales 11-2
Cardiff Bay barrage, Advertising 539w
Cardiff Bay barrage, Disclosure of information 135w
Cardiff Bay barrage, Ground water 570w
Cardiff Bay barrage, Investment 135w
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, Government grants 539w, 570-1w
Citizen's Charter, Rights of way 283w
District health authorities, Expenditure 282-4w
Dyfed Family Health Services Authority 438-9w
EC regional policy 18w
EC regional policy, Wales 18w
Employment action, Wales 137w
Farm incomes, Wales 7-8
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 20-1w, 102-3w
House renovation grants, Wales 6
Housing construction, Wales 5-6
Housing for Wales, Finance 540w
Industrial production, Wales 570w
Land reclamation, Merthyr Tydfil 438w
Local government reform, Wales 19w
Mortgage defaulters, Wales 6-8
Non-departmental public bodies, Contracts for services 284w
Non-departmental public bodies, Wales 404w
Public appointments, Party membership 102w
Redundancy, Point of Ayr 8-9
Regional aid, Rural areas 285w
Rented housing, Wales 6
River Taff, Salmon 134w
Set-aside schemes, Fraud 571-2w
Set-aside schemes, Sports facilities 571-2w
Set-aside schemes, Wales 404w, 571w
Standard spending assessments, Wales 285w
Training, Dwyfor 100w
Training & enterprise councils, Government grants 442w
Unemployment, Wales 8, 20w
Valleys initiative 248w
Valleys initiative, Expenditure 194w
Welsh Assembly 19w
Welsh Development Agency, Factories 248w
Welsh Office, Annual reports 570w
Welsh Office, Civil servants' background 569w
Welsh Office, Civil service manpower 569w
Welsh Office, Day care of children 569-70w
Welsh Office, Disabled workers 194w
Welsh Office, Higher civil servants 568-9w
Welsh Office, House of Commons broadcasting 101w
Welsh Office, Pay incentives 568w
Welsh Office, Performance indicators 569w
Welsh Office, Public appointments 532-7w
Welsh Office, Publicity 569w

Hunt, Rt Hon David—continued
Welsh Office, Working hours 570w
World Trade Centre Cardiff, Urban development grants 285w
Youth training, South Glamorgan 539w
Youth training, Wales 283w

Hunter, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Timeshare Bill, 1R (04:12:91) 279
Questions
Aid financed trade 384-6w
Full Sutton Prison, Prison escapes 294w

Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas, Secretary of State for Foreign & Commonwealth Affairs
Questions
EC Foreign Affairs Council 262-3w
Intergovernmental conference, EC integration 263w

Hydrofluorocarbons
462w

Hypothermia
Elderly 200w

Ibbs report
118-9w

ICI
428w

ICSTIS
see Independent Committee for Supervision of Telephone Services

Illsley, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Coal mining (10:12:91) 806, 812, 821-2
Questions
Ecolabelling 259
Social security benefits, Compensation Recovery Unit 468-9w

Immigration
Departmental correspondence 243w

Immigration appeals
Administrative delays 273-4w

Immingham
Dock workers 556w

Impact & Disasters Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (04:12:91) 282

Import controls
Eggs 590w

Import duties
Footwear 374w

Import of live animals
Birds 182w
EC action 490-1w

Imports
Uranium 381w

"In Pursuit of a Nuclear Test Ban Treaty"
594w

Incinerators
Maydown 451w
South East region 430w
Tyne & Wear 173w

Income support
Community charge 172w
Pensioners 126w, 221-2w
Personal income 353w
Social security benefits uprating 376-7w
Women 525w
Young people 53-4w, 352-3w

Income tax
Low incomes 160-1w
Personal tax allowances 252-6w
Tax allowances 302w
Tax rates & bands 161w, 254w
Tax yields 301-3w, 369w

Income tax—continued
Taxpayers 371w

Incontinence aids
NHS charges 202w

Independent Committee for Supervision of Telephone Services
178w

India
Confiscation orders 244-5w
Human rights 261-2w, 390w

Indictable offences
Confiscation orders 502w

Indirect taxation
EC action (09:12:91) 707

Indonesia
Aid financed trade 385-6w
Human rights 605-6

Industrial accidents
Boots 341w
Cranes 340w
Scilly Isles 340w
Youth training 339w

Industrial diseases
Harmonisation of legislation 377w

Industrial disputes
Office of Telecommunications 280-1w

Industrial production
Scotland 453w
Wales 570w

Industrial training
Northern Ireland 323w
Women 323w

Industrial training board levies
Building industry (02:12:91) 83-96

Industrial Training Levy (Construction Board) Order 1992
Debates etc.
(02:12:91) 83-96

Industrial wastes
Hazardous wastes 313w

Information services
Royal Ulster Constabulary 452-3w

Ingram, Mr Adam
Questions
New towns development corporations, Scotland 454w

Inheritance tax
162w
Tax thresholds 160w
Tax yields 160w, 250w

Inland waterways
Transport & Works Bill 1991/92 145w

Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council
311w

Inland Waterways Association
145w

Inner cities initiative
Bradford 70-1w, 375w
Hackney 373-4w

Inner city school compacts
Finance 342w

Innovation
Telecommunications industry 97-8w, 179w

Institute of Terrestrial Ecology
182w

Insurance companies
259-60w

Insurance Services Group
11-2w
Privatisation 205w, 260-1w

Integrated schools
Northern Ireland 978-9

Intelligence tests
Research finance 90w

Interest payments
38w, 303w

Interest rates
Capital rules 243w
Local government revenue 316-7w

Intergovernmental conference
227w, 389-90w
EC integration 263w
Economic & monetary union 252w

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
490w

Interim Advisory Committee on School Teachers' Pay
416w, (09:12:91) 702-6

International aid from international bodies
Somalia 391w

International Atomic Energy Agency
141w, 276w, 361w
Iraq 497w
Nuclear power 337w

International Bank for Reconstruction & Development
see World Bank

International law
Criminal law (12:12:91) 1033-7

International Monetary Fund
147-8w, 151w

"International Politics of Nuclear Waste"
337w

International Red Cross
97w

International trade
Nature conservation 432w

International Union of Marine Insurers
361w

Intervention Board
591-2w

Interviews
Health & Safety Executive 342w

Invalid care allowances
Computers 376w
Social security claims 352w
Social security recipients 352w

Invalidity benefits
470w
Clothing 566w

Investment in financial assets
Investment Management Regulatory Organisation 498-9w

Investment income
National insurance contributions 80-2w, 160w

Investment Management Regulatory Organisation
Investment in financial assets 498-9w

Iraq
Consolidated Fund debates (12:12:91) 1212-20
Exports 499w
Human rights (12:12:91) 1212-20
International Atomic Energy Agency 497w
Nuclear weapons 268w
Overseas aid 97w
Petrochemicals 480-1w
Scientists 321w
Work permits 340w

Iraq-Kuwait conflict
Armed forces casualties 270w, (06:12:91) 583-90

Iraq-Kuwait conflict—continued
Navigational aids 56-7w

Irish Sea
Petroleum exploration 600

Iron & steel
Yugoslavia (09:12:91) 706

Iron & steel industry
Dalzell 851
Lanarkshire 851
Scotland 850-1

Irvine, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Aggravated Taking Bill, 2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 653-4
Pension funds (12:12:91) 1076
Questions
A45, Road traffic 358-60w
Air force 391-2w
Business statements 999
EC Social Charter 464-6w
Sizewell B, Construction 596-7

Isle of Wight
Whitbread 498w

Israel
Lebanon 496w

Jack, Mr Michael, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Social Security
Questions
Child benefit 469w
Child benefit, Social security benefits uprating 152w
Child Support Agency, Offices 525w
Earnings rules, Fire services 471w
Dept of Social Security, European Communities 50w
Family credit 469-70w
Family credit, Owner occupied housing 352w
Family credit, Take-up 565w
Income support, Young people 53-4w, 352w
Invalidity benefits 470w
Means tested benefits, Civil servants 349-50w
Means tested benefits, Low incomes 523-4w
Means tested benefits, Social security recipients 350w
National insurance contributions 129-30w
National insurance contributions, Earnings limits 242w
National insurance contributions, Fringe benefits 376w
National Insurance Fund 220-1w
Official visits, European Communities 223-4w
Operation Scotcheck 223-4w
Part-time employment, Publicity 472w
Pay 152-3w
Retirement pensions, EC countries 523w
Severe hardship provision, Costs 354w
Social security, EC law 222w
Social security abuse, Civil service manpower 224w
Social security benefits, Administrative costs 127w
Social security benefits, Compensation Recovery Unit 468-9w
Social security benefits, Young people 353-4w
Social Security Contributions Agency, Caerphilly 469w
Social security recipients, Pregnant women 54w
State earnings related pension scheme 153w
Unemployment benefits, Early retirement 566w
Unemployment benefits, Social security benefits rules 241w

Jackson, Mr Robert, Under-Secretary of State for Employment
Questions
Apprentices, Building industry 24w
Citric acid, Respiratory diseases 465-7w

Jackson, Mr Robert—continued
Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazard Regulations 531-2w
Duration of unemployment, Coal mining 340w
EC Social Charter 464-6w
Employment level, Northumberland 24w
Footwear industry, National vocational qualification 410w
Health & Safety Executive, Interviews 342w
Industrial Accidents, Boots 341w
Industrial accidents, Cranes 340w
Industrial accidents, Youth training 339w
Inner city school compacts, Finance 342w
Jobclubs, North West region 339w
Lorry drivers, Medical examinations 26w
Low pay 467-8w
Low pay, Greater London 341w
Offshore safety 531w
Offshore Safety Division, Training 467w
Offshore structures, Safety equipment 467w
Pay 341-2w, 409w
Public holidays, EC countries 339-40w
Public holidays, Netherlands 339w
Redundancy, Coventry 26-7w
Special training needs, Training & enterprise councils 340w
Tourism, Government grants 408-9w
Tourist boards, Government grants 338w
Training, Expenditure 409-10w
Training & enterprise councils 25-6w
Training & enterprise councils, Civil servants' secondment 25-6w
Training & enterprise councils, Expenditure 25w
Training & enterprise councils, Finance 26w
Unemployment benefits, Social security benefits disqualification 25w
Youth training, North West region 338w

Janman, Mr Tim
Questions
Budget 395-6
Community charge benefits 248
Shops, Theft 389

Janner, Greville
(03:12:91) 223-42

Janner, Mr Greville
Debates etc.
Contempt of court (03:12:91) 225-6, 236
Questions
Child abuse, Leicestershire 24-5
UN resolutions, Zionism 274-5w, 319-20w
War crimes 603-4

Japan
Plutonium 320w

Jessel, Mr Toby
Questions
Legal profession, Recruitment 602-3

Job satisfaction
Civil service 567w

Jobclubs
North West region 339w

John Sutcliffe Consolidated Stevedores
555-6w

Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 739-40
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 320-3

Johnston, Sir Russell
Questions
Homelessness, Scotland 854
Yugoslavia, Recognition of states 593-4w

Jones, Mr Barry
Questions
Employment action, Wales 137w
Hospital patients, Wales 198w
Industrial production, Wales 570w
Llay School 198w

Jones, Mr Barry—continued
Mortgage defaulters, Wales 6-8
National Association for the Care & Resettlement of Offender, Training 442w
NHS trusts, Wales 408w
Set-aside schemes 545-6w
Set-aside schemes, Wales 404w
Training & enterprise councils, Government grants 442w
Training & enterprise councils, Wales 2-3
Welsh Office, Public appointments 532-7w

Jones, Mr Gwilym
Questions
Ambulance services, Wales 3-4
Cardiff Bay barrage, Investment 135w
Community councils, Wales 21w
Family doctors, Pay 100-1w
Hospital consultants, Pay 136-7w
Hospital waiting lists, Wales 194w, 403-4w
Housing for Wales, Finance 540w
NHS, Public expenditure 99-100w
Regional aid, Rural areas 285w
River Taff, Salmon 134w
Standard spending assessments, Wales 285w
Tranquillisers, Prescriptions 135w
Unemployment, Wales 8

Jones, Mr Ieuan Wyn
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 329-32
Questions
Agricultural subsidies, Sheep 7
Consumer credit, Sales methods 9w
House of Commons Library, Recruitment 403w
Mobility allowance, Blind 52w
NHS administration 115w

Jones, Mr Martyn
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 335-6
Questions
Dyfed Family Health Services Authority 438-9w
Homelessness, Christmas 173w
Housing construction, Wales 5-6
NHS trusts, Wales 438w
Pentachlorophenol 589w
Retirement pensions 470w, 472w
River pollution 173w

Jones, Mr Robert B
Questions
Building regulations 365-6w
United Kingdom Passport Agency 381-2

Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 286
Questions
Council house sales, Cumbria 77-8w
Council housing, Cumbria 486w
EC Agriculture Council 593w
Listed buildings, Construction materials 181-2w
Local government revenue, Cumbria 78w

Judges
Scotland (02:12:91) 96
Training 73w

Judgments
Community charge 285w
Deportation (02:12:91) 30-5
Spycatcher 249-50w

Judicial Studies Board
73w

Judiciary
Children Act 1989 73w

Justice Charter
Legal aid 168w

Kashmir
261-2w, 390w
Public petitions (10:12:91) 830, (11:12:91) 968

Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Questions
Cyprus, British embassies 262w
Cyprus, Missing persons 262w
Diplomatic bags, Wandsworth Prison 397-8
House of Commons catering, Members' facilities 512w

Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Debates etc.
Aggravated Taking Bill, 2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 632, 637-8, 681
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 286, 292, 334, 341
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 873
Regional government (06:12:91) 571
Questions
Local government social services 138

Kennedy, Mr Charles
Questions
Air ambulance services 131-2
Offshore suppliers, EC internal trade 599
Oil pollution control, Minch 145-6w

Kent
Railway travel (12:12:91) 1124-44
Regional planning & development 990

Keswick
Theatres 48w

***Key, Mr Robert**, Under-Secretary of State for the Environment*
Debates etc.
Community charge, Non-payment (10:12:91) 835-9
Regional government (06:12:91) 518, 541, 547, 560-73
Questions
City action teams, Bradford 70-1w
Community charge 254
Community charge, Administrative costs 429-30w
Community charge, Attachment of earnings 172w
Community charge, Bailiffs 173w, 316w
Community charge, Civil proceedings 172w
Community charge, East Anglia 69-70w
Community charge, Holiday accommodation 429w
Community charge, Income support 172w
Community charge, Liability 172w
Community charge, Local government revenue 185-6w
Community charge, Non-payment 172-3w
Community charge, Tax collection 317w
Community charge, Waveney 70w
Community charge benefits 70w, 248-9
Community charge benefits, Calderdale 253-4
Community charge capping 430w
Contract cleaning, Schools 174w
Council tax 235-6w, 254
Council tax, Armed forces 69w
Coventry City Council, Government grants to local authorities 427w
Flood damage, Government grants to local authorities 176w
Government grants to local authorities, Wandsworth 70w
Local government borrowing 316w
Local government expenditure, Northamptonshire 491w
Local government revenue, Capital investment 315-7w
Local government revenue, Greater Manchester 184w
Local government revenue, Interest rates 316-7w
Local government revenue, Northamptonshire 429w, 489-90w
Local government services 251
Local government services, Contracts for services 250-1, 260
Local government services, Privatisation 171w
London Docklands Development Corporation, Employment opportunities 76w

***Key, Mr Robert**—continued*
London Docklands Development Corporation, Land acquisition 426-7w
London Residuary Body, Local government revenue 174w
Non-domestic rates, Overcharging 236w
Parish councils 184w
Rate rebates, Sports facilities 492w
Revenue support grant 315w
Revenue support grant, Road works 316-7w
Revenue support grant, Sunderland 234w
Revenue support grant, Yorkshire & Humberside 184w
Standard spending assessments 317w
Standard spending assessments, Tourists 69w
Unemployment, London docklands 486-7w
Uniform business rate 175w
Uniform business rate, Private rented housing 492w

Kidney machines
63w

Kidney patients
118w

Kidneys
Transplant surgery 65w, 199w

Kilfedder, Mr James
Debates etc.
Economic situation, Northern Ireland (12:12:91) 1010-1
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 870
Questions
Administration of justice, Northern Ireland 977
Environmentally sensitive areas, Crawfordsburn 519w
Family credit, One parent families 573w
Handicap benefits, Northern Ireland 573-4w
Rathgael Training School 519w
Social security abuse, Northern Ireland 520w
Social security recipients, Northern Ireland 573w
Territorial Army, Northern Ireland 589w
Youth unemployment, North Down 520w

Kilfoyle, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Prison Security Bill, 2R (03:12:91) 208-11
Questions
Homelessness, Liverpool 243-4

King, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Mirror Group Newspapers, Points of order (09:12:91) 617
Pension funds (12:12:91) 1069, 1072, 1077-8
Questions
Car tax, Imports 478w
Cars, Burglar alarms 99w
Local government services, Contracts for services 260
Monopolies & Mergers Commission, Car industry 10w
NHS trusts 111w, 136
Privatisation 393

***King, Rt Hon Tom**, Secretary of State for Defence*
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves, Ministerial statements (10:12:91) 733-48

King's Cross Railways Bill 1988/89
Debates etc.
Order for consideration read (03:12:91) 127, (05:12:91) 379, (12:12:91) 975

King's Cross Station
357w

Kinlochleven
228-9w

Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 862-3
Questions
EC social policy 728-30, 987

***Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil**—continued*
Economic situation 392

***Kirkhope, Mr Timothy**, An Assistant Whip*
Debates etc.
Prison Security Bill, 2R (03:12:91) 214, 216

Kirkwood, Mr Archy
Debates etc.
NHS trusts, Scotland (03:12:91) 158
Social security orders (11:12:91) 900-5, 916-7, 920
Questions
Business statements 997
Citizen's Charter, Social security claims 53w
Dept of Social Security, Overtime 52-3w
Dept of Social Security local offices, Civil service manpower 52w
Economic situation, Borders region 456w
Family credit, Housing benefits 470w
Free school meals 470-1w
Free school meals, Take-up 416-7w
Home Office, Civil service dispersal 393w
Prisoners, HIV infection 214w

Knapman, Mr Roger
Questions
Family doctors, Budgeting 132
Interim Advisory Committee on School Teachers' Pay 416w
Public expenditure, Northern Ireland 324w

Knee replacements
65w

***Knight, Mr Greg**, Lord Commissioner to the Treasury*
Debates etc.
Aggravated Taking Bill, 2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 661

Know-how Fund
209w
Baltic states 387w

Knox, Mr David
Questions
Coal mining, Productivity 591
Government grants to voluntary organisations, Scotland 453-4w

Kumar, Dr Ashok
Debates etc.
Regional government (06:12:91) 522, 577-9
Questions
Community care, Northern region 64w
Crime prevention 213w

Kurdistan
(12:12:91) 1212-20
Overseas aid 147w, 151w

Labelling
Footwear 374-5w

Labour Party
(13:12:91) 1230-98

Lakin Consortium
134w

Lamond, Mr James
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 872
Questions
Adult education 725
GATT 143
Uniform business rate 255-6

***Lamont, Rt Hon Norman**, Chancellor of the Exchequer*
Debates etc.
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 423-32
Questions
Economic & monetary union, Intergovernmental conference 252w
National income 370w
Public sector borrowing requirement 38-9w
Retail price index 370w

Lamont, Rt Hon Norman*—*continued
Tax allowances, Travelling expenses 36-7w
UK contributions to EC budget 39w

Lanarkshire
Enterprise zones 44w
Iron & steel industry 851

Lancashire
Bypasses 359w
Victim support schemes 244w

Lancaster University
364w

Land
Conservation 454w

Land acquisition
Crown lands & estates 494w
Forestry Commission 857
London Docklands Development Corporation 426-7w

Land reclamation
London Docklands Development Corporation 427w
Merthyr Tydfil 438w

Landlord & tenant
Housing benefits 351w

***Lang, Rt Hon Ian**, Secretary of State for Scotland*
Debates etc.
NHS trusts, Ministerial statements (03:12:91) 145-62
Public expenditure, Ministerial statements (04:12:91) 261-76
Questions
Devolution, Scotland 847-50
Devolution, Scottish Assembly 847-8
Enterprise zones, Lanarkshire 44w
Environment protection, Scotland 257w
Lead pipes, Tweeddale 501w
Local government reform, Scotland 850
NHS trusts, Scotland 855-6
Scottish Agricultural College, Common agricultural policy 344w
Scottish Assembly 848
Scottish Constitutional Convention 848-9
Scottish Office, Disabled workers 345-6w
Scottish Office, House of Commons broadcasting 167w
Scottish Pensioner Power 257w
Sea transport, Transport subsidies 501-2w
Sunday trading, Scotland 844-5
Textile industry, EC grants & loans 346w

Languages education
Northern Ireland 325-6w

Latham, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Adult education (12:12:91) 1025-7
Contempt of court (03:12:91) 226-7
Established Church Bill, 1R (10:12:91) 749-50
Questions
Adult education, Educational finance 724
Business statements 993
Child abuse, Leicestershire 25
Construction materials, Harmonisation of standards 364-5w
Listed buildings, Burley 431w
Police stations, Oakham 138w
Property Services Agency, Privatisation 176-7w
Water pollution, Harmonisation of standards 431-2w

Latvia
387w

Law Commission
Law reform 8-9w

Law enforcement
Government departments 94w

Law reform
Community care 331-2w
Domicil 146w

Law reform*—*continued
Homicide 433w
Law Commission 8-9w
Negligence 420w

Law Society
602-3

Lawrence, Mr Ivan
Debates etc.
Aggravated Taking Bill, 2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 648-50, 684
Contempt of court (03:12:91) 234-5, 242
Deportation, Judgments (02:12:91) 32
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 874
National Lottery Bill, 1R (04:12:91) 279
Prison Security Bill, 2R (03:12:91) 177-81, 183, 219
Questions
Business statements 409
Cars, Burglar alarms 383

Lay visitors
Northern Ireland 323w
Police custody 323w

Le Pen, Jean-Marie
384-6

Lead pipes
Tweeddale 501w

Leadbitter, Mr Ted
Debates etc.
Aggravated Taking Bill, 2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 665-7, 668
Questions
Brixton Prison, Prison escapes 122w
Brixton Prison, Prison staff 2-3w

Leader of the Opposition
House of Commons broadcasting 119w

League of Arab States
857-8

Leave
Prison staff 502w

Lebanon
Israel 496w

Lee, Mr John
Questions
Neighbourhood watch schemes 386

Leeds
Mandatory student grants 723

Legal aid
602-3
Justice Charter 168w
Scotland 168w
Taxation 419w

Legal profession
Civil service recruitment 273w
Overseas aid 278-9w, 387w
Recruitment 602-3

Legal representation
Terrorism 285-6w

Legislation
EC social policy 575-6w
Social security reform 376w
Welsh language 12-3

Leicester
Homelessness 365w

Leicester Energy
598

Leicestershire
Child abuse 23-9
Hospital waiting lists 112w

Leicestershire Children's Homes Inquiry
23-4

***Leigh, Mr Edward** Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs*
Debates etc.
EC grants & loans (12:12:91) 1189-95
Questions
Advertising, EC action 12-3w

Leigh, Mr Edward*—*continued
Alcohol advertising, EC action 13w
Buoyancy aids, EC law 461w
Chemicals, Exports 461w
Chlorofluorocarbons, Overseas trade 279-80w
City action teams, Cumbria 205-6w
Consumer credit, Marketing 206w
Consumer credit, Sales methods 9w
Consumer credit, Unfair trading practices 499-500w
"Cumbrias Economy Strategic Needs & Opportunities in the 1990s", Costs 464w
Dept of Trade & Industry, Disabled workers 177w
Dept of Trade & Industry, House of Commons broadcasting 207w
Direct selling, EC action 13w
EC grants & loans 12w
EC Industry Council, Textile industry 464w
EC regional policy, EC grants & loans 178w
Footwear, Labelling 374-5w
Hallmarking, Metals 372w
Hydrofluorocarbons 462w
Inner cities initiative, Bradford 375w
Inner cities initiative, Hackney 373-4w
Metalworking, Air pollution control 9w
Ozone layer, Air pollution control 461w
Postal services, Privatisation 179w
Regional selective assistance, Corby 373w
RENAVAL, EC grants & loans 178w
Science & technology research, EC action 586w
Telephone services, Codes of practice 178w
Timesharing, Consumer protection 206-7w

Leighton, Mr Ron
Questions
London Docklands Development Corporation, Employment opportunities 76w
Unemployment, London docklands 486-7w

***Lennox-Boyd, Mr Mark**, Under-Secretary of State, Foreign & Commonwealth Office*
Debates etc.
Iraq, Human rights (12:12:91) 1216-9
Questions
Albania, Gold 95w
Arms trade, Pakistan 321w
British embassies, Civil service manpower 261w
Council of Ministers, Voting methods 95w
Diplomatic bags, Wandsworth Prison 397-9
East Timor, Human rights 594w
EC nationals, EC integration 389-90w
Europe, Civil servants' visits abroad 95w
Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Disabled workers 154w
Gibraltar, European Parliament members 389w
Hong Kong, Court of Appeal 154-5w
"In Pursuit of a Nuclear Test Ban Treaty" 594w
India, Human rights 261-2w, 390w
Iraq, Scientists 321w
Libyan Arab Republic, Lockerbie 95w
Nuclear disarmament 421w
Nuclear weapons tests 96w
Pearl Harbour, Anniversaries 321w
Plutonium, International conferences 421w
Turkey, Politics & government 421w
Turks & Caicos Islands 31w
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 31w
UN finances 319w
UN resolutions, Zionism 319-20w
United Nations 497w
Vietnamese refugees, Repatriation 390-1w
Wilton Park Executive Agency 227w
Yugoslavia, Armed conflict 155w

Lester, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Aggravated Taking Bill, 2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 700

Lestor, Miss Joan
Debates etc.
Tobacco advertising, Children (02:12:91) 97-101
Questions
Child abuse, Leicestershire 28-9
Mental health services, Young people 114-5w
Overseas aid 731
Taking & driving away 383-4

Level crossings
Newton Garths (12:12:91) 1007-10
Public footpaths 307-8w, 405w
Wales 405w

Lewis, Mr Terry
Debates etc.
Community charge, Non-payment (10:12:91) 831, 838
Questions
Council tax, Administrative costs 169w
Government grants to local authorities, Wandsworth 70w
House of Commons, Telephones 220w
Local government revenue, Greater Manchester 184w

Leyland Bus
(09:12:91) 615

Libyan Arab Republic
Extradition 389w
Lockerbie 95w

Liechtenstein
Dept of Trade inquiries 498w

Life insurance
AIDS 443w

Light dues
358w
EC countries 553w
Treaty of Rome 145w

Lighting
Motorways 306w

Lilley, Rt Hon Peter, Secretary of State for Trade & Industry
Debates etc.
Socialism (13:12:91) 1285, 1287-94
Questions
Balance of trade, Arab states 204w
British & Commonwealth Group, Dept of Trade inquiries 462w
Dept of Trade & Industry, Council of Ministers 98w
Dept of Trade inquiries, Switzerland 498w
European Communities, Ministers' visits abroad 280w
Export Credits Guarantee Department, Privatisation 11-2w
Footwear, Import duties 374w
Insurance Services Group, Privatisation 205w, 260-1w
Manufacturing industries, Ministers' domestic visits 178w
Maxwell companies, Company investigations 372-3w, 422w, 462-3w
Maxwell companies, Directors 463w
Maxwell companies, Pension funds 373w
Multifibre arrangement 374w
Pension funds, Fraud 260w

Lindsey Dock Services
555-6w

Line of route
460w

Listed buildings
Burley 431w
Construction materials 181-2w

Lithuania
387w

Liver diseases
Alcoholism 61-2w

Liverpool
Empty property 244
Homelessness 243-4

Livestock
Waste disposal 208w

Living Over the Shop
79w

Livingstone, Mr Ken
Questions
British National Party, Bexley 990

Livsey, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 312-3
Questions
Ambulance services, Wales 4
Rented housing, Wales 19w

Llay School
198w

Lloyd, Sir Ian
Questions
Business statements 405-6

Lloyd, Mr Peter, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office
Debates etc.
Gypsies, Hampshire (12:12:91) 1179-83
Salt, Tony, Police deaths on duty (12:12:91) 1226-8
Questions
Arrests, Football 215w
Asylum Bill 1991/92 216w, 583w
Au pairs 507-8w
Broadcasting, Ethnic minorities 122-3w
Burglary 215w
Complaints against police, Crimes of violence 292-3w
Concessionary television licences 214w
Criminal investigation, Genetics 434w
Entry clearances, Nigeria 123w
Gambling, EC action 394w
Gambling, EC internal trade 507w
Immigration, Departmental correspondence 243w
Lotteries 507w
Lotteries, EC internal trade 507w
Lotteries, Employment opportunities 509w
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 286w
Metropolitan Police, Complaints against police 286-7w
Metropolitan Police, Overtime 139w
Metropolitan Police, Police records 219w
Metropolitan Police, Racial discrimination 122w
Motor insurance, Enforcement 583w
Offensive weapons, Amnesties 434w
Offensive weapons, Crime prevention 3w
Overseas workers, Domestic service 509w
Paint ball guns 217w
Passports 382
Police, Expenditure 288-92w
Police, Government grants 121w
Police, Helicopters 121-2w
Police, Manpower 390, 394w, 433w, 506w
Police, North Tyneside 218w
Police, West Yorkshire 390
Police civilians 213w, 505w
Police powers, Football 219w
Police stations, Oakham 138w
Police vehicles, Road accidents 140w, 583w
Political refugees, Bangladesh 396w
Prisoners, Deportation 287w
Prostitution, Police records 508-9w
Riot control weapons 293w
South Wales Constabulary, Manpower 582w
South Yorkshire Police, Manpower 379
Sunday trading, Shoplifting 396w
Sunday trading, Theft 121w
Television licences, Data banks 434w
Trespass, Police powers 243-4w
United Kingdom Passport Agency 381-2
Warren, Gordon, Ex gratia payments 217w
West Yorkshire Police Authority, Police civilians 505w
Young offenders, Police cautions 4w

Lloyd, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Regional government (06:12:91) 517, 566, 571
Questions
Control of Industrial Major Accident Hazard Regulations 531-2w
Immigration appeals, Administrative delays 273-4w

Lobsters
Canada 28w

Local authority powers
Council tax 253
Urban areas 173w

Local education authorities
Capital investment 415w
Expenditure 416w, 718-9

Local enterprise companies
26w
Directors 45-7w
Equal opportunities 45-7w

Local Government Act 1966
Questions
508w

Local government borrowing
316w

Local government expenditure
Further education 167w
Housing 552w
Northamptonshire 491w
Rate support grants 554w
Revenue support grant 554w

Local government finance
Economic models 235-6w
Residential care 51w
Wales 9

Local Government Finance Act 1988
Questions
538-9w

Local Government Finance Bill 1991/92
Questions
Orders & regulations 489w

Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1985
Questions
328w

Local government pensions
Early retirement 478w

Local government reform
79w, 244-5
Northern Ireland 986
Scotland 119-20w, 850
Wales 19w

Local government revenue
Capital investment 315-7w
Community charge 185-6w
Cumbria 78w
Greater Manchester 184w
Interest rates 316-7w
London Residuary Body 174w
Northamptonshire 429w, 489-90w
Reading Borough Council 488w

Local government services
251
Attendance allowance 354-5w
Contracts for services 250-1, 260
Privatisation 171w

Local government social services
113w, 137-8
Community care 137
Handicapped 114w

Lockerbie
Bombings 95w, 321-2w, 389w, 857-8
Libyan Arab Republic 95w

Lofthouse, Mr Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Coal mining (10:12:91) 811-3
Questions
British Coal Corporation, Privatisation 333w

Lofthouse, Mr Geoffrey—continued
Business statements 406
Community care, Local government social services 137

London & Bishopsgate International Investment Management
462-3w

London Arts Board
17

London Bases
556w

London docklands
Unemployment 486-7w

London Docklands Development Corporation
486-7w
Docklands Light Railway 233w, 236-7w
Employment opportunities 76w
Land acquisition 426-7w
Land reclamation 427w

London Docklands Railway Bill 1989/90
Debates etc.
Lords amendts* (12:12:91) 975

London Regional Transport Act 1984
Questions
233w

London Residuary Body
171w
Local government revenue 174w

London Underground
Capital investment 357w

Lord, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 305, 311, 326-9
Firearms (Amendment) Bill, 1R (04:12:91) 282

Lorry drivers
Driving licences 59w
Medical examinations 26w, 59w
Tax allowances 83w

Lost working days
Smoking related diseases 159w

Lotteries
14w, (04:12:91) 279, 507w, 721-2
EC internal trade 507w, 568w
Employment opportunities 509w

Low flying
265w, 267w
Armed forces training 268w
Bwlch Llyn Bach Valley 265w
Chepstow 267-8w
Complaints 267w
Germany 265-6w
Military exercises 267w
Nature conservation 267w
Skyguard radar 269w

Low incomes
251-2w, 526w
Income tax 160-1w
Means tested benefits 523-4w
Statistics 521-3w

Low pay
22-4w, 467-8w
Greater London 341w

Loyden, Mr Eddie
Questions
Family doctors 132
Shipbuilding, Northern Ireland 977

Luce, Rt Hon Sir Richard
Questions
Arts finance 15

Lung diseases
Medical equipment 156w

Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas, Solicitor-General
Debates etc.
Contempt of court (03:12:91) 236-42
Questions
Crown Prosecution Service 605

Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas—continued
Crown Prosecution Service, Vacancies 604
House of Fraser 605
Maxwell companies 604

M3
67w

M4
406-7w

M20
House purchase 109w

M25
Military vehicles 511-2w, 542w

Maastricht Summit
252w, 260w, 262-3w, (04:12:91) 280, 389-90w, (11:12:91) 859-78
EC integration 192w
Parliamentary procedure 227w
Parliamentary sovereignty & European Community 192w

McAllion, Mr John
Debates etc.
NHS trusts, Scotland (03:12:91) 158
Public expenditure, Scotland (04:12:91) 266, 271
Questions
Annual reports, Welsh Office 570w
Civil servants' background, Welsh Office 569w
Civil service agencies, Dept of Health 481-2w
Civil service agencies, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 591-2w
Civil service agencies, Treasury 435w
Civil service manpower, Welsh Office 569w
Day care of children, Welsh Office 569-70w
Directors, Ministry of Defence 587w
Directors, NHS Estate Management & Health Building Agency 584w
Higher civil servants, Welsh Office 568-9w
Homelessness, Scotland 140-1
Opencast mining 601
Pay incentives, Ministry of Defence 586w
Pay incentives, Welsh Office 568w
Performance indicators, Dept of Health 584w
Performance indicators, Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 590-1w
Performance indicators, Ministry of Defence 586-7w
Performance indicators, Welsh Office 569w
Publicity, Welsh Office 569w
Scottish Assembly 454w
Scottish Trades Union Congress, Coal mining 333w
Working hours, Ministry of Defence 587w
Working hours, Welsh Office 570w

McAuley, Pearse
122w

McAvoy, Mr Thomas
Questions
Administration of justice, Northern Ireland 975
Railway travel, Strathclyde 457w
Road construction, Contracts 458w
Road works, Expenditure 459w

McCrea, Rev William
Questions
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 981

Macdonald, Mr Calum
Debates etc.
Common fisheries policy (11:12:91) 949-51
Public expenditure, Scotland (04:12:91) 270
Questions
Fish farming, Scotland 120w
Fish Farming Advisory Committee 120w
Western Isles 845

McFall, Mr John
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 746
Public expenditure, Scotland (04:12:91) 271
Tobacco advertising, Children (02:12:91) 107-10

McFall, Mr John—continued
Questions
Homelessness, Dumbarton 854
National parks 256
Sites of special scientific interest, Scotland 454w

McGrady, Mr Eddie
Questions
Business statements 995
Child protection registers, South Down 326-7w
Educational finance, Northern Ireland 979-80
Hearing therapists, Manpower 572-3w
Northern Ireland Electricity, Equal opportunities 513-4w
Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Expenditure 211-2w
One parent families, South Down 328w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Recruitment 211w
School admission, Northern Ireland 451w, 517-8w
Social Fund, South Down 325w

MacGregor, Rt Hon John, Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons
Debates etc.
Ministerial & Other Salaries Order 1991 (10:12:91) 824, 827-9
Recess motions, Christmas (12:12:91) 1042-6
Questions
Business statements 400-12, 991-1004
Council tax 732
EC integration 730-1
EC social policy 728-30
House of Commons, Telephone operator services 258w
House of Commons, Telephones 220w
House of Commons accommodation, Theft 258w
House of Commons broadcasting, Leader of the Opposition 119w
House of Commons catering, Members' facilities 512w
House of Commons debates, Orders & regulations 168-9w
Members' facilities 460w
Ministers, Pay 30-2w
New parliamentary building, House of Commons accommodation 460-1w
Official engagements 375w
Overseas aid 731
Palace of Westminster, Recycling 402-3w
Parent's Charter 730
Parliamentary furnishings, Removal services 257w
"Radioactive Heaven & Earth" 375-6w
Taxation 728
USSR 732
Westminster underground station 30w
Yugoslavia 731-2

McKay, Mr Allen
Debates etc.
Standard spending assessments, Barnsley (12:12:91) 1022-4
Questions
Developing countries, Official visits 277w

MacKay, Mr Andrew
Questions
Business statements 412, 1001
School Teachers' Review Body 717-8

McKelvey, Mr William
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 747
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 317-20
NHS trusts, Scotland (03:12:91) 153
Public expenditure, Scotland (04:12:91) 267
Socialism (13:12:91) 1232, 1234, 1248-60, 1289-90, 1298
Questions
Devolution, Scottish Assembly 847-8

***Maclean, Mr David**, Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture Fisheries & Food*
Questions
Badgers Act 1991, Licensing 548-9w, 592w
Bovine somatotropin, EC action 207w
Crops, Air pollution 548w
Environment Agency, National Rivers Authority 548w
Fish, Radiation hazards 549w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food, Government department reorganisation 545w
Pentachlorophenol 589w
Pesticides, Hazardous materials 281w
Pets, Waste disposal 207w
Pigs, Animal housing 246-7w
Sea pollution, Radiation hazards 549-50w
Set-aside schemes, Departmental correspondence 547w

McLeish, Mr Henry
Debates etc.
Industrial Training Levy (Construction Board) Order 1992 (02:12:91) 84-9, 94-5
Questions
Operation Scotcheck 193w, 223-4w, 232w, 281w, 303-4w
Social security abuse 193w
Social security abuse, Civil service manpower 224w
Training & enterprise councils 25-6w
Training & enterprise councils, Civil servants' secondment 25-6w
Training & enterprise councils, Expenditure 25w
Training & enterprise councils, Finance 26w

Maclennan, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Deportation, Judgments (02:12:91) 32
Deportation, Points of order (02:12:91) 36
Prison Security Bill, 2R (03:12:91) 170, 180-4
Socialism (13:12:91) 1243, 1260, 1265-9
Questions
Belmarsh Prison Woolwich, Departmental correspondence 509w
Diplomatic bags, Wandsworth Prison 398-9
EC immigration 384
Ethnic minorities, Government grants to local authorities 508w
Highlands & Islands Airports 400w
Highlands & Islands Airports, Monopolies & Mergers Commission 375w
Land, Conservation 454w
Security industry 286w
Security industry, Licensing 286w

***McLoughlin, Mr Patrick**, Under-Secretary of State for Transport*
Debates etc.
Transport & Works Bill, 2R (02:12:91) 39-47, 51, 52, 56, 65, 75-6
Questions
Air fares, Europe 304w
Air safety, Fires 110w
Air safety, Smoke hoods 110w
Air travel, Competition 304-5w
Airports, Public sector borrowing 188w
British Airways, Air fares 304w
Buoyancy aids, EC action 57-8w
Buoyancy aids, Safety standards 57w
Defence review, British merchant fleet 554w
Dept of Transport, Disabled workers 109w
Dept of Transport, House of Commons broadcasting 110w
Dock labour scheme, Redundancy pay 555w
Dock workers, Redundancy 556w
HM Coastguard 105-6w
Light dues, EC countries 553w
Light dues, Treaty of Rome 145w
Marine Accident Investigation Branch 305w
Merchant seamen, Training 58-9w
Merchant ships, Pollution control 306w
MFV Ocean Hound, Salvage 306w

***McLoughlin, Mr Patrick**—continued*
MV Marchioness, Shipping accidents 511w
Navigational aids 358w
Oil pollution control, Minch 145-6w
Tees & Hartlepool Port Authority, Dock labour scheme 555w
Tees & Hartlepool Port Authority, Redundancy 555w
Transport & Works Bill 1991/92, Inland waterways 145w
Transport of radioactive materials, Packaging 361w
Transport of radioactive materials, Scotland 422w
Transport of radioactive materials, Shipping accidents 361w
Trust ports, Buy outs 360w
Trust ports, Privatisation 359-60w

McMaster, Mr Gordon
Debates etc.
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 458
Public expenditure, Scotland (04:12:91) 268
Questions
Economic situation, Paisley 455-6w

McNair-Wilson, Sir Michael
Debates etc.
HIV infection, Blood transfusions (12:12:91) 1014-6
Questions
Kidney patients 118w
Local government reform, Northern Ireland 986
Social security benefits, HIV infection 129w
Sunday trading, Shoplifting 396w

McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Debates etc.
British Railways Bill, Rep* & 3R (02:12:91) 78-9

McNamara, Mr Kevin
Questions
Administration of justice, Northern Ireland 976-7
Caravan sites, Transient people 327-8w
Detention centres, Castlereagh 389w
Government information services, Northern Ireland 324w
Industrial training, Women 323w
Maghaberry Prison, Body searches 323-4w
Police custody, Lay visitors 323w
Rights of accused, Northern Ireland 324w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Information services 452-3w
Terrorism, Legal representation 285-6w

Madden, Mr Max
Debates etc.
Kashmir, Public petitions (10:12:91) 830
Questions
Business statements 406, 998-9
Chahal, Karamjit Singh, Deportation 508w
Community charge benefits 248
Confiscation orders, India 244-5w
Earnings rules 524w
Hanover Square Bradford, House purchase 236w
Hanover Square Bradford, Property development 183-5w
Income support, Women 525w
India, Human rights 261-2w, 390w
Inner cities initiative, Bradford 375w
Lorry drivers, Driving licences 59w
Lorry drivers, Medical examinations 26w
Lorry drivers, Tax allowances 83w
Railway electrification, West Yorkshire 233w
Railway travel, West Yorkshire 233w
School buildings, Bradford 415w
Water supply industry, Tree felling 69w
Yugoslavia, Mercenaries 33w

Maghaberry Prison
Body searches 323-4w

Maginnis, Mr Ken
Questions
Doherty, Daniel, Compensation 228w
Terrorism, Compensation 211w, 228w, 522w

Magistrates
Community charge 361w
Cost effectiveness 420w
Coventry 361w
Manpower 419-20w
Training 73w

Magistrates' courts
Rural areas 432-3w
Wales 432-3w

Mahon, Mrs Alice
Debates etc.
Food surpluses (12:12:91) 1032-3
Inflation, Points of order (13:12:91) 1260
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 873
Residential care (10:12:91) 773-7, 786
Socialism (13:12:91) 1263-4
Questions
Community charge benefits, Calderdale 253-4
Police, West Yorkshire 390
Social security recipients, Pregnant women 54w

***Major, Rt Hon John**, Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service*
Debates etc.
European Council, Ministerial statements (11:12:91) 859-78
Questions
Bank notes, Design 277w
Bank of Credit & Commerce International 142
British National Party, Bexley 990
British Youth Council 14w
Budget 395-6
Business, Competition 94w
Child care 13w
Civil servants' business appointments 94w
Civil service, Ministers 193w
Council housing, Empty property 139-40
Council tax benefits 551w
Criminal proceedings, Republic of Ireland 13w
Dalai Lama 191w
Disabled workers, EC action 276w
Disabled workers, Government departments 14w
East Timor, UN resolutions 479w
EC integration 143, 392
EC Social Charter 141
EC social policy 987-90
Economic & monetary union 395
Economic situation 392
Educational assessment, Primary education 143
Essex County Council 394
European central bank 391
"Faith in the Countryside" 277w
Foreign exchange 14w
Foreign investment in UK 987-8
Former Prime Ministers 15w
GATT 143
Government departments, Law enforcement 94w
Group of Seven, Arms control 275w
Group of Seven, Arms trade 275w
Homelessness, Scotland 140-1
Hospital waiting lists 140
Iraq, Petrochemicals 480-1w
Lotteries 14w
Maastricht Summit, EC integration 192w
Maastricht Summit, Parliamentary sovereignty & European Community 192w
Maxwell companies, Pension funds 394-5
Metrication 142
Minimum wage 391-2
Mirror Group Newspapers 392-3
Mortgage defaulters 393-4, 989-90
NHS trusts, Scotland 144
Non-departmental public bodies, Political activities 552w

Major, Rt Hon John—continued
Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty 276w
Official engagements 192w, 481w
Operation Scotcheck 193w
Opposition, Higher civil servants 192-3w
Parliamentary questions, Civil service agencies 152w
Prime Minister 480w
Prime Minister, House of Commons broadcasting 151w
Privatisation 393-4
Public expenditure 396
Racial discrimination, Europe 276-7w
Regional planning & development, Kent 990
Royal National Institute for the Blind, Surveys 93-4w
Science & technology research, Wales 14-5w
Shadow Cabinet, Higher civil servants 192w
Small businesses, Unfair competition 94w
Social security abuse 193w
Sunday trading 15w
Tibet 141-2
Trident submarines 141
Ukraine 988
UN finances 275w
UN resolutions, Zionism 274-5w
Unemployment 392-3
United Nations, Disaster relief 275-6w
USSR, EC aid 989
USSR, Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty 479-80w
Whales, Nature conservation 144
Working hours, EC action 144
Young people 142

Major Energy Users' Council
382w

Malins, Mr Humfrey
Questions
Neighbourhood watch schemes 386

Mallon, Mr Seamus
Debates etc.
Housing & handicapped, Northern Ireland (03:12:91) 372-6
Questions
Club licensing, Prosecutions 66w
Firearms, Theft 89w, 213w
Newry bypass, Road construction 66w
Road works, Northern Ireland 66w

Manchester Airport
188w

Manchester Central Hospitals & Community Care NHS Trust
114w

Mandatory student grants
Higher education 91w
Leeds 723

Mans, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
Common fisheries policy (11:12:91) 933, 935, 955-7
Pension funds (12:12:91) 1072
Traffic Calming Bill, 2R (04:12:91) 279
Questions
Consumer credit, Marketing 206w
EC social policy, Legislation 575-6w
Oil industry, UK companies abroad 332w

Manufacturing industries
Air pollution control 175w
Ministers' domestic visits 178w

Maple flag exercises
270w

Maples, Mr John, Economic Secretary to the Treasury
Questions
Civil service, Pay 36w
Civil service recruitment, Travelling expenses 435-6w
Currencies, EC action 191w
Debts, Developing countries 303w

Maples, Mr John—continued
Deutsche Bundesbank, Sterling 164w
Economic models, Finance 190w
European monetary system, Norway 42w
Government securities 191w
Parliamentary questions, Costs 369-70w
Personal savings 369w
Public sector borrowing requirement 368-9w
Treasury, Civil service agencies 435w

Marek, Dr John
Debates etc.
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 438
Questions
Equal opportunities 18
Gibraltar, European Parliament members 33w, 389w, 497w

Marginal land
Agricultural subsidies 851-2
Scotland 851-2

Marine Accident Investigation Branch
305w, 511w

Marine Pollution Control Unit
145-6w

Market Harborough
Dept of Social Security local offices 224w

Marketing
Consumer credit 206w
Employment schemes 103w

Marland, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 305-9, 364

Marlow, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Aggravated Taking Bill, 2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 675-6
Maxwell, Robert, Points of order (05:12:91) 414
Questions
Economic & monetary union 38w
North Sea oil, Oil reserves 44w
Taking & driving away 384

Marshall, Mr David
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 745-6, 748
Questions
Offensive weapons, Injuries 842
Timesharing, Consumer protection 206-7w

Marshall, Mr Jim
Questions
Business, Northern Ireland 983
Child abuse, Leicestershire 25

Marshall, Mr John
Debates etc.
Contempt of court (03:12:91) 235, 238
NHS trusts, Scotland (03:12:91) 156
Residential care (10:12:91) 755
Questions
Business statements 403, 1001-2
Civil service agencies 27-8w
Crown lands & estates, Land acquisition 494w
London Residuary Body, Local government revenue 174w
National Rivers Authority, River pollution 431w
NHS, Contracts for services 139
Scottish Assembly 848
Shops Act 1950 216w
Sunday trading, Northern Ireland 983-4

Marshall, Sir Michael
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 871-2

Martin, Mr David
Debates etc.
Pension funds (12:12:91) 1070, 1074
Prison Security Bill, 2R (03:12:91) 202-4
Questions
Frigates, International cooperation 88-9w

Martin, Mr David—continued
Railway accidents, Severn tunnel 611

Martin, Mr Michael J
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 742
Residential care (10:12:91) 777
Questions
Employment opportunities, Glasgow 855
Heart diseases, Scotland 455w
Stobhill Hospital, Urology 345w

Martin House Hospice
Government grants 443-5w

Martlew, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 293, 312, 315, 323-6, 364, 368
Questions
Council housing, Carlisle 170-1w
Milk deliveries, Refrigeration 388w
Supermarkets, Eggs 464w

Maternity benefits
Social security recipients 153w

Maternity hospitals
Hospital closures 445-6w

Maternity pay
103-4w

Maude, Mr Francis, Financial Secretary to the Treasury
Debates etc.
Consolidated Fund Bill, 1R (10:12:91) 823
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 433
Questions
British Telecom, Privatisation 299-300w
Business expansion scheme 252w
Capital gains tax 81w
Car allowances, Ambulance services 35-6w
Car allowances, Voluntary work 475-7w
Corporation tax, Passenger transport executives 161w
Corporation tax, Tax yields 251w
Council tax, Valuation 477-8w
Economic & monetary union 38w
Income tax, Low incomes 160-1w
Income tax, Personal tax allowances 252-6w
Income tax, Tax allowances 302w
Income tax, Tax rates & bands 161w, 254w
Income tax, Tax yields 301-3w, 369w
Inheritance tax 162w
Inheritance tax, Tax thresholds 160w
Inheritance tax, Tax yields 160w, 250w
Local government pensions, Early retirement 478w
Low incomes 251-2w
Maxwell companies, Pension funds 475w
Mortgage relief 479-80w
National insurance contributions, Fringe benefits 301-2w
National insurance contributions, Health insurance 250-1w
National insurance contributions, Investment income 80-2w, 160w
Tax allowances 250w
Tax allowances, Health insurance 251w
Tax allowances, Lorry drivers 83w
Tax allowances, Tax yields 191w
Tax yields 40-1w
Tax yields, Scotland 368w
Taxation, Environment protection 162w
Unpaid taxes 37-8w
Valuation, Powers of entry 370w
VAT 371w
Voluntary contributions 477w

Mauritius
Overseas aid 278w

Mawhinney, Dr Brian, Minister of State for Northern Ireland
Questions
Army in Northern Ireland 514w
Art education, Student numbers 451-2w
Club licensing, Prosecutions 66w

Mawhinney, Dr Brian—continued
Contracts, Company liquidations 322w
Detention centres, Castlereagh 389w
Dyslexia, Northern Ireland 515-6w
Educational finance, Northern Ireland 979-80
Firearms, Theft 89w, 213w
Government contracts, Northern Ireland 210w
Government information services, Northern Ireland 324w
Industrial training, Women 323w
Integrated schools, Northern Ireland 978-9
Maghaberry Prison, Body searches 323-4w
Maze Prison, Portraits 514w
Northern Ireland Office, Council of Ministers 66w
Northern Ireland Office, Disabled workers 264w
Northern Ireland Office, European Communities 65w
Police custody, Lay visitors 323w
Police interrogation, Castlereagh 985-6
Post-mortems, Disclosure of information 67w
Public expenditure, Northern Ireland 515w
Pupil-teacher ratios, Northern Ireland 979-80
Rathgael Training School 519w
Rights of accused, Northern Ireland 324w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Information services 452-3w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, National Criminal Intelligence Service 389w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Police national computer 89w
Royal Ulster Constabulary, Recruitment 211w
School admission, Northern Ireland 451w, 517-8w
School population, Northern Ireland 324w
Schools, Northern Ireland 322-3w
Student loans, Northern Ireland 512w
Terrorism, Compensation 211w, 522w

Maximum Number of Judges (Scotland) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(02:12:91) 96

Maxton, Mr John
Questions
Craft industries, Scotland 501w
Crime, Strathclyde 344-6w
Homelessness, Scotland 846-7
Hospital beds, Scotland 255-6w
NHS finance, Scotland 229-31w
Scottish health boards, Repairs & maintenance 402w
Tax yields, Scotland 368w
Voluntary organisations, Manpower 501w

Maxwell, Robert
361w, 373w, 604

Maxwell Communication Corporation
274w, 361w, 372-3w, 422w, 462-3w, 475w

Maxwell companies
392-3, 604
Company investigations 274w, 372-3w, 422w, 462-3w
Directors 463w
Pension funds 373w, 394-5, 475w
Sequestration of assets 361w

Maxwell-Hyslop, Mr Robin
Questions
Baltic states, Know-how Fund 387w
Environmental Protection (Prescribed Processes & Substances) Regulations 1991 177w
General certificate of secondary education, School administration 296w
General certificate of secondary education, Teaching aids 296w
Special education 16w

Maydown
Incinerators 451w

Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick, Attorney-General
Questions
Attorney General, Council of Ministers 8w
Attorney General, European Communities 7w
Bailiffs, Working hours 274w
Centre for Policy Studies, Disclosure of information 273w
Charities, Political activities 273w
Children Act 1989, Judiciary 73w
Courts, Closed circuit television 7w
Courts, Working hours 475w
Crown Prosecution Service, Manpower 420w
Domicil, Law reform 146w
Fraud, Prosecutions 8w
House of Fraser, Takeovers 8w
Immigration appeals, Administrative delays 273-4w
Law Commission, Law reform 8-9w
Legal aid, Taxation 419w
Legal profession, Civil service recruitment 273w
Legal profession, Recruitment 602-3
Magistrates, Community charge 361w
Magistrates, Cost effectiveness 420w
Magistrates, Manpower 419-20w
Maxwell companies, Company investigations 274w
Maxwell companies, Sequestration of assets 361w
Nazi war crimes, Prosecutions 603
Negligence, Law reform 420w
Offensive weapons, Amnesties 146w
Paint ball guns, Prosecutions 274w
Pre-trial procedures, Administrative delays 146-7w
Probate Registry Cardiff, Furniture 146w
Prosecutions 273w
Radioactive Substances Act 1960, Consolidation bills 475w
Spycatcher, Judgments 249-50w
Tottenham Three, Prosecutions 181w
Vocational training, Discretionary student grants 603
War crimes 603-4

Maze Prison
Portraits 514w

Meacher, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Mirror Group Newspapers, Points of order (09:12:91) 616
Pension funds (12:12:91) 1080-6
Social security orders (11:12:91) 889-97, 898-9, 906, 918
Questions
Average earnings 24-5w
Child benefit, Social security benefits rates 263-4w
Child benefit, Social security benefits uprating 152w
Dept of Social Security local offices, Opening hours 521w
Disabled workers, Government departments 14w
Income support, Social security benefits uprating 376-7w
Means tested benefits, Civil servants 349-50w
National insurance contributions, Earnings limits 242w, 388w
National insurance contributions, Investment income 80-2w, 160w
National insurance contributions, Northern Ireland 264w
Pay 152-3w
Personal pensions, National Insurance Fund 325-6w
Residential care, Local government finance 51w
Retirement pensions, EC countries 523w
Retirement pensions, Northern Ireland 450w
Severe disability premium 125-6w
Social Fund, Loans 123w
Social security benefits, Departmental forms 221w

Meacher, Mr Michael—continued
State earnings related pension scheme 153w
Supplementary benefits, Social security benefits uprating 124-5w
Teachers' pensions 16w, 446w

Meadowell Estate
225w

Meale, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Coal mining (10:12:91) 791-3
Socialism (13:12:91) 1278
Questions
Arts festivals, East Midlands 48w
GATT, Multifibre arrangement 499w
Textiles, Uruguay round 502w

Means tested benefits
Civil servants 349-50w
Low incomes 523-4w
Social security recipients 350w

Medical equipment
Lung diseases 156w
Patients (04:12:91) 281
Prescriptions 63w

Medical examinations
Lorry drivers 26w, 59w

Medical records
Childbirth 62w

Medical Research Council
397-8w
Annual reports 418w

Medical treatments
Cancer 134w
Women 4-5

Medicinal Products Prescription By Nurses Etc Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (04:12:91) 279

Medicines Control Agency
486w, 584w

Medway Health Authority
Expenditure 155-6w

Medway Hospital
Capital investment 201-2w

Mellor, Rt Hon David, Chief Secretary to the Treasury
Debates etc.
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 491-8
Questions
HM Inspectorate of Schools, Inquiries 566w
Public expenditure 304w, 478w

Members
Car allowances 35-6w

Members' conduct
Speaker's rulings & statements (02:12:91) 37, (03:12:91) 163, 164, 166, (04:12:91) 317, 343

Members' correspondence
Administrative delays 286w

Members' facilities
460w
House of Commons catering 512w

Members' interventions
Speaker's rulings & statements (03:12:91) 240, (12:12:91) 1082, 1203

Members' speeches
Speaker's rulings & statements (03:12:91) 160, 209, (04:12:91) 364-5, (05:12:91) 478, (06:12:91) 563, (11:12:91) 938, 955

Members' visits abroad
EC institutions (06:12:91) 582

Menopause
4-5

Mental health community care
Schizophrenia 482w
Wales 439-40w

Mental health services
Disasters (04:12:91) 282
Young people 114-5w

Mentally handicapped
Respite care 102w
Wales 102w, 137-8w

Mercenaries
Yugoslavia 33w

Merchant seamen
Training 58-9w

Merchant Shipping (Control of Pollution by Noxious Liquid Substances in Bulk) Regulations 1987
Questions
306w

Merchant ships
Pollution control 306w

Merit awards
136-7w

Merseyside
Hospital waiting lists 134
Pay 27w

Merthyr Tydfil
Land reclamation 438w

Metals
Hallmarking 372w

Metalworking
Air pollution control 9w

Methyl chloroform
427-8w

Metrication
142

Metropolitan Police
121w, 217w, 394-5w
Arrests 139-40w
Complaints against police 286-7w, 292-3w
Overtime 139w
Police Complaints Authority 293w
Police records 219w
Racial discrimination 122w

Meyer, Sir Anthony
Questions
Arts finance, Wales 16
Bus services, Railway stations 11

MFV Ocean Hound
Salvage 306w

Michael, Mr Alun
Debates etc.
Crime (12:12:91) 1055-60, 1066
Oral question time intervention (02:12:91) 4
Tobacco advertising, Children (02:12:91) 116-8, 120-1
Questions
Ambulance services, Wales 3
Business, Competition 94w
Community care, Wales 195w
Crime prevention, Wales 407w
Deprivation indicators, Wales 407-8w
Government departments, Law enforcement 94w
Health services, Wales 249w, 283-4w
Manpower 394w
Members' facilities 460w
Mentally handicapped, Respite care 102w
Mentally handicapped, Wales 137-8w
NHS, Wales 248w
NHS administration, Wales 22w
Nitrogen oxides, Air pollution control 22w
Police, Manpower 394w, 433w, 506w
Prisons, Expenditure 217w
Secure accommodation, Government grants 118w, 157-8w
Secure accommodation, Wales 102w, 137w, 195-8w

Michael, Mr Alun—continued
Secure accommodation, Young offenders 157-8w
Small businesses, Unfair competition 94w
Somalia, Armed conflict 391w
Somalia, Diplomatic relations 421-2w
Somalia, International aid from international bodies 391w
Somalia, Overseas aid 388w, 421w
South Wales Constabulary, Manpower 582w
Special education, Wales 248w
Sunday trading 1w, 15w, 138w
Sunday trading, Enforcement 1-2w
Urban areas, Local authority powers 173w

Michie, Mr Bill
Questions
Armed forces discharges, Housing 227w
Car allowances, Voluntary work 476-7w
Community charge benefits 70w
Contract cleaning, Schools 174w
Health authorities 112-3w
Police powers, Football 219w
Social Fund, Sheffield 123-4w
Trafalgar Medical Services, NHS complaints 379w

Michie, Mrs Ray
Debates etc.
Public expenditure, Scotland (04:12:91) 266
Questions
Economic & monetary union, Scotland 852-3
Radiation, Holy Loch 501w

Mid Glamorgan
Hospital waiting lists 537-8w

Midland main railway line
Railway electrification 190w

Military exercises
Air force 270w
Low flying 267w

Military vehicles
Defence procurement 541w
M25 511-2w, 542w

Milk deliveries
Refrigeration 388w

Miller, Sir Hal
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 364
Members' conduct, Points of order (03:12:91) 163

Mills, Mr Iain
Debates etc.
Aggravated Taking Bill, 2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 629, 662-5, 678
Questions
Bardsley, Kevin, Criminal appeals 140w
Directorate of Telecommunications, Expenditure 393w
Directorate of Telecommunications, Public buildings 434w
Directorate of Telecommunications, Sonic Communications 393-4w
Employment schemes, Marketing 103w
Training & enterprise councils, Rural areas 103w

Milton Keynes
Rents to mortgages scheme 313-4w

Minch
Oil pollution control 145-6w

Minimum wage
391-2

Minister for the Civil Service
Disabled workers 84w

Ministerial & Other Salaries Order 1991
Debates etc.
(10:12:91) 824-9

Ministerial duties
Northern Ireland Office 387-9w

Ministerial statements
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 733-48
Deportation (02:12:91) 30-5
European Council (11:12:91) 859-78
NHS trusts (03:12:91) 145-62
Public expenditure (04:12:91) 261-76
Speaker's rulings & statements (02:12:91) 36, (10:12:91) 742, 745, 747, (11:12:91) 875, 879-80, (13:12:91) 1260

Ministers
Civil service 193w
Monktonhall colliery 337w
Pay 30-2w

Ministers' domestic visits
Bradford 17w
Manufacturing industries 178w
North Tyneside 218w, 225w, 238w

Ministers' visits abroad
European Communities 280w

Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food
Civil servants' business appointments 593w
Civil service agencies 591-2w
Civil service manpower 247w
Disabled workers 246w
Government department reorganisation 545w
Performance indicators 590-1w

Ministry of Defence
228w, 348w, 474w
Directors 587w
Disabled workers 270w
Environmental policy 84w
European Communities 56w
Pay incentives 586w
Performance indicators 586-7w
Working hours 587w

Minor works grants
Community charge 283w
Wales 283w

Mirror Group Newspapers
361w, 373w, 392-5, 422w, 462-3w, 475w, (12:12:91) 1069-89
Pension funds (04:12:91) 277
Standing Order No 20 applications (04:12:91) 277

Missing persons
Cyprus 262w

Mitchell, Mr Andrew
Questions
Business statements 997-8
NHS trusts 111w
Non-departmental public bodies 567w

Mitchell, Mr Austin
Debates etc.
Common fisheries policy (11:12:91) 959-60
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 440, 441, 451, 453, 462-7, 469, 474-5
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 877
Questions
Courts, Working hours 475w
Currencies, EC action 191w
Deutsche Bundesbank, Sterling 164w
Foreign exchange 14w
House of Fraser, Takeovers 177w
Maxwell companies, Pension funds 373w
Professional organisations, Complaints 97-8w

Mitchell, Sir David
Debates etc.
Gypsies, Hampshire (12:12:91) 1176-9, 1181-3
Questions
Environmental impact assessment, EC law 67w

Moate, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Railway travel, Kent (12:12:91) 1135-7
Transport & Works Bill, 2R (02:12:91) 49, 74-5

Moate, Mr Roger—continued
Questions
Medway Health Authority, Expenditure 155-6w
Prisons, Expenditure 216w

Mobility allowance
Blind 52w
Social security appeals 126-7w

Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 739
Questions
Terrorism, Northern Ireland 980

Monktonhall colliery
Manpower 337w
Ministers 337w

Monopolies
Postal services 179w

Monopolies & Mergers Commission
Car industry 10w
Highlands & Islands Airports 375w

Monro, Sir Hector
Debates etc.
NHS trusts, Scotland (03:12:91) 150
Public expenditure, Scotland (04:12:91) 265-6
Questions
House renovation grants, Scotland 844
Marginal land, Agricultural subsidies 851-2
Scottish Bus Group, Privatisation 45-6w

Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Questions
Airports, Public sector borrowing 188w
Hospital waiting lists 128

Moonie, Dr Lewis
Debates etc.
Prime Minister's questions, Points of order (05:12:91) 415

Morgan, Mr Rhodri
Debates etc.
Coal mining (10:12:91) 790
National Health Service (Supply of Medicine Equipment) Bill, 1R (04:12:91) 281
Tobacco advertising, Children (02:12:91) 109, 112, 115, 119, 121, 125
Questions
Associated British Ports, Water abstraction 136w
Cardiff Bay barrage, Advertising 539w
Cardiff Bay barrage, Disclosure of information 135w
Cardiff Bay barrage, Ground water 570w
Cardiff Bay Development Corporation, Government grants 539w, 570-1w
Electricity, Commodity markets 382w
Electricity tariffs 382w
Energy conservation, Domestic appliances 186w
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 10-1, 102-3w
Fraud, Prosecutions 8w
Gas consumption, Energy conservation 382w
Insurance Services Group, Privatisation 205w, 260-1w
NHS & private practice, Contracts for services 101w
Non-departmental public bodies, Political activities 552w
Nuclear power 596
Probate Registry Cardiff 100w
Probate Registry Cardiff, Furniture 9w, 77w, 146w
Public appointments, Party membership 102w
Science & technology research, Wales 14-5w
"Ten years cold" 76w
World Trade Centre Cardiff, Urban development grants 285w
Youth training, South Glamorgan 539w

Morley, Mr Elliot
Debates etc.
Common fisheries policy (11:12:91) 928-35

Morris, Rt Hon Alfred
Debates etc.
Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill, 1R (04:12:91) 280
Homelessness (12:12:91) 1011-3, 1043
Prison Security Bill, 2R (03:12:91) 168
Questions
"Blind & Partially Sighted Adults in Britain" 446w
Disabled workers, EC action 276w
Invalidity benefits 470w
Local government social services 138
Perinatal mortality 443-4w
Social security benefits rules, Absence abroad 377w
Special education, Further education 92w
Zidovudine, Clinical trials 449w

Morris, Rt Hon John
Questions
Hong Kong, Court of Appeal 154-5w
Spycatcher, Judgments 249-50w

Morris, Mr Michael
Questions
Family health services authorities 111w
Opencast mining 601

Morrison, Sir Charles
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 744

Mortgage defaulters
393-4, 989-90
Wales 6-8, 13-4

Mortgage relief
479-80w

Moss, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Coal mining (10:12:91) 804-7
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 336-9
Questions
Energy conservation 599-600
NHS, Capital investment 127
Privatisation 394
Straw, Alternative energy 594

Mothers
Prison medical services 577w

Motor insurance
Driving offences 583w
Enforcement 583w
Security equipment 5-6w

Motor vehicle theft
Crime prevention 216w

Motor vehicles
Tax yields 367-8w

Motorways
107-8w
Lighting 306w
Scotland 168w
Transport of radioactive materials 57w
Wales 101w

Mowlam, Ms Marjorie
Questions
Financial services, EC action 260w
Investment Management Regulatory Organisation, Investment in financial assets 498-9w

Moynihan, Mr Colin, Under-Secretary of State for Energy
Questions
Alternative energy, Conferences 336w
Alternative energy, Research finance 74-6w
Coal mining 594
Electricity generation, Gas fired power stations 73-4w
Energy conservation 598-600
Fuels, Wood 333w

Moynihan, Mr Colin—continued
Gas consumption, Energy conservation 382w
Natural gas 597
North Sea oil 593, 598
North Sea oil, Capital investment 592-3
North Sea oil, Oil reserves 44w, 597
Offshore structures, Shipping safety 335w
Offshore suppliers, EC internal trade 599
Oil industry, Economic League 593-4
Petroleum Engineering Directorate 593
Petroleum exploration, Firth of Clyde 43w
Petroleum exploration, Irish Sea 600
Refuse derived fuel 333w
Solar power, Research finance 187w
Straw, Alternative energy 594-5
Wave power, Energy research 601-2
Wind power 335w
Wind power, International conferences 335w

Mudd, Mr David
Questions
Road construction, Contracts 108w

Mullen, Nicholas
294w

Mullin, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Regional government (06:12:91) 518-9
Salt, Tony, Police deaths on duty (12:12:91) 1221-6
Questions
Centre for Policy Studies, Disclosure of information 273w
Coal mining 333w
Complaints against police, Crimes of violence 292-3w
Elmbridge County Infants School 296w
Police interrogation, Castlereagh 985-6
Post-mortems, Disclosure of information 67w
Prisoners, Deportation 287w
Revenue support grant, Sunderland 234w

Multifibre arrangement
374w
GATT 499w

Murphy, Mr Paul
Questions
Civil servants' secondment, Wales 20
Further education teachers, Pay 90-1w
Local government finance, Wales 9
Polytechnics, Staff-student ratios 91w
Road construction, Contracts 439w
Universities, Cost per student 89-90w

Music education
Curriculum 16w
Musical instruments 15-6w

Musical instruments
Music education 15-6w

"Must Babies Still Die"
330w

MV Bowbelle
511w

MV Marchioness
Shipping accidents 511w

National Association for the Care & Resettlement of Offender
407w
Training 442w
Wales 442w

National Audit Office
77w

National Council of Victim Support
4-5w

National Criminal Intelligence Service
Royal Ulster Constabulary 389w

National Curriculum Council
560-5w

National disability information project
483-4w

National Disability Information Project Steering Group
483-4w

National Grid Company
Nationalisation 591-2

National Health Service (Supply of Medical Equipment) Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (04:12:91) 281

National income
370w

National Institute for Medical Research
397-8w

National insurance contributions
129-30w
Credit cards 250-1w
Earnings limits 242w, 388w
Fringe benefits 301-2w, 376w
Health insurance 250-1w
Investment income 80-2w, 160w
Northern Ireland 264w, 388w

National Insurance Contributions Unit
see Social Security Contributions Agency

National Insurance Fund
220-1w
Personal pensions 325-6w

National Lottery Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (04:12:91) 279

National parks
256-7

National Radiological Protection Board
485w, 492w

National Rivers Authority
238w, 246-7, 494-5w
Environment Agency 548w
River pollution 431-2w

National Union of Public Employees
129

National vocational qualification
Footwear industry 410w

Nationalisation
National Grid Company 591-2

NATO
55-6w, 96w, (11:12:91) 859-78
Armed forces strength 180w

Natural gas
597

Nature Conservancy Council for England
Birds 170w

Nature conservation
Botswana 551w
Elephants 551w
Fisheries (04:12:91) 282
International trade 432w
Low flying 267w
Whales 144

Naval bases
Almondbank 84w

Navigational aids
358w
Challenger tanks 54-5w
Iraq-Kuwait conflict 56-7w
Tanks 55-6w

Nazi war crimes
Prosecutions 603

Nederlandsche Credietverzekering Maatschappij
11-2w, 205w, 260-1w

Needham, Mr Richard, Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Debates etc.
Housing & handicapped, Northern Ireland (03:12:91) 375-8

Needham, Mr Richard*—*continued
Questions
Belfast Airport, Government grants 210w, 514w
Birds, Northern Ireland 450-1w
Bombings, Belfast 981-2
Business, Northern Ireland 983
Business premises, Belfast 982
Caravan sites, Transient people 327-8w
Electricity supply industry, Northern Ireland 513w
Employment level, Northern Ireland 513w
Environmentally sensitive areas, Crawfordsburn 519w
Foreign investment in UK, Northern Ireland 986-7
Handicapped drivers, Parking 519w
Hazardous wastes, Northern Ireland 984-5
Incinerators, Maydown 451w
Newry bypass, Road construction 66w
Northern Ireland Airports, Privatisation 212w
Northern Ireland Airports, Profits 212w
Northern Ireland Electricity, Electricity supply industry 513w
Northern Ireland Electricity, Equal opportunities 513-4w
Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Expenditure 211-2w
Road accidents, Northern Ireland 515w
Road works, Northern Ireland 66w
Royal family, Portraits 514w
Shipbuilding, Northern Ireland 977-8
Tourism, Northern Ireland 512w
Training Enterprise & Education Directorate, Expenditure 325-6w
Unemployment, Northern Ireland 515w
Youth unemployment, North Down 520w

Negligence
Law reform 420w

Neighbourhood Energy Action
76w

Neighbourhood watch schemes
386-7

Nellist, Mr Dave
Debates etc.
Community charge, Non-payment (10:12:91) 831-5, 837
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 470, 476, 480-3
Questions
Bailiffs, Working hours 274w
Business statements 996
Christmas bonus, Departmental correspondence 51w
Community charge 254
Community charge, Attachment of earnings 172w
Community charge, Bailiffs 173w, 316w
Community charge, Civil proceedings 172w
Community charge, Liability 172w
Community charge, Local government revenue 185-6w
Community charge, Non-payment 172-3w, 294w
Community charge, Social security benefits reductions 153w
Community charge, Tax collection 317w
Educational assessment, Contracts for services 449w
Electricity supply industry, Northern Ireland 513w
Homelessness, Coventry 80w
Kurdistan, Overseas aid 151w
Magistrates, Community charge 361w
NHS trusts 133-4
Parliamentary questions, Civil service agencies 152w
Rate arrears, Civil proceedings 139w
Redundancy, Coventry 26-7w
Retirement pensions 51-2w

Nelson, Mr Anthony
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 874-5

Netherlands
Public holidays 27w, 339w

Network SouthEast
(12:12:91) 1124-44

Neubert, Sir Michael
Debates etc.
Industrial Training Levy (Construction Board) Order 1992 (02:12:91) 89-91
Questions
Educational standards, Primary education 414w
Food, Expenditure 247-8w
Sunday trading, Supermarkets 260w
Taking & driving away 383

New businesses
401w
Amber Valley 242w
Enterprise allowance scheme 132-3w
Strathclyde 401-2w

New parliamentary building
House of Commons accommodation 460-1w

New Roads & Street Works Act 1991
Questions
108-9w

"New Tax for Local Government Consultation Paper"
175w

New towns development corporations
Scotland 454w

Newry bypass
Road construction 66w

Newton, Rt Hon Tony, Secretary of State for Social Security
Debates etc.
Social security orders (11:12:91) 881-9, 890, 892, 893, 894
Questions
Low incomes, Statistics 521-3w
Pension funds, Investment 525-6w

Newton Garths
Level crossings (12:12:91) 1007-10

Next steps initiative
27-8w

NHS
Capital investment 127
Contracts for services 139
Expenditure 133, 138-9
Procurement 99w
Public expenditure 99-100w
Wales 248w

NHS administration
115w
Wales 22w

NHS & private practice
113w
Contracts for services 101w
Wales 101w

NHS charges
Incontinence aids 202w

NHS charges exemptions
328-9w

NHS complaints
Trafalgar Medical Services 379w

NHS Estate Management & Health Building Agency
584w
Directors 584w

NHS finance
127-8, 139, 485-6w
Hospitals 118w
NHS reform 245w
Regional health authorities 200-2w
Scotland 229-31w
Wales 99-100w

NHS reform
Costs 245w
NHS finance 245w

NHS trusts
111w, 133-4, 136
Debts 62w, 331w, 445w
Departmental circulars 62w
Ministerial statements (03:12:91) 145-62
Official hospitality 445w
Scotland 144, (03:12:91) 145-62, 455w, 855-6
Sheffield 136
Wales 408w, 438w

Nicholls, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Contempt of court (03:12:91) 238
Members' conduct, Points of order (03:12:91) 166
Pension funds (12:12:91) 1073, 1082, 1083
Public expenditure, Scotland (04:12:91) 272
Residential care (10:12:91) 767-9
Questions
Crime prevention 213w
Trust ports, Privatisation 359-60w

Nicholson, Mr David
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 297
Regional government (06:12:91) 516-7, 527-8, 550-5, 556
Questions
Council housing 245-6
EC regional policy, EC grants & loans 178w
Environmentally sensitive areas, Exmoor 165w
Light dues, Treaty of Rome 145w
Maxwell companies, Pension funds 394-5
Motor vehicle theft, Crime prevention 216w
Northern Ireland Electricity, Electricity supply industry 513w
Sunday trading 1w
Telecommunications industry, Innovation 97-8w, 179w

Nicholson, Miss Emma
Debates etc.
Iraq, Human rights (12:12:91) 1212-6, 1220
Social security orders (11:12:91) 897-900
Questions
Council tax 252-3

Nigeria
Entry clearances 123w

NIREX
see United Kingdom NIREX

Nitrogen oxides
Air pollution control 22w

Noise abatement zones
311w

Non-departmental public bodies
567w
Contracts for services 284w
Political activities 552w
Wales 284w, 404w

Non-domestic rates
Overcharging 236w

Non-Domestic Rating (Appropriate Fraction & Rateable Values) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(09:12:91) 619

Non-governmental organisations
388w
Arms control 32-3w

Norris, Mr Steve
Debates etc.
Homelessness (12:12:91) 1094, 1096-100, 1103
Prison Security Bill, 2R (03:12:91) 183
Socialism (13:12:91) 1242-9, 1254
Questions
Business statements 996
Dentists, Pay 201w
Inner cities initiative, Hackney 373-4w
National Grid Company, Nationalisation 591-2

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
see NATO

North Down
Youth unemployment 520w

North East Thames Regional Health Authority
Hospital waiting lists 444w

North Sea oil
593, 598
Capital investment 592-3
Oil reserves 44w, 597

North Tyneside
225w
Housing improvement 238w
Ministers' domestic visits 218w, 225w, 238w
Police 218w
Young offenders 219w

North Wales
Cancer 134w

North West Arts
Arts finance 48w

North West region
Jobclubs 339w
Youth training 338w

Northamptonshire
Council house sales 488-90w
Local government expenditure 491w
Local government revenue 429w, 489-90w

Northern General Hospital Sheffield
Transplant surgery 199w

Northern Ireland
Administration of justice 975-7
Agriculture 517-20w
Animal experiments 210-1w
Art education 451-2w
Birds 450-1w
Business 983
Caravan sites 327-8w
Cattle 516w
Child benefit 263-4w
Clenbuterol 211w
Club licensing 66w
Compensation 211w
Contracts 322w
Deer farming 211w
Dyslexia 515-6w
Economic situation (12:12:91) 1010-1
Educational finance 979-80
Electricity supply industry 513w
Employment level 513w
Family credit 573w
Firearms 89w, 213w
Foreign investment in UK 986-7
Free school meals 324w
Freshwater fish 521-2w
Government contracts 210w
Government information services 324w
Handicap benefits 573-4w
Handicapped drivers 519w
Hazardous wastes 984-5
Hearing therapists 521w, 572-3w
House renovation grants (04:12:91) 372-8
Industrial training 323w
Integrated schools 978-9
Languages education 325-6w
Lay visitors 323w
Local government reform 986
National insurance contributions 264w, 388w
Personal pensions 325-6w
Post-mortems 67w
Public expenditure 324w, 515w
Pupil-teacher ratios 979-80
Retirement pensions 450w
Rights of accused 324w
Road accidents 515w
Road works 66w
School admission 451w, 517-8w
School population 324w
Schools 322-3w
Set-aside schemes 573-5w

Northern Ireland—continued
Shipbuilding 977-8
Social Fund 328w
Social security abuse 520w
Social security recipients 573w
Student loans 512w
Sunday trading 983-4
Taking & driving away 383
Territorial Army 589w
Terrorism 513w, 522w, 980-1
Tourism 512w
Unemployment 515w
Voting methods 515w

Northern Ireland Airports
Privatisation 212w
Profits 212w

Northern Ireland Electricity
Electricity supply industry 513w
Equal opportunities 513-4w

Northern Ireland government
512w, 515w

Northern Ireland Housing Executive
(04:12:91) 372-8
Expenditure 211-2w

Northern Ireland Office
210w
Council of Ministers 66w
Disabled workers 264w
European Communities 65w
Ministerial duties 387-9w

Northern region
Community care 64w
Eye disorders 111w

Northern Regional Health Authority
Finance 112w

Northfield House Peckham
Estate Action 68w

Northumberland
Employment level 24w
Police 380-1
Sheep premiums 29w
Smoking 158w

Norway
European monetary system 42w

Norwich City Council
Public sector housing 257-8

Nuclear accidents
Radioactive wastes 338w

Nuclear disarmament
421w
USSR 228w

Nuclear Electric
383w, 595
Nuclear safety 540-1w
Radioactive wastes 541w

Nuclear Installations Inspectorate
540-1w

Nuclear non proliferation
USSR 87w

Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty
276w
International conferences 348w
USSR 479-80w

Nuclear physics
Daresbury (11:12:91) 969-74
Work permits 340w

Nuclear power
383w, 595-6
EC action 336w
Health physics 492w
International Atomic Energy Agency 337w

Nuclear power stations
Construction 381w
Decommissioning 541w
Nuclear safeguards 187w

Nuclear power stations—continued
Sellafield 187w

Nuclear safeguards
141w
Euratom 336w
Nuclear power stations 187w

Nuclear safety
Nuclear Electric 540-1w
Nuclear weapons 542w
Sizewell A 338w

Nuclear submarines
Armed forces deployment 542w
Decommissioning 543w

Nuclear test ban
Verification 543w

Nuclear weapons
Departmental correspondence 543w
Iraq 268w
Nuclear safety 542w

Nuclear weapons policy
USSR 496w

Nuclear Weapons Safety Working Group
542w

Nuclear weapons tests
96w, 347-8w
USA 322w

Nurses
Prescriptions (04:12:91) 279

Nurses Midwives & Health Visitors Act 1979
Questions
117-8w

Nutrition
School meals 238w

Oakham
Police stations 138w

O'Brien, Mr William
Debates etc.
Regional government (06:12:91) 514, 528-9, 551, 555-9, 564, 568, 571
Questions
EC social policy 988-9
Energy conservation, Companies 589w
Public sector housing 258
Youth training scheme, Wakefield 104w

Occupational health
481-2w, 569-70w

OECD countries
Overseas aid 607-8

Offenders
Bail 214-5w

Offensive weapons
Amnesties 146w, 434w
Crime prevention 3w
Injuries 842
Prosecutions 506w
Scotland 842

OFFER
see Office of Electricity Regulation

Office of Arts & Libraries
Disabled workers 83-4w

Office of Electricity Regulation
382w

Office of Fair Trading
382w, 499-500w

Office of Gas Supply
382w

Office of Telecommunications
Industrial disputes 280-1w

Offices
Child Support Agency 525w
Health & Safety Executive 575w

Official engagements
192w, 375w, 481w

Official hospitality
NHS trusts 445w

Official Solicitor's Dept
361w

Official visits
Developing countries 277w
European Communities 223-4w

Offshore safety
531w

Offshore Safety Division
531w
Training 467w

Offshore structures
Safety equipment 467w
Shipping safety 335w

Offshore suppliers
EC internal trade 599

OFGAS
see Office of Gas Supply

OFT
see Office of Fair Trading

OFTEL
see Office of Telecommunications

O'Hara, Mr Edward
Questions
Channel tunnel, Fire prevention 553-4w
Local education authorities, Capital investment 415w
Special education 719

Oil industry
Economic League 593-4
UK companies abroad 332w

Oil pollution control
Minch 145-6w

Oil reserves
North Sea oil 44w, 597

One parent families
Family credit 573w
South Down 328w

O'Neill, Mr Martin
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 735-7
NHS trusts, Scotland (03:12:91) 151
Questions
Armed forces civilians, Redundancy 86-7w
Armed forces uniforms 87w
Armoured fighting vehicles, Armed forces deployment 544w
Arms control negotiations 497w
Arms control negotiations, Warships 88w
Biological & Toxin Weapons Convention, International conferences 474w
Chemical & biological warfare, Canada 474w
Chemical & biological warfare, Defence research 474w
Chemical & biological warfare, Disclosure of information 474w
Defence equipment, Armed forces deployment 88w, 544-5w
Defence expenditure 88w, 544w
Defence Quality Assurance Directorate, Civil service dispersal 545w
Defence review, Armed forces deployment 84-6w, 545w
Defence review, Helicopters 84w
Exservicemen, Housing 544w
Guided weapons, USA 87-8w
Naval bases, Almondbank 84w
Nuclear non proliferation, USSR 87w
Peace keeping operations 87w
United Nations, Arms trade 498w

Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 867-8

Open government
(04:12:91) 280

Open University
209w
Eastern Europe 209w
Environmental education 209w

Opencast mining
600-1
Production 187w

Opera
Wales 15-6

Operation Scotcheck
193w, 223-4w, 232w, 281w, 303-4w

Oppenheim, Mr Phillip
Debates etc.
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 421, 422, 473, 475-9
Members' conduct, Points of order (03:12:91) 164
Sea Fisheries (Wildlife Conservation) Bill, 1R (04:12:91) 282
Questions
Business statements 408
Coal mining, Subsidence 44w
Iron & steel industry, Scotland 850-1
Police, Expenditure 288-92w
Uniform business rate 256
VAT registration 242w

Opportunity 2000
20-2

Opposition
Higher civil servants 190w, 192-3w

Opposition days
Economic situation (05:12:91) 416-502

Oral questions
Speaker's rulings & statements (03:12:91) 130, 135, (11:12:91) 854, (12:12:91) 988

Orange badge scheme
519w

Orders & regulations
Deer farming 246w
House of Commons debates 168-9w
Local Government Finance Bill 1991/92 489w

Origin marking
Food labelling 29w

Orimulsion
Air pollution control 78-9w
Pembroke power station 78w

Osteoporosis
4-5

Outdoor advertising
Roads 310w

Outer estates
Housing estates 170w

Overseas aid
96w, 151w, 731
Cyprus 262w
Expenditure 385w
Guyana 96w
Iraq 97w
Kurdistan 147w, 151w
Legal profession 278-9w, 387w
Mauritius 278w
OECD countries 607-8
Somalia 388w, 421w
Yugoslavia 277w

Overseas Development Administration
96w, 387w

Overseas students
Art education 449w

Overseas trade
Chlorofluorocarbons 279-80w

Overseas workers
Domestic service 509w

Overtime
Dept of Social Security 52-3w
Metropolitan Police 139w

Owner occupied housing
Family credit 352w

Oxleas Wood
249-50
East London river crossing 249

Oystermouth
Bus stations 101w

Ozone layer
428w
Air pollution control 461w
Chemicals 461w
Civil service manpower 428w
Research 364w, 428w
Telecommunications industry 430w

Packaging
Transport of radioactive materials 361w

Page, Mr Richard
Questions
Local education authorities, Expenditure 416w
Ministers, Pay 30-2w
Prisons, Security 214w

Paice, Mr James
Debates etc.
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 483-4
Questions
Shops, Crime prevention 388-9
Vietnamese refugees, Repatriation 390-1w

Paint ball guns
217w
Prosecutions 274w

Paisley
Economic situation 455-6w

Paisley, Rev Ian
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 327, 353-6
Common fisheries policy (11:12:91) 923
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 868
Questions
Bombings, Belfast 982
Business statements 404-5
Passports 382
Shipbuilding, Northern Ireland 977-8

Pakistan
Arms trade 321w

Palace of Westminster
257w
Recycling 402-3w

Parental responsibility
Young offenders 4w

Parent's Charter
257w, 730

Parish councils
184w

Parking
189w
Handicapped drivers 519w
Hospitals 482w

Parliamentary constituencies
3-4w
Scotland 453w

Parliamentary furnishings
Removal services 257w

Parliamentary privilege
Speaker's rulings & statements (05:12:91) 415

Parliamentary procedure
Maastricht Summit 227w
Transport (02:12:91) 39-77

Parliamentary questions
Civil service agencies 152w
Costs 369-70w

Parliamentary sovereignty & European Community
Maastricht Summit 192w
Referenda (04:12:91) 280

Parliamentary Works Office
118-9w

Part-time employment
Publicity 472w

Party membership
Public appointments 102w

Passenger transport executives
Corporation tax 161w
Greater London 556w

Passport Agency
see United Kingdom Passport Agency

Passports
382

Patchett, Mr Terry
Debates etc.
Coal mining (10:12:91) 797-8
Questions
EC social policy 988

Patients
Guy's & Lewisham NHS Trust 203w
Medical equipment (04:12:91) 281

Patient's Charter
129-31, 157w, 257w, 379w
Hospital waiting lists 110w
Scotland 459w

Patnick, Mr Irvine, Lord Commissioner to the Treasury
Debates etc.
Prison Security Bill, 2R (03:12:91) 177
Socialism (13:12:91) 1248, 1255
Sunday trading (12:12:91) 1202-3

Patten, Rt Hon John, Minister of State, Home Office
Debates etc.
Aggravated Taking Bill, 2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 629, 635-6, 643, 646, 653, 659, 664, 681-6, 687-9, 691-4, 701
Crime (12:12:91) 1051, 1062, 1064-8
Regional government (06:12:91) 534
Questions
Arrests, Shoplifting 138w
Bail 504w
Bail, Committal proceedings 582w
Bail, EC countries 393w
Bail, Habitual offenders 433-4w
Bail, Offenders 214-5w
Bail hostels 217-8w, 502-4w, 579-81w
Bail hostels, Change of use 580w
Bail hostels, Children Act 1989 580w
Bail hostels, Crime 503w
Bail hostels, Government grants 503w
Bail hostels, Habitual offenders 503w
Bail hostels, Management 579w
Bail hostels, Operating costs 580w
Bail hostels, Per capita costs 579-80w
Bail hostels, Unemployed 502w
Bail information schemes, Government grants 581-2w
Bardsley, Kevin, Criminal appeals 140w
Cars, Burglar alarms 383
Civil defence 6w
Community charge, Non-payment 285w, 294w
Community service orders 215w
Crime prevention 213w
Crime prevention, Housing estates 5w
Crime victims, Government grants 4-5w
Crown Prosecution Service, Administrative delays 140w
Custodial treatment, Costs 504w
Home Office, Civil service dispersal 393w
Homicide, Law reform 433w
Indictable offences, Confiscation orders 502w
Magistrates' courts, Rural areas 432-3w
Manpower 394w
Metropolitan Police, Arrests 139-40w

Patten, Rt Hon John—continued
Motor insurance, Driving offences 583w
Motor insurance, Security equipment 5-6w
Motor vehicle theft, Crime prevention 216w
Neighbourhood watch schemes 386-7
Offensive weapons, Prosecutions 506w
Police interrogation, Video recordings 391
Police misconduct, Committal proceedings 139w
Probation committees 578-9w
Probation officers, Public relations 578w
Rate arrears, Civil proceedings 139w
Security industry 286w
Security industry, Licensing 286w
Shops, Crime prevention 388-9
Shops, Theft 389
Taking & driving away 383-4
Taking & driving away, Northern Ireland 383
Taking & driving away, Young people 382
Theft, Birds 138w
Theft, Electricity supply industry 540w
Victim support schemes, Lancashire 244w
Young offenders 219w
Young offenders, Custodial treatment 6-7w, 217w
Young offenders, Parental responsibility 4w

Pawsey, Mr James
Questions
Educational assessment, Primary education 18w
Income support, Pensioners 126w
Intelligence tests, Research finance 90w
Local government reform 244
Police, Manpower 214w
"Science & Technology" 449w

Pay
152-3w, 341-2w, 409w
Civil service 36w
Dentists 201w
Family doctors 100-1w, 113w
Further education teachers 90-1w
Hospital consultants 136-7w
Merseyside 27w
Ministers 30-2w
Teachers 717-8
Women 103w

Pay incentives
Civil service agencies 568w, 586w
Ministry of Defence 586w
Welsh Office 568w

Pay settlements
Educational finance 297w

Payroll deduction scheme
House of Commons staff 31w

Peace keeping operations
87w

Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Questions
Speech therapists 116w
Speech therapists, Recruitment 117w
Speech therapists, Training 116-7w
Speech therapists, Yorkshire Regional Health Authority 117w
Speech therapy, Dewsbury Health Authority 116w

Pearl Harbour
Anniversaries 321w, 349w

Peers
Speaker's rulings & statements (12:12:91) 1071-2, (13:12:91) 1264

Pembroke power station
Orimulsion 78w

Pembrokeshire NHS Trust
438-9w

Pendle
386

Pendry, Mr Tom
Questions
Football, Arrests 215w
Rate rebates, Sports facilities 492w
Sports, Departmental publications 511w

Pendry, Mr Tom—continued
Sports facilities, Rate rebates 538-9w

Pension funds
(12:12:91) 1004
Consolidated Fund debates (12:12:91) 1069-89
Fraud 260w
Investment 525-6w
Maxwell companies 373w, 394-5, 475w
Mirror Group Newspapers (04:12:91) 277

Pensioners
Cold weather payments 242-3w
Income support 126w, 221-2w
Personal income 51w

Pentachlorophenol
589w

Performance appraisal
Teachers 413-4w

Performance indicators
Civil service agencies 569w, 584w, 586-7w, 590-1w
Dept of Health 584w
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food 590-1w
Ministry of Defence 586-7w
Welsh Office 569w

Perinatal mortality
(04:12:91) 280, 443-4w

Personal income
Income support 353w
Pensioners 51w

Personal pensions
National Insurance Fund 325-6w
Northern Ireland 325-6w

Personal savings
369w

Personal social services
Fees & charges 113w

Personal tax allowances
Income tax 252-6w

Pesticides
Hazardous materials 281w

Petrochemicals
Iraq 480-1w

Petroleum Engineering Directorate
593

Petroleum exploration
Firth of Clyde 43w
Irish Sea 600

Pets
Waste disposal 207w

Pigs
Animal housing 246-7w

Pike, Mr Peter L
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 734
Regional government (06:12:91) 514, 517
Questions
Burnley Pendle & Rossendale Health Authority, Public appointments 585w
Community care grants, Prisoners' release 50w
Disabled facilities grants 313w
Local government reform 244
Noise abatement zones 311w
Police custody, Prisoners 578w
Road construction, Contracts 308-9w
Royal National Institute for the Blind, Surveys 93-4w
Student loans 722-3

Planning & Compensation Act 1991
Questions
171-2w, 254-5, 367w

Planning authorities
Alternative energy 185w

Planning permission
255
Alternative energy 69w
Fairgrounds 237w
Fish farming 494-5w
Smallholdings 494-5w

Plutonium
International conferences 421w
Japan 320w

Plymouth
Schools 510w

Point of Ayr
Redundancy 8-9

Points of order
Speaker's rulings & statements (02:12:91) 36, (09:12:91) 616, (13:12:91) 1263-4

Poland Hungary assistance for economic restructuring
262-3w

Police
Criminal statistics 394w
Expenditure 288-92w
Government grants 121w
Helicopters 121-2w
Manpower 214w, 390, 394w, 433w, 506w
North Tyneside 218w
Northumberland 380-1
Scotland 399-400w
South Wales 506w
West Yorkshire 390

Police & Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989
Questions
324w

Police cautions
Young offenders 4w

Police civilians
139w, 213-4w, 505w
West Yorkshire Police Authority 505w

Police Complaints Authority
Metropolitan Police 293w

Police custody
396w
Greater Manchester 578w
Lay visitors 323w
Prisoners 578w

Police deaths on duty
Salt, Tony (12:12:91) 1221-8

Police interrogation
Castlereagh 985-6
Video recordings 391

Police misconduct
Committal proceedings 139w

Police national computer
Royal Ulster Constabulary 89w

Police powers
Football 219w
Trespass 243-4w

Police records
Metropolitan Police 219w
Prostitution 508-9w

Police stations
Oakham 138w

Police vehicles
Road accidents 140w, 583w

Political activities
Charities 273w
Non-departmental public bodies 552w

Political refugees
Bangladesh 396w

Politics & government
Turkey 421w

Pollution
Disclosure of information 68-9w

Pollution control
Merchant ships 306w

Pollution Inspectorate
see HM Inspectorate of Pollution

Pollution monitoring
River Ribble 238w

Polytechnics
413w
Staff-student ratios 91w

Polytechnics' & Colleges' Funding Council
Expenditure 239-40w

Porter, Mr David
Debates etc.
Common fisheries policy (11:12:91) 951-3
Questions
Community charge, East Anglia 69-70w
Community charge, Waveney 70w
Marine Accident Investigation Branch 305w
Sizewell A 338w
Sizewell A, Floods 337-8w
Sizewell A, Nuclear safety 338w
Teachers, Performance appraisal 413-4w

Portillo, Mr Michael, Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities
Questions
City Challenge, Urban programme 236w
Community charge capping 170w
Council tax 169-70w, 252-3, 494w
Council tax, Administrative costs 169w
Council tax, Local authority powers 253
Docklands Light Railway, London Docklands Development Corporation 236-7w
Government grants to local authorities 317-8w
Government grants to local authorities, Cumbria 489-90w
Local Government Finance Bill 1991/92, Orders & regulations 489w
Local government reform 79w
Rate support grants, Local government expenditure 554w
Uniform business rate 255-6
Urban areas, Local authority powers 173w

Portraits
Maze Prison 514w
Royal family 514w

Post Office
179w

Postal services
Monopolies 179w
Privatisation 179w

Postgraduate education
720-1

Postgraduate students
Discretionary student grants 720

Post-mortems
Disclosure of information 67w
Northern Ireland 67w

Potatoes
EC action 592-3w

Powell, Mr Ray
Debates etc.
Sunday trading (12:12:91) 1196-201, 1210
Questions
Business statements 403
Training & enterprise councils, Wales 1-2

Powell, Mr William
Debates etc.
International law, Criminal law (12:12:91) 1033-7
Questions
Council house sales, Northamptonshire 488-90w
Local government expenditure, Northamptonshire 491w
Local government revenue, Northamptonshire 429w, 489-90w

Powell, Mr William—continued
Regional selective assistance, Corby 373w

Powers of entry
Valuation 370w

Pregnant women
Social security recipients 54w

Prerogative of mercy
Bentley, Derek 387-8

Prescott, Mr John
Questions
Railway accidents, Severn tunnel 613-4

Prescriptions
Medical equipment 63w
Nurses (04:12:91) 279
Tranquillisers 135w

Press advertising
Greenhouse effect 174w

Press releases
Fair Employment Commission for Northern Ireland (12:12:91) 1027-9

Pre-trial procedures
Administrative delays 146-7w

Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989
Questions
285-6w, 324w, 396w

Price, Sir David
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 741

Primary education
716
Educational assessment 18w, 143, 298w, 417w
Educational standards 414w
France 240w
Special education 727

Prime Minister
480w
House of Commons broadcasting 151w

Prime Minister's questions
Speaker's rulings & statements (05:12:91) 415

Prison accommodation
Remand in custody 504w

Prison education services
Young offenders 6w

Prison escapes
Brixton Prison 122w, 394-5w
Full Sutton Prison 294w

Prison governors
395w

Prison medical services
Faulkner, AP 218w
Mothers 577w
Prison visitors 577w
Vaccination 287w

Prison mutiny
(03:12:91) 167-222

Prison Security Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
2R (03:12:91) 167-222

Prison sentences
244w
Homicide 433w

Prison staff
Brixton Prison 2-3w
Leave 502w
Manpower 502w
Wandsworth Prison 502w
Wolds Remand Prison 392w

Prison visitors
Holloway Prison 577w
Prison medical services 577w

Prisoner escorts
Contracts for services 219-20w

Prisoners
Deportation 287w
Hepatitis 287w
HIV infection 214w
Police custody 578w

Prisoners' home leave
355-6w

Prisoners' mail
Brixton Prison 139w

Prisoners' release
Community care grants 50w

Prisoners' rights
Childbirth 577w

Prisoners' transfers
Hewell Grange Young Offender Institution 217w

Prisons
Expenditure 216-7w
Security 214w

Prisons Inspectorate
see HM Inspectorate of Prisons

Private bills
Speaker's rulings & statements (02:12:91) 63

Private Members' motions
Regional government (06:12:91) 512-82
Socialism (13:12:91) 1230-98
Speaker's rulings & statements (13:12:91) 1298

Private notice questions
Speaker's rulings & statements (05:12:91) 397, 398

Private rented housing
Uniform business rate 492w

Privatisation
393-4
British Coal Corporation 333w
British Telecom 299-300w
British Waterways Board 363w
Electricity supply industry 592
Energy prices 335w
Export Credits Guarantee Department 11-2w
Insurance Services Group 205w, 260-1w
Local government services 171w
Northern Ireland Airports 212w
Postal services 179w
Property Services Agency 176-7w
Scottish Bus Group 44-6w
Skillcentres 134w
Strathclyde Buses 232w
Trust ports 359-60w

Probate Registry Cardiff
100w
Furniture 9w, 77w, 146w

Probation committees
503-4w, 578-9w

Probation Inspectorate
see HM Inspectorate of Probation

Probation officers
Public relations 578w

Procurement
NHS 99w

Productivity
British Coal Corporation 334w
Coal mining 591

Professional organisations
Complaints 97-8w

Property development
Hanover Square Bradford 183-5w

Property Holdings
77w

Property Services Agency
Privatisation 176-7w

Property transfer
Hospital closures 378-80w
Housing estates 314-5w

Property values
Council tax 250

Prosecutions
273w
Club licensing 66w
Fraud 8w
Nazi war crimes 603
Offensive weapons 506w
Paint ball guns 274w
Tottenham Three 181w
Wages councils 526-32w
Waste disposal 491w

Prostitution
Police records 508-9w

Protection of Pension Funds & Investments Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (12:12:91) 1004

PSA Services
Empty property 361-2w

Public appointments
Burnley Pendle & Rossendale Health Authority 585w
Director of Public Prosecutions 159w
HM Inspectorate of Schools 538w
Party membership 102w
Wales 102w
Welsh Office 532-7w

Public bodies
Disclosure of information (04:12:91) 281

Public buildings
Directorate of Telecommunications 434w

Public expenditure
304w, 396, 478w
Ministerial statements (04:12:91) 261-76
NHS 99-100w
Northern Ireland 324w, 515w
Scotland (04:12:91) 261-76

Public footpaths
Level crossings 307-8w, 405w

Public holidays
133w, (12:12:91) 1039-42
EC countries 339-40w
Netherlands 27w, 339w

Public houses
Brewing industry 10-1w
Public petitions (05:12:91) 502-3

Public libraries
49w

Public morals
(12:12:91) 1005-7

Public Order Act 1986
Questions
243-4w

Public petitions
Gypsies (13:12:91) 1229
Kashmir (10:12:91) 830, (11:12:91) 968
Public houses (05:12:91) 502-3
RU486 (06:12:91) 511

Public relations
Probation officers 578w

Public sector borrowing
Airports 188w

Public sector borrowing requirement
38-9w, 368-9w

Public sector housing
258
Capital investment 423-4w
Empty property 311-2w

***Public sector housing**—continued*
Housing construction 257, 424-5w
Housing standards 312-3w
Norwich City Council 257-8

Public utilities
108-9w

Publicity
Civil service agencies 569w
Welsh Office 569w

Pugwash Conference on Science & World Affairs
474w

Punjab
261-2w, 390w

Pupil-teacher ratios
715
Northern Ireland 979-80

Quest for a Test for Cancer
Research finance 159w, 330w

Quin, Ms Joyce
Debates etc.
EC grants & loans (12:12:91) 1187-9, 1193
Regional government (06:12:91) 512-25, 529-30, 534-5, 566, 570, 581-2
Questions
Business statements 1001
RENAVAL, EC grants & loans 178w

Quinlivan, Nessan
122w

Racal Electronics
Takeovers 375w

Racial attacks
990

Racial discrimination
Europe 276-7w
Metropolitan Police 122w

Radiation
Holy Loch 501w

Radiation hazards
Fish 549w
River Ribble 165w
Sea pollution 549-50w
Sellafield 364w
THORP 382w
X rays 485w

Radice, Mr Giles
Debates etc.
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 425-6, 471-5, 478
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 869
Regional government (06:12:91) 515-6, 519

Radio engineering
Defence procurement 180w

"Radioactive Heaven & Earth"
375-6w

Radioactive Substances Act 1960
Questions
Consolidation bills 475w

Radioactive waste disposal
493w

Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee
494w

Radioactive wastes
Nuclear accidents 338w
Nuclear Electric 541w

Radioactivity
Licensing 493w

RAF Brawdy
12

Raffan, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
Tourism (Overseas Promotion) (Wales) Bill, 1R (04:12:91) 281
Questions
EC regional policy 18w

***Raffan, Mr Keith**—continued*
Redundancy, Point of Ayr 8-9

Raghip, Engin
181w

Railway accidents
Severn tunnel 609-14

Railway electrification
Midland main railway line 190w
West Yorkshire 57w, 233w

Railway Inspectorate
(02:12:91) 39-77

Railway network
Channel tunnel 188-9w, 357w

Railway signals
609-10

Railway stations
Ashford station 105w
Bus services 11

Railway transport
Transport policy 422w

Railway travel
Cambrian Coast railway line 439w
Channel tunnel 106-7w
Consolidated Fund debates (12:12:91) 1124-44
Kent (12:12:91) 1124-44
Strathclyde 457w
West Yorkshire 233w

Rain forests
Brazil 386-7w

Randall, Mr Stuart
Debates etc.
Sunday trading (12:12:91) 1201-6, 1208
Questions
Neighbourhood watch schemes 387

Rapid Reaction Corps
(10:12:91) 733-48

Rate arrears
Civil proceedings 139w

Rate rebates
Sports facilities 492w, 538-9w

Rate support grants
Local government expenditure 554w

Rathgael Training School
519w

Reading
Educational standards 298w

Reading Borough Council
Local government revenue 488w

Reading University
592w

Recess motions
(12:12:91) 1005-46

RECHAR
12w, 178w, (12:12:91) 1184-95

Recognition of states
Ukraine 320w
Yugoslavia 593-4w

Recruitment
Euratom 336w
House of Commons Library 403w
Legal profession 602-3
Royal Ulster Constabulary 211w
Speech therapists 117w

Recycling
Palace of Westminster 402-3w

Red Arrows
Operating costs 268w

Red Cross
see International Red Cross

Red flag exercises
270w

Redmond, Mr Martin
Questions
Airmisses, Shipping 57w
"Good Irrigation Practice" 164w
NHS charges exemptions 328-9w
Transport of radioactive materials, Motorways 57w

Redundancy
Angus 852
Armed forces civilians 86-7w
Coventry 26-7w
Dock workers 556w
Point of Ayr 8-9
Tees & Hartlepool Port Authority 555w

Redundancy pay
Bank of Credit & Commerce International 104w
Dock labour scheme 555w
Skills Training Agency 134w

Redwood, Mr John, Minister of State for Industry
Questions
Audit, Companies 10w
Brewing industry, Public houses 10-1w
Cars, Burglar alarms 99w
Financial services, Consultants 204w
Financial services, EC action 260w
Highlands & Islands Airports, Monopolies & Mergers Commission 375w
House of Fraser, Takeovers 177w
Insurance companies 259-60w
Investment Management Regulatory Organisation, Investment in financial assets 498-9w
Monopolies & Mergers Commission, Car industry 10w
NHS, Procurement 99w
Office of Telecommunications, Industrial disputes 280-1w
Operation Scotcheck 281w
Professional organisations, Complaints 97-8w
Racal Electronics, Takeovers 375w
Sunday trading, Supermarkets 260w
Supermarkets, Eggs 464w
Telecommunications industry, Innovation 97-8w, 179w
Telephone charges, Billing 9-10w
Telephone systems, Standardisation 204-5w
Telephone systems, Telephones 205w
Telephones, Households 178-9w
Whitbread, Tenancy agreements 498w

Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Debates etc.
Contempt of court (03:12:91) 231
Housing (Fitness Standard) (Amendment) Bill, 1R (04:12:91) 282

Referenda
Parliamentary sovereignty & European Community (04:12:91) 280
Western Sahara 319w

Referendum Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (04:12:91) 280

Refrigeration
Milk deliveries 388w

Refugees
Children in care 115w
Croatia 96-7w
Eritrea 115w

Refuse derived fuel
333w, 336w

Regional aid
Rural areas 285w

Regional arts boards
17

Regional government
Private Members' motions (06:12:91) 512-82

Regional health authorities
Capital 378-80w
NHS finance 200-2w

Regional planning & development
Kent 990

Regional selective assistance
(06:12:91) 512-82
Corby 373w

Registration of Clubs (Northern Ireland) Order 1987
Questions
66w

Remand in custody
Prison accommodation 504w

Removal services
Parliamentary furnishings 257w

RENAVAL
178w
EC grants & loans 178w

Rendering industry
208w

Rent arrears
Chelmsford Borough Council 430w

Rented housing
Wales 6, 19w

Renton, Rt Hon Tim, Minister of State, Privy Council Office (Minister of State for the Arts)
Questions
Arts, Teesside 48-9w
Arts Council, Government grants 14
Arts council grants 14-5
Arts festivals, Birmingham 48w
Arts festivals, East Midlands 48w
Arts finance 15, 49w
Arts finance, Greater London 49w
Arts finance, Wales 16
Civil servants' secondment, Arts 19-20
Civil servants' secondment, Scotland 20
Civil servants' secondment, Wales 20
Civil service, Equal opportunities 435w
Civil service, Job satisfaction 567w
Civil service agencies 27-8w
Civil service recruitment, Universities 18-9
Director of Public Prosecutions, Public appointments 159w
Equal opportunities 18-9
Equal opportunities, Training 18
Equal opportunities, Women 20-2
Higher civil servants, Women 28w
London Arts Board 17
Minister for the Civil Service, Disabled workers 84w
Non-departmental public bodies 567w
North West Arts, Arts finance 48w
Office of Arts & Libraries, Disabled workers 83-4w
Opposition, Higher civil servants 190w
Public libraries 49w
Scottish Arts Council 16-7
Theatres, Keswick 48w
Welsh National Opera 15-6

Rents
Social Fund 54w

Rents to mortgages scheme
Basildon 313-4w, 363w
Milton Keynes 313-4w
Television advertising 363w

Repatriation
Vietnamese refugees 390-1w

Republic of Ireland
Criminal proceedings 13w

Research councils
Income 298w

Research finance
Alternative energy 74-6w
Arts 726-7

Research finance—continued
Intelligence tests 90w
Quest for a Test for Cancer 159w, 330w
Social science 726-7
Solar power 187w

Resettlement units
128w

Residential care
Estimates days (10:12:91) 751-823
Local government finance 51w

Resource Allocation Working Party
485-6w

Respiratory diseases
Citric acid 465-7w

Respite care
Mentally handicapped 102w

REST proposals
138w

Restart programme
339w

Retail price index
370w

Retirement age
50w

Retirement pensions
51-2w, 350-1w, 470w, 472w
EC countries 523w
Northern Ireland 450w

Revenue support grant
315w
Local government expenditure 554w
Road works 316-7w
Sunderland 234w
Yorkshire & Humberside 184w

"Review of the Open University"
209w

Richardson, Ms Jo
Questions
Child benefit 469w
Maternity benefits, Social security recipients 153w
Maternity pay 103-4w
Pay, Women 103w

Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm, Secretary of State for Transport
Questions
Ashford station, Railway stations 105w
Channel tunnel, Railway network 188-9w
Railway accidents, Severn tunnel 609-14

Rights of accused
Northern Ireland 324w

Rights of way
Citizen's Charter 283w, 426w

Riot control weapons
293w

River Darent
247

River pollution
173w, 246-7
Fish 318w
National Rivers Authority 431-2w
Wales 18-9w

River Ribble
Pollution monitoring 238w
Radiation hazards 165w

River Taff
Salmon 134w
Water abstraction 136w, 570-1w

RNAD Trecwn
12

Road accidents
Northern Ireland 515w
Police vehicles 140w, 583w

Road closures
511-2w
A13 309w

Road construction
A1 343w
A465 20w
Contracts 108w, 308-9w, 439w, 458w
Newry bypass 66w
Scotland 458w
Wales 198w, 439w

Road safety
(12:12:91) 1029-32

Road tolls
Greater London 105w

Road traffic
A45 358-60w

Road traffic control
(04:12:91) 279

Road works
A1 306-7w
A10 189-90w
Cost effectiveness 357-8w
Direct labour departments 108-9w
Expenditure 459w
Northern Ireland 66w
Revenue support grant 316-7w
Scotland 459w
Wales 436-8w

Roads
Outdoor advertising 310w

Roberts, Rt Hon Sir Wyn, Minister of State for Wales
Questions
A48(M) 406-7w
A465, Road construction 20w
Areas of outstanding natural beauty, Wales 20w
Art education, Student numbers 440w
Bus services, Wales 405w
Cambrian Coast railway line, Railway travel 439w
Cardiff Airport 21w
Educational advisers, Manpower 406w
Foreign investment in UK, Wales 10-1
HM Inspectorate of Schools, Manpower 405w
HM Inspectorate of Schools, Public appointments 538w
HM Inspectorate of Schools, Wales 405-6w, 438w
Level crossings, Public footpaths 405w
Llay School 198w
Motorways, Wales 101w
Probate Registry Cardiff 100w
Road construction, Contracts 439w
Road construction, Wales 198w
Road works, Wales 436-8w
Schools, Wales 19w
Training & enterprise councils, Wales 1-3
Welsh language, Adult education 19-20w
Welsh language, Legislation 12-3
Wide load vehicles, Trees 137w
Youth training, Wales 405w

Robertson, Mr George
Debates etc.
Croatia (12:12:91) 1162-5
Western Sahara (12:12:91) 1171-3

Robinson, Mr Peter
Questions
Administration of justice, Northern Ireland 975-6

Roe, Mrs Marion
Questions
A10, Road works 189-90w
Fairgrounds, Planning permission 237w

Rogers, Mr Allan
Debates etc.
Pension funds (12:12:91) 1078, 1081, 1087-8
Territorial Army (12:12:91) 1115-9
Questions
Armed forces, Blood sports 268-9w

Rogers, Mr Allan—continued
Defence procurement 269w
Red Arrows, Operating costs 268w
Thermal observation & gunnery sights, Defence procurement 269-70w

Romania
Adoption 320-1w, 329-30w

Romanian Adoption Committee
329-30w

Rooker, Mr Jeff
Debates etc.
Corporate Safety & Environmental Information Bill, 1R (04:12:91) 281
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 492
Questions
Family doctors 132-3

Rooney, Mr Terry
Debates etc.
Kashmir, Public petitions (11:12:91) 968
Questions
Departmental correspondence, Administrative delays 445w
Essex County Council 394
Martin House Hospice, Government grants 443-5w

Ross, Mr Ernie
Questions
Scottish health boards, Finance 858

Ross, Mr William
Debates etc.
Hazardous wastes (12:12:91) 1145-53
Territorial Army (12:12:91) 1112, 1120
Questions
Africa, Democracy 496w
Agriculture, Income 517-20w
Birds, Northern Ireland 450-1w
Cattle, Prices 516w
Clenbuterol, Convictions 211w
Deer farming, Northern Ireland 211w
Deer farming, Orders & regulations 246w
Hazardous materials 487w
Hazardous wastes, Northern Ireland 984-5
Incinerators, Maydown 451w
Paint ball guns 217w
Paint ball guns, Prosecutions 274w
Public sector borrowing requirement 368-9w
Training Enterprise & Education Directorate, Expenditure 131w, 325-6w

Rossi, Sir Hugh
Questions
Ecolabelling 259-60

Rost, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Coal mining (10:12:91) 793-7
Questions
Alternative energy, Planning authorities 185w
Combined heat & power 598-9, 602
Electricity generation 423w
Family doctors, Alternative medicine 585-7w

Rosyth Dockyard
Vanguard submarines 588w

Rowe, Mr Andrew
Questions
Devolution, Scotland 848
Regional planning & development, Kent 990
Youth services 726

Rowlands, Mr Ted
Questions
EC integration, Subsidiarity 318w
Educational advisers, Manpower 406w
European monetary system, Norway 42w
HM Inspectorate of Schools, Manpower 210w, 405w
HM Inspectorate of Schools, Public appointments 538w

Rowlands, Mr Ted—continued
HM Inspectorate of Schools, Wales 405-6w, 438w
Hospital waiting lists, Mid Glamorgan 537-8w
Land reclamation, Merthyr Tydfil 438w
Minor works grants, Community charge 283w
Mortgage defaulters, Wales 13-4
Non-departmental public bodies, Wales 404w
Welsh Development Agency, Factories 248w
Youth training, Wales 283w, 405w

Royal Academy of Dancing
19-20

Royal Auxiliary Air Force
(10:12:91) 733-48

Royal Botanic Gardens Kew
432w

Royal College of Radiologists
485w

Royal family
Portraits 514w

Royal National Institute for the Blind
446w
Surveys 93-4w

Royal Naval Auxiliary Service
(10:12:91) 733-48

Royal Naval Reserve
55w, (10:12:91) 733-48
Defence expenditure 349w

Royal ordnance factories
Health physics 269w

Royal Scottish National Hospital
(03:12:91) 145-62

Royal Ulster Constabulary
323w
Information services 452-3w
National Criminal Intelligence Service 389w
Police national computer 89w
Recruitment 211w

RU486
Abortion (06:12:91) 511
Public petitions (06:12:91) 511

Ruchill Hospital
Hospital closures 841

Ruddock, Mrs Joan
Questions
Docklands Light Railway 233w
Docklands Light Railway, London Docklands Development Corporation 233w, 236-7w
Driving licences, Elderly 309-10w
Family credit, Owner occupied housing 352w
Means tested benefits, Social security recipients 350w
Palace of Westminster, Recycling 402-3w
Road works, Direct labour departments 108-9w
Thameslink 234w

Rufford, N
165-6w, 282w

Rumbold, Rt Hon Angela, Minister of State, Home Office
Debates etc.
Prison Security Bill, 2R (03:12:91) 182, 218-22
Sunday trading (12:12:91) 1202, 1204-11
Questions
Advocates for Animals, Animal experiments 216w
Animal experiments, Licensing 217w
Belmarsh Prison Woolwich, Departmental correspondence 509w

Rumbold, Rt Hon Angela—continued
Brixton Prison, Prison staff 2-3w
Brixton Prison, Prisoners' mail 139w
Computer privacy, Charities 120w
Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 121w
Data Protection Registrar, Welsh language 293w
Electoral register 218w
Electoral register, Advertising 293-4w
Ethnic minorities, Government grants to local authorities 508w
Faulkner, AP, Prison medical services 218w
Feldberg, Wilhelm, Animal experiments 397-8w
Feltham Young Offenders Institution, Solitary confinement 510w
Hewell Grange Young Offender Institution, Prisoners' transfers 217w
Holloway Prison, Prison visitors 577w
Homicide, Prison sentences 433w
Parliamentary constituencies 3-4w
Police custody 396w
Police custody, Prisoners 578w
Prison education services, Young offenders 6w
Prison medical services, Mothers 577w
Prison medical services, Prison visitors 577w
Prison sentences 244w
Prison staff, Leave 502w
Prison staff, Manpower 502w
Prisoners, Hepatitis 287w
Prisoners, HIV infection 214w
Prisons, Expenditure 216-7w
Prisons, Security 214w
Remand in custody, Prison accommodation 504w
Shops Act 1950 216w
Sunday trading 1w, 138w
Sunday trading, Enforcement 1-2w
Voting rights, EC nationals 215w
Wolds Remand Prison, Contracts for services 392-3w
Wolds Remand Prison, Prison staff 392w
Young offenders 123w

Rural areas
Housing associations 185w
Magistrates' courts 432-3w
Regional aid 285w
Training & enterprise councils 103w
Wales 285w

S Grundas Limited
80w

"Safe Energy Europe"
337w

Safety equipment
Offshore structures 467w

Safety standards
Buoyancy aids 57w

Sainsbury, Mr Tim, Minister of State for Trade
Questions
Export licensing, Archives 12w
Exports, Iraq 499w
GATT, Multifibre arrangement 499w
Textile industry, France 464w
Textiles, Uruguay round 502w

St Anne's School Birkenhead
Capital investment 511w

Sales methods
Consumer credit 9w

Salmon
River Taff 134w

Salmond, Mr Alex
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 288, 342
Common fisheries policy (11:12:91) 924, 934, 937, 957-8
Deportation, Judgments (02:12:91) 33
NHS trusts, Points of order (02:12:91) 36
NHS trusts, Scotland (03:12:91) 145, 159

Salmond, Mr Alex—continued
Public expenditure, Scotland (04:12:91) 269
Social security orders (11:12:91) 917
Questions
Council tax 169-70w
Devolution, Scotland 848
"Higher Education White Paper" 414w
Hospitals, Contracts for services 134-5
Mortgage relief 479-80w
Public expenditure 478w

Salt, Tony
Police deaths on duty (12:12:91) 1221-8

Salvage
MFV Ocean Hound 306w

Sayeed, Mr Jonathan
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 877
Questions
Central heating 334-5w
Patient's Charter 130

Schizophrenia
Mental health community care 482w

School administration
Budgeting 410-4w
General certificate of secondary education 296w

School admission
Northern Ireland 451w, 517-8w

School boards
Scotland 455w

School buildings
Birmingham 415w
Bradford 415w
Capital investment 256-7w, 415w, 559-60w
Extracurricular activities (04:12:91) 282
Scotland 256-7w

School choice
Central London 416w

School discipline
289-90w
Education of children at home 294w

School Examinations & Assessment Council
560-5w

School governors
Teachers 299w
Training 239w
Vacancies 238-9w

School meals
Durham 448w
Nutrition 238w
Subsidies 295w
Water 238w

School population
295w
Northern Ireland 324w
Scotland 343-4w

School Teachers' Review Body
717-8

School transport
17w, 417w
Expenditure 557-8w

Schools
Contract cleaning 174w
Northern Ireland 322-3w
Plymouth 510w
Wales 19w

Science & Engineering Research Council
208w, (11:12:91) 969-74

"Science & Technology"
449w

Science & technology research
EC action 586w
Sponsorship 295w
Wales 14-5w

Scientists
Iraq 321w

Scientists against Nuclear Arms
Books 347w

Scilly Isles
Industrial accidents 340w

Scope of debate
Speaker's rulings & statements (02:12:91) 80, 82, 115, 119, (04:12:91) 284, (10:12:91) 793, 827, (13:12:91) 1248, 1253, 1258-9, 1285

Scotland
Agriculture 852
AIDS 457w
Art education 460w
Central institutions 346-7w
Church schools 345w
Civil servants' secondment 20
Cold weather payments 471w
Conservation 454w
Craft industries 501w
Crime 399-400w
Crimes of violence 842-3
Defence industries 855
Defence land 229-30w
Devolution (04:12:91) 280, 847-50
Dyslexia 567w
EC social policy 853
Economic & monetary union 852-3
Electoral register 231w
Emigration 456w
Environment protection 257w
Fish farming 120w
Foundation for Sport & the Arts 568w
Free school meals 343-4w
Further education 167w
Government grants to voluntary organisations 453-4w
Heart diseases 455w
Higher education 299w
Homelessness 140-1, 846-7, 854
Hospital beds 255-6w
Hospital waiting lists 841-2
House renovation grants 843-4
Industrial production 453w
Iron & steel industry 850-1
Judges (02:12:91) 96
Legal aid 168w
Local government reform 119-20w, 850
Marginal land 851-2
Motorways 168w
New towns development corporations 454w
NHS finance 229-31w
NHS trusts 144, (03:12:91) 145-62, 455w, 855-6
Offensive weapons 842
Parliamentary constituencies 453w
Patient's Charter 459w
Police 399-400w
Public expenditure (04:12:91) 261-76
Road construction 458w
Road works 459w
School boards 455w
School buildings 256-7w
School population 343-4w
Sea transport 501-2w
Sentencing 843
Sites of special scientific interest 454w
Speech therapists 568w
Sunday trading 844-5
Tax yields 368w
Textile industry 346w
Timesharing (04:12:91) 281
Transport of hazardous materials 193w, 232w, 281w
Transport of radioactive materials 422w
Tree planting 457-8w
Voluntary organisations 501w

Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas, Minister of State, Dept of Social Security
Debates etc.
Social security orders (11:12:91) 901, 902, 915-21
Questions
Attendance allowance 126w
Attendance allowance, Local government services 354-5w
Cold weather payments, Publicity 350w, 471w

Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas—continued
Cold weather payments, Scotland 471w
Disability Appeal Tribunals 128-9w
Handicap benefits, Publicity 127-8w
Handicap benefits, Transitional arrangements 351-2w
Industrial diseases, Harmonisation of legislation 377w
Invalid care allowance, Computer applications 376w
Invalid care allowances, Social security claims 352w
Invalidity benefits, Clothing 566w
Maternity benefits, Social security recipients 153w
Mobility allowance, Blind 52w
Mobility allowance, Social security appeals 126-7w
Pensioners, Cold weather payments 242-3w
Social Fund, Departmental publications 355-6w
Social Fund, Manpower 224, 472w
Social Fund, Sheffield 123-4w
Social security benefits, HIV infection 129w
Social security benefits rules, Absence abroad 377w

Scottish Agricultural College
Common agricultural policy 344w

Scottish Arts Council
16-7

Scottish Assembly
454w, 848
Devolution 847-8

Scottish Bus Group
Privatisation 44-6w

Scottish Constitutional Convention
847-9

Scottish Enterprise
855

Scottish health boards
Finance 858
Repairs & maintenance 402w

Scottish Office
Council of Ministers 47w
Disabled workers 345-6w
European Communities 47w
House of Commons broadcasting 167w

Scottish Pensioner Power
257w

Scottish Sports Council
568w

Scottish Trades Union Congress
Coal mining 333w

Screening
Breast cancer 64w
Cervical cancer 63-4w

Sea disposal licences
281w

Sea Fisheries (Wildlife Conservation) Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (04:12:91) 282

Sea pollution
Radiation hazards 549-50w
Waste disposal 281w

Sea transport
Scotland 501-2w
Transport subsidies 501-2w

Secondary education
Basildon (12:12:91) 1038-9
Educational standards 154w

Secure accommodation
217w
Government grants 118w, 157-8w
Wales 102w, 137w, 195-8w
Young offenders 157-8w

Secure tenancies
362w

Security
Housing 328w
Prisons 214w

Security equipment
Cars 59w
Motor insurance 5-6w

Security industry
286w
Licensing 286w

Sedgemore, Mr Brian
Questions
Metropolitan Police, Complaints against police 286-7w

Self-employed
132w
Strathclyde 401-2w

Sellafield
381w
Nuclear power stations 187w
Radiation hazards 364w

Semiconductor devices
Research 208w

Sentencing
Scotland 843

Sequestration of assets
Maxwell companies 361w

Serious Fraud Office
274w, 372-3w, 462-3w

Set-aside schemes
(04:12:91) 283-370, 545-7w
Agricultural research 592w
Departmental correspondence 547w
EC grants & loans 546-7w
Fraud 165-6w, 282w, 571-2w, 575w
Inspections 547-8w
Northern Ireland 573-5w
Sports facilities 571-2w, 574w
Wales 404w, 571-2w

Severe disability premium
125-6w

Severe disablement allowance
Social security appeals 126-7w

Severe hardship provision
53-4w, 353-4w
Costs 354w

Severn tunnel
Railway accidents 609-14

Sex education
Training 92w

Sexual harassment
225-6w

Sexual Offences (Amendment) Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (04:12:91) 281

Shadow Cabinet
Higher civil servants 192w

Shaw, Mr David
Debates etc.
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 422
Mirror Group Newspapers, Points of order (09:12:91) 618
Pension funds (12:12:91) 1075-80
Residential care (10:12:91) 772-4
Questions
Business statements 403-4
Dept of Trade inquiries, Switzerland 498w
Maxwell companies 604
Maxwell companies, Company investigations 422w, 462-3w
Maxwell companies, Directors 463w
Maxwell companies, Pension funds 475w

Shaw, Mr David—continued
Maxwell companies, Sequestration of assets 361w
Trust ports, Buy outs 360w

Shaw, Sir Giles
Debates etc.
Aggravated Taking Bill, 2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 674-5

Sheep
Agricultural subsidies 7
Wales 7

Sheep premiums
Northumberland 29w

Sheerman, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Aggravated Taking Bill, 2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 677-81, 685-7, 689-91, 692, 693, 694-6
Crime (12:12:91) 1053-4, 1064, 1068
Prison Security Bill, 2R (03:12:91) 195-6, 198, 211-20
Questions
Arrests, Shoplifting 138w
Police, Northumberland 380-1
Shops, Empty housing 79w
Sunday trading, Theft 121w

Sheffield
133w, 379w
Enterprise allowance scheme 133w
NHS trusts 136
Social Fund 123-4w

Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Debates etc.
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 425, 433-7, 440
Questions
Arts council grants 14-5

Shelter
318w

Shephard, Mrs Gillian, Minister of State, Treasury
Questions
Alcoholic drinks duties, Beer 82-3w
Alcoholic drinks duties, Tax harmonisation 83w
Arms exports, Export licensing 39-40w
Betting & gaming duties 566w
Car tax, Imports 478w
Civil service dispersal 163-4w
Operation Scotcheck 303-4w
Tax yields, EC internal trade 41-2w
Tax yields, Motor vehicles 367-8w
Tax yields, Tobacco duties 190w, 371-2w
Treasury, Disabled workers 81-2w
Treasury, House of Commons broadcasting 83w
VAT 300-1w, 436w
VAT, Environment protection 436w
VAT, Horses 162-3w, 191w
VAT, Small businesses 38w
VAT, Tax yields 371w
VAT zero rated goods 370-1w

Shepherd, Mr Colin
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 743
Questions
Housing, Non-metropolitan districts 170w

Shepherd, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Referendum Bill, 1R (04:12:91) 280
Questions
House of Fraser, Takeovers 8w

Shersby, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Aggravated Taking Bill, 2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 627, 631, 640-4
Questions
Children in care, Refugees 115w
Fluoridation, Costs 114w
Grant maintained schools, Hillingdon 724

Shersby, Mr Michael—continued
Hallmarking, Metals 372w
Riot control weapons 293w

Shipbuilding
Northern Ireland 977-8

Shipping
Airmisses 57w

Shipping accidents
MV Marchioness 511w
Transport of radioactive materials 361w

Shipping safety
Offshore structures 335w

Shoplifting
Arrests 138w
Sunday trading 396w

Shops
Basildon (12:12:91) 1038-9
Crime prevention 388-9
Empty housing 79w
Theft 389

Shops Act 1950
Questions
216w

Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 866-7
Questions
Overseas aid, OECD countries 607-8
Political refugees, Bangladesh 396w
Public sector borrowing requirement 38-9w
UK contributions to EC budget 39w

Short, Ms Clare
Debates etc.
Contempt of court (03:12:91) 224, 231, 239-40
Questions
Local enterprise companies, Directors 45-7w
Youth training, Industrial accidents 339w

Shotgun certificates
(04:12:91) 282

Shropshire
Bail hostels 580w

Silcott, Winston
181w

Sillars, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 868
Questions
Balance of trade, Arab states 204w
Council of Ministers, Attorney General 8w
Council of Ministers, Dept of Energy 43-4w
Council of Ministers, Dept of Health 60w
Council of Ministers, Dept of the Environment 67-8w
Council of Ministers, Dept of Trade & Industry 98w
Council of Ministers, Northern Ireland Office 66w
Council of Ministers, Scottish Office 47w
Council of Ministers, Voting methods 95w
EC external trade, Arab states 226w
EC external trade, Gulf Cooperation Council 226w

Sims, Mr Roger
Debates etc.
Medicinal Products Prescriptions by Nurses Bill, 1R (04:12:91) 279
Residential care (10:12:91) 760-2
Questions
Alcoholic drinks, Consumption 61w
Alcoholism, Liver diseases 61-2w
Child abuse, Leicestershire 28
Cholesterol, Blood tests 60w
Courts, Closed circuit television 7w

Single Homelessness in London
318w, 552w

Sites of special scientific interest
Scotland 454w

Sizewell A
338w
Floods 337-8w
Nuclear safety 338w

Sizewell B
Construction 596-7

Skeet, Sir Trevor
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 872
Questions
Nuclear power 596

Skillcentres
Privatisation 134w

Skills Training Agency
Redundancy pay 134w

Skin disorders
377-8w

Skinner, Mr Dennis
Debates etc.
Aggravated Taking Bill, 2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 620
Calling of Members, Points of order (11:12:91) 879
Coal mining (10:12:91) 793
Companies political contributions, Points of order (02:12:91) 38
Deportation, Judgments (02:12:91) 30, 35
Maxwell, Robert, Points of order (05:12:91) 414
Socialism (13:12:91) 1262-6, 1268-9, 1271-5, 1285
Questions
Business statements 1004
Civil service, Pay 36w
Dioxins, Bolsover 112w
Hazardous wastes, Northern Ireland 985
Northern Ireland government 512w
Public sector housing, Housing construction 257
Teachers, Pay 718

Skyguard radar
Low flying 269w

Sleeping rough
552w

Slovenia
593-4w

Small businesses
Enterprise allowance scheme 133w
Unfair competition 94w
VAT 38w

Smallholdings
Planning permission 494-5w

Smith, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Aggravated Taking Bill, 2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 641, 644-8
Questions
Adult education 725
Curriculum, USA 16w
Teacher training, Costs 239w
Unemployment benefits, Social security benefits disqualification 25w
Water pollution, Ewelme 80w

Smith, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 475-6
Inflation, Points of order (13:12:91) 1260
Socialism (13:12:91) 1237, 1241, 1244, 1271, 1276-7, 1279-87, 1288, 1291, 1293, 1295, 1298

Smith, Rt Hon John
Debates etc.
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 416-23, 427, 491, 495

Smith, Mr John P
Questions
Business statements 996-7
Cardiff Airport 21w
Personal social services, Fees & charges 113w

Smith, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 425, 442, 459-62, 465
Social security orders (11:12:91) 890, 892, 893, 905-7

Smoke hoods
110w
Air safety 110w

Smoking
Health education 154w
Northumberland 158w
Young people 158-9w

Smoking related diseases
Costs 158w
Lost working days 159w

Smyth, Rev Martin
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 744-5
Questions
Business statements 410
Community nurses, Manpower 111w
Postgraduate students, Discretionary student grants 720

Snape, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Members' conduct, Points of order (03:12:91) 163
Railway travel, Kent (12:12:91) 1132-3, 1137-41
Transport & Works Bill, 2R (02:12:91) 47-54, 58, 63

Soames, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Socialism (13:12:91) 1233, 1253, 1258, 1267, 1270-4, 1290

Social Fund
Departmental publications 355-6w
Loans 123w
Northern Ireland 328w
Rents 54w
Sheffield 123-4w
Social security appeals 224w
South Down 325w

Social Fund inspectors
Manpower 224w, 472w

Social science
Research finance 726-7

Social security
EC law 222w

Social security abuse
193w
Civil service manpower 224w
Northern Ireland 520w

Social Security Act 1990
Questions
525-6w

Social Security (Adjudication) Amendment (No 3) Regulations 1991
Debates etc.
(11:12:91) 881-921

Social Security Administration Bill (HL) 1991/92
Questions
376w

Social Security Advisory Committee
241w

Social security appeals
Mobility allowance 126-7w
Severe disablement allowance 126-7w

Social security appeals—continued
Social Fund 224w
Unemployment benefits 25w

Social Security (Attendance Allowance) Regulations 1991
Debates etc.
(11:12:91) 881-921

Social security benefits
Administrative costs 127w
Compensation Recovery Unit 468-9w
Departmental forms 221w
HIV infection 129w
Young people 353-4w

Social Security Benefits Agency
193w

Social security benefits disqualification
Unemployment benefits 25w

Social security benefits rates
Child benefit 263-4w

Social security benefits reductions
Community charge 153w

Social security benefits rules
Absence abroad 377w
Unemployment benefits 241w

Social security benefits uprating
Child benefit 152w
Income support 376-7w
Supplementary benefits 124-5w

Social Security Benefits Uprating (No 2) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(11:12:91) 881-921

Social security claims
Citizen's Charter 53w
Invalid care allowances 352w

Social Security (Claims & Payments) Amendment Regulations 1991
Debates etc.
(11:12:91) 881-921

Social Security (Consequential Provisions) Bill (HL) 1991/92
Questions
376w

Social Security Contributions Agency
Caerphilly 469w

Social Security Contributions & Benefits Bill (HL) 1991/92
Questions
376w

Social Security (Contributions) (Rerating) (No 2) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(11:12:91) 881-921

Social Security (Disability Living Allowance) Regulations 1991
Debates etc.
(11:12:91) 881-921

Social Security (Introduction of Disability Living Allowance) Regulations 1991
Debates etc.
(11:12:91) 881-921
Questions
351-2w

Social security recipients
Invalid care allowances 352w
Maternity benefits 153w
Means tested benefits 350w
Northern Ireland 573w
Pregnant women 54w

Social security reform
Legislation 376w

Social Security Select Committee
(10:12:91) 751-823

Socialism
Private Members' motions (13:12:91) 1230-98

Solar power
Research finance 187w

Soley, Mr Clive
Debates etc.
Homelessness (12:12:91) 1091, 1094, 1096-7, 1101-4
Questions
Council housing 246
Members' correspondence, Administrative delays 286w
Rents to mortgages scheme, Basildon 313-4w

Solitary confinement
Feltham Young Offenders Institution 510w

Somalia
Armed conflict 391w
Diplomatic relations 421-2w
International aid from international bodies 391w
Overseas aid 388w, 421w

Sonic Communications
Directorate of Telecommunications 393-4w

South Africa
United Nations 279-80w
Uranium 541w

South Ayrshire Hospital
(03:12:91) 145-62

South Down
211w
Child protection registers 326-7w
One parent families 328w
Social Fund 325w

South East region
Incinerators 430w

South East Thames Regional Health Authority
201-2w

South Glamorgan
Youth training 539w

South Wales
Police 506w

South Wales Constabulary
Manpower 582w

South Yorkshire Police
Manpower 379

Southern Arts Association
49w

Speaker and his deputies, For rulings & statements see separate heading
Speaker's rulings & statements
Debates etc.
Amendments & new clauses (03:12:91) 167, (04:12:91) 283, (05:12:91) 416, (10:12:91) 824
Business motions (06:12:91) 582, (13:12:91) 1298
Orders & regulations motions (09:12:91) 619, 706
Procedure (02:12:91) 2, 30, 35, 36, (03:12:91) 130, 145, 149, 162, (05:12:91) 384, 397, 490, (09:12:91) 613, 636, (10:12:91) 722, 728, 786, (11:12:91) 856, 857, 861-2, 922, (12:12:91) 983, 989, 996, 1051, 1173, (13:12:91) 1232, 1261, 1273
Standing Order No 20 applications, Volvo (09:12:91) 615
Standing Order No 20 applications, Mirror Group Newspapers (04:12:91) 278

Speaker's rulings & statements
Adjournment debates (06:12:91) 588, (12:12:91) 1004
Business questions (05:12:91) 402
Calling of Members (02:12:91) 35, (03:12:91) 141, 160, 165, (05:12:91) 405, 412, 414, (11:12:91) 864, (13:12:91) 1260, 1265
Civil servants' box (13:12:91) 1240

Speaker's rulings & statements—continued
Consolidated Fund debates (05:12:91) 413, (09:12:91) 616-8
Documents (10:12:91) 734, 736, 738
European Legislation Select Committee (11:12:91) 922
House of Commons debates (05:12:91) 414-5
House of Commons procedure (09:12:91) 620
House of Commons questions (03:12:91) 164
House of Commons Standing Committees (04:12:91) 253
House of Commons stationery (02:12:91) 38, (10:12:91) 749-50
Members' conduct (02:12:91) 37, (03:12:91) 163, 164, 166, (04:12:91) 317, 343
Members' interventions (03:12:91) 240, (12:12:91) 1082, 1203
Members' speeches (03:12:91) 160, 209, (04:12:91) 364-5, (05:12:91) 478, (06:12:91) 563, (11:12:91) 938, 955
Ministerial statements (02:12:91) 36, (10:12:91) 742, 745, 747, (11:12:91) 875, 879-80, (13:12:91) 1260
Oral questions (03:12:91) 130, 135, (11:12:91) 854, (12:12:91) 988
Parliamentary privilege (05:12:91) 415
Peers (12:12:91) 1071-2, (13:12:91) 1264
Points of order (02:12:91) 36, (09:12:91) 616, (13:12:91) 1263-4
Prime Minister's questions (05:12:91) 415
Private bills (02:12:91) 63
Private Members' motions (13:12:91) 1298
Private notice questions (05:12:91) 397, 398
Scope of debate (02:12:91) 80, 82, 115, 119, (04:12:91) 284, (10:12:91) 793, 827, (13:12:91) 1248, 1253, 1258-9, 1285
Statutory Instruments Joint Select Committee (11:12:91) 881
Sub judice (02:12:91) 30-1, 37, (05:12:91) 408, (09:12:91) 617
Supplementary questions (04:12:91) 254, 260, (10:12:91) 728, 730-1, (11:12:91) 851, (12:12:91) 985, 989, 992, 995-6, 998, 999, 1001, 1002
Ten minutes rule (05:12:91) 416, 454
Transfer of questions (11:12:91) 880
Unparliamentary expressions (02:12:91) 38, (03:12:91) 152, 166, (12:12:91) 1082, (13:12:91) 1272, 1277-8, 1296

Spearing, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 871
Questions
London Docklands Development Corporation, Land acquisition 426-7w
MV Marchioness, Shipping accidents 511w
Non-domestic rates, Overcharging 236w

Special education
16w, 719
Further education 92w, 510w
Primary education 727
Wales 248w

Special needs management allowance
540w

Special protection areas
Coastal areas 68w
Estuaries 68w

Special training needs
Training & enterprise councils 240w, 340w
Wakefield 240w

Speech therapists
116w
Argyll & Clyde Health Board 460w
Recruitment 117w
Scotland 568w
Training 116-7w
Vocational guidance 116w
Yorkshire Regional Health Authority 117w

Speech therapy
Dewsbury Health Authority 116w

Speed, Mr Keith
Questions
Ashford station, Railway stations 105w

Speed limits
A59 359w

Speller, Mr Tony
Questions
Metrication 142
Planning permission, Alternative energy 69w

Spicer, Sir Jim
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 872

Sponsorship
Science & technology research 295w

Sports
722
Departmental publications 511w
Finance 721-2

Sports Council
418w, 721-2

Sports facilities
Rate rebates 492w, 538-9w
Set-aside schemes 571-2w, 574w
Wales 538-9w

Springfields
176w
British Nuclear Fuels 165w

"Spycatcher"
Judgments 249-50w

Squire, Mr Robin
Questions
NHS finance, Regional health authorities 200-2w
Uniform business rate 255

Squirrels
Surveys 167w, 182w

Staffordshire Police
122w
Brixton Prison 395w

Staff-student ratios
Polytechnics 91w

Stanbrook, Mr Ivor
Questions
Administration of justice, Northern Ireland 976
Bombings, Lockerbie 389w
Criminal proceedings, Republic of Ireland 13w

Standard assessment tasks
18w, 298w

Standard spending assessments
252, 260, 317w
Barnsley (12:12:91) 1022-4
Tourists 69w
Wales 285w

Standardisation
Telephone systems 204-5w

Standing Medical Advisory Committee
60w

Standing Order No 20 applications
Mirror Group Newspapers (04:12:91) 277
Volvo (09:12:91) 615

Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Questions
Breast cancer, Screening 64w
Cervical cancer, Screening 63-4w
Eye disorders, Surgery 65w
Heart diseases, Surgery 64w
Kidneys, Transplant surgery 65w
M20, House purchase 109w
Retail price index 370w
Surgery 446w
Tomography 63w
Vaccination, Children 62-3w

START Treaty
347w

State earnings related pension scheme
153w

Statistics
Low incomes 521-3w
Unemployment 131w

Statutory Instruments Joint Select Committee
168-9w
Speaker's rulings & statements (11:12:91) 881

Statutory Instruments Select Committee
168-9w

Statutory Sick Pay (Rate of Payment) (No 2) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(11:12:91) 881-921

Stean, John
397-8w

Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Questions
British Overseas Aid 1991 280w
Lead pipes, Tweeddale 501w
Scottish Agricultural College, Common agricultural policy 344w
Scottish Constitutional Convention 848-9
Scottish Pensioner Power 257w
Television licences, Data banks 434w
Textile industry, EC grants & loans 346w
Western Sahara, Referenda 319w

Steen, Mr Anthony
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 877
Questions
Housing benefits, Landlord & tenant 351w
Planning & Compensation Act 1991 254-5
School transport 17w

Steinberg, Mr Gerry
Questions
Apprentices, Building industry 24w
Brewing industry, Public houses 10-1w
Business statements 994
Channel tunnel, Railway network 357w
Cost per student 93w
Council housing, Housing construction 245
Duration of unemployment, Coal mining 340w
Football, Europe 416w
Hazardous wastes, Industrial wastes 313w
Housing investment programmes, Durham 488w
Public libraries 49w
School buildings, Capital investment 415w
School meals, Durham 448w
Student loans 15w, 91-2w

Stephen, Mr Nicol
Debates etc.
NHS trusts, Scotland (03:12:91) 154
Questions
House renovation grants, Scotland 844

Sterling
Deutsche Bundesbank 164w

Stern, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Gypsies, Public petitions (13:12:91) 1229
Questions
Direct fire weapons effect system, Defence procurement 228w

Stevens, Mr Lewis
Questions
Foreign investment in UK, Northern Ireland 986-7
Parent's Charter 730

Stewart, Mr Allan, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scottish Office
Questions
Craft industries, Scotland 501w
Defence industries, Scotland 855
EC social policy, Scotland 853
Economic & monetary union, Scotland 852-3

Stewart, Mr Allan—continued
Economic situation, Borders region 456w
Economic situation, Paisley 455-6w
Employment opportunities, Glasgow 855
Enterprise allowance scheme, Strathclyde 401-2w
Industrial production, Scotland 453w
Iron & steel industry, Dalzell 851
Iron & steel industry, Lanarkshire 851
Iron & steel industry, Scotland 850-1
Local enterprise companies, Directors 45-7w
Local government reform, Scotland 119-20w
New towns development corporations, Scotland 454w
Scottish Assembly 454w
Scottish Office, Council of Ministers 47w
Scottish Office, European Communities 47w
Self-employed, Strathclyde 401-2w
Voluntary organisations, Manpower 501w
Western Isles 845
Western Isles, Freight transport 845-6
Whisky, Production 456w
Youth training, Administrative delays 232w

Stewart, Mr Andy
Debates etc.
Coal mining (10:12:91) 798-800, 811
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 362

Stewart, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Debates etc.
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 444, 454-7

Stillbirth (Definition) Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (04:12:91) 280

Stobhill Hospital
Urology 345w

Stockton on Tees
Housing improvement 169w

Stokes, Sir John
Debates etc.
Public morals (12:12:91) 1005-7
Questions
War crimes 604

Stott, Mr Roger
Questions
Belfast Airport, Government grants 210w
Student loans, Northern Ireland 512w

Strang, Mr Gavin
Debates etc.
NHS trusts, Scotland (03:12:91) 156
Questions
Arms trade 271-2w
Business statements 411-2
Defence industries, Scotland 855
Nuclear weapons tests 96w
Prisoners, HIV infection 214w

Stranraer
Ferries 459w

Strathclyde
Crime 344-6w
Enterprise allowance scheme 401-2w
New businesses 401-2w
Railway travel 457w
Self-employed 401-2w
Youth training 232w

Strathclyde Buses
Privatisation 232w

Strathclyde Regional Council Order Confirmation Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
Rep* (03:12:91) 127
3R* (04:12:91) 243

Straw
Alternative energy 594-5

Straw, Mr Jack
Questions
Curriculum 560-5w
Education, Exhibitions 559w
Education (School Premises) Regulations 1981 17w

Straw, Mr Jack—continued
Educational assessment, Primary education 298w
Educational finance, Cambridgeshire 719-20
Grammar schools 558-9w
HM Inspectorate of Schools, Inquiries 566w
School buildings, Capital investment 559-60w

"Structure of Local Government in England Consultation Paper"
244

Student grants
415w

Student loans
15w, 91-2w, 722-4
Northern Ireland 512w

Student Loans Company
15w

Student numbers
Art education 440w, 449w, 451-2w, 460w

Sub judice
Speaker's rulings & statements (02:12:91) 30-1, 37, (05:12:91) 408, (09:12:91) 617

Subsidence
Coal mining 44w

Subsidiarity
EC integration 318w

Subsidies
School meals 295w

Suckler cow premiums
(04:12:91) 283-370, 593w
Carlisle 207w

Sumberg, Mr David
Debates etc.
Deportation, Judgments (02:12:91) 34
Mirror Group Newspapers, Points of order (09:12:91) 616
Questions
Business statements 997
Fish farming, Planning permission 494-5w
Opencast mining 600-1

Summerson, Mr Hugo
Debates etc.
Offensive weapons, Points of order (02:12:91) 37
Regional government (06:12:91) 570-1
Questions
Brazil, Rain forests 386-7w
Broadcasting, Ethnic minorities 122-3w
Ethnic minorities 115-6w
Parliamentary constituencies 3-4w
Tax yields, Tobacco duties 371-2w

Sunday trading
1w, 15w, 138w
Consolidated Fund debates (12:12:91) 1196-211
Enforcement 1-2w
Northern Ireland 983-4
Scotland 844-5
Shoplifting 396w
Supermarkets 260w
Theft 121w

Sunderland
Revenue support grant 234w

Supermarkets
Eggs 464w
Sunday trading 260w

Supplementary benefits
Social security benefits uprating 124-5w

Supplementary credit approvals
316w

Supplementary questions
Speaker's rulings & statements (04:12:91) 254, 260, (10:12:91) 728, 730-1, (11:12:91) 851, (12:12:91) 985, 989, 992, 995-6, 998, 999, 1001, 1002

"Supply Estimates 1991/92, Supplementary Estimates"
(10:12:91) 751-823

Surgery
446w
Eye disorders 65w
Guy's & Lewisham NHS Trust 203-4w
Heart diseases 64w

Switzerland
Dept of Trade inquiries 498w

Tactical nuclear weapons
Warships 543w

Tai Cymru
see Housing for Wales

Takeovers
House of Fraser 8w, 177w
Racal Electronics 375w

Taking & driving away
383-4, (09:12:91) 620-701
Northern Ireland 383
Young people 382

Tanks
Navigational aids 55-6w

Tapsell, Sir Peter
Questions
Diplomatic bags, Wandsworth Prison 399

Tax allowances
250w
EC countries 36-7w
Health insurance 251w
Income tax 302w
Lorry drivers 83w
Tax yields 191w
Travelling expenses 36-7w

Tax collection
Community charge 317w

Tax harmonisation
Alcoholic drinks duties 83w

Tax rates & bands
Income tax 161w, 254w

Tax thresholds
Inheritance tax 160w

Tax yields
40-1w
Corporation tax 251w
EC internal trade 41-2w
Income tax 301-3w, 369w
Inheritance tax 160w, 250w
Motor vehicles 367-8w
Scotland 368w
Tax allowances 191w
Tobacco duties 190w, 371-2w
VAT 371w

Taxation
728
Environment protection 162w
Legal aid 419w

Taxpayers
Income tax 371w

Taylor, Mrs Ann
Questions
British Waterways Board, Privatisation 363w
Cryptosporidia, Humberside 487w
Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council 311w
National Rivers Authority, River pollution 432w
Orimulsion, Air pollution control 78-9w
Orimulsion, Pembroke power station 78w
River pollution 247
Skin disorders 377-8w
Transport & Works Bill 1991/92, Inland waterways 145w

Taylor, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 489
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 875

Taylor, Mr Ian*—*continued
Socialism (13:12:91) 1261
Questions
Public sector housing 258
Yugoslavia, Armed conflict 155w

Taylor, Rt Hon John David
Debates etc.
Common fisheries policy (11:12:91) 953-5
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 866
Questions
Business statements 405
Integrated schools, Northern Ireland 978-9
Maze Prison, Portraits 514w

Taylor, Mr John M, Vice-Chamberlain of Her Majesty's Household
Debates etc.
Aggravated Taking Bill, 2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 631

Taylor, Mr Matthew
Questions
"Faith in the Countryside" 277w
Higher education, Age participation rates 447-8w
Housing associations, Rural areas 185w
Parish councils 184w
Student loans 723-4

Taylor, Sir Teddy
Questions
Bombings, Lockerbie 321-2w
EC nationals, EC integration 389-90w
EC social policy 990
Energy prices, Privatisation 335w
House of Fraser 605
Libyan Arab Republic, Lockerbie 95w
Overseas aid 96w
Scottish Assembly 454w

Teacher training
Costs 239w
Dyslexia 446-8w

Teachers
Dyslexia 413w
Pay 717-8
Performance appraisal 413-4w
School governors 299w

Teachers' Pay & Conditions Act 1987 (Continuation) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(09:12:91) 702-6

Teachers' pensions
16w, 446w

Teaching aids
General certificate of secondary education 296w

Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Questions
Business statements 992

Technical assistance
Brazil 148-50w

Technology transfer
Dept of Energy 384w

Tees & Hartlepool Port Authority
Dock labour scheme 555w
Redundancy 555w

Teesside
173w
Arts 48-9w
Electric cables 334w

Telecommunications industry
Innovation 97-8w, 179w
Ozone layer 430w

Telephone charges
Billing 9-10w

Telephone operator services
House of Commons 258w

Telephone services
Codes of practice 178w

Telephone systems
Standardisation 204-5w
Telephones 205w

Telephones
House of Commons 220w
Households 178-9w
Telephone systems 205w

Television
Franchising (12:12:91) 1039-42

Television advertising
Rents to mortgages scheme 363w

Television licences
Data banks 434w

Temporary accommodation
425-6w
Homelessness 441w

Ten minutes rule
Speaker's rulings & statements (05:12:91) 416, 454

"Ten Years Cold"
76w

Tenancy agreements
Whitbread 498w

Terminology
European Communities 35w

Territorial Army
543w, (10:12:91) 733-48
Army strength 348w
Consolidated Fund debates (12:12:91) 1111-23
Northern Ireland 589w

Terrorism
Compensation 211w, 228w, 522w
Legal representation 285-6w
Northern Ireland 513w, 522w, 980-1

Textile industry
EC grants & loans 346w
EC Industry Council 464w
France 464w
Scotland 346w

Textiles
Uruguay round 502w

Thameslink
234w

Theatres
Keswick 48w

Theft
Birds 138w
Electricity supply industry 540w
Firearms 89w, 213w
House of Commons accommodation 258w
Shops 389
Sunday trading 121w

Thermal observation & gunnery sights
Defence procurement 269-70w

Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 870
Questions
Air force, Military exercises 270w
Arms control, Non-governmental organisations 32-3w
Atomic Weapons Establishment, Verification 347w
Environmental policy, Wales 13
Indonesia, Aid financed trade 385-6w
Japan, Plutonium 320w
Low flying 265w, 267w
Low flying, Armed forces training 268w
Low flying, Bwich Llyn Bach Valley 265w
Low flying, Chepstow 267-8w
Low flying, Germany 265-6w
Low flying, Military exercises 267w
Low flying, Nature conservation 267w
Low flying, Skyguard radar 269w
Nuclear test ban, Verification 543w

Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis—continued
Nuclear weapons, Iraq 268w
Radiation hazards, Sellafield 364w
Royal ordnance factories, Health physics 269w
Trespass, Police powers 243-4w
Wind power, Conferences 281-2w

Thompson, Mr Donald
Questions
Flood damage, Government grants to local authorities 176w
North Sea oil, Capital investment 592-3
Police, West Yorkshire 390

Thompson, Mr Jack
Debates etc.
Aggravated Taking Bill, 2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 670-2
Regional government (06:12:91) 523, 527, 534
Questions
Low pay 467-8w

Thompson, Lee
(06:12:91) 583-90

Thompson, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Amusement Arcades (Protection of Children Bill, 1R (10:12:91) 749
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 748
Questions
Adult education 725
Economic & monetary union, Intergovernmental conference 252w
Minimum wage 391-2
Public sector housing, Norwich City Council 257-8

Thorne, Mr Neil
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 738
Territorial Army (12:12:91) 1111-5

THORP
Radiation hazards 382w

Thurnham, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Aggravated Taking Bill, 2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 624, 667-70
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 420
Grant, Bernie, Points of order (05:12:91) 414-5
Teachers' Pay & Conditions Act 1987 (Continuation) Order 1991 (09:12:91) 705
Questions
Adoption 329-30w
Adoption, Romania 329-30w
Child abuse, Leicestershire 26-7
Grant maintained schools, Finance 414w
Income tax, Tax yields 369w
Local government social services 137
National disability information project 483-4w
Personal savings 369w
Romania, Adoption 320-1w
School discipline 289-90w
School discipline, Education of children at home 294w
Ukraine, Recognition of states 320w
Voluntary contributions 477w

Tibet
141-2

Tigerfish
588w

Timeshare Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (04:12:91) 279

Timeshare Contracts (Time for Reconsideration) (Scotland) Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (04:12:91) 281

Timesharing
Cancellation rights (04:12:91) 279, 281
Consumer protection 206-7w

Timesharing—continued
Scotland (04:12:91) 281

Tobacco advertising
Children (02:12:91) 97-126

Tobacco duties
Tax yields 190w, 371-2w

Tomography
63w, 128

Torpedoes
588w

Torquay Market Bill (HL) 1990/91
Debates etc.
3R* (10:12:91) 715

Tottenham Three
Criminal appeals 181w
Prosecutions 181w

Touche Ross
104w

Tourism
Government grants 408-9w
Household Division 473w
Northern Ireland 512w
Wales (04:12:91) 281

Tourism (Overseas Promotion) (Wales) Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (04:12:91) 281

Tourist boards
Government grants 338w

Tourists
Standard spending assessments 69w

Town & country planning
Alternative energy 552-3w
EC Environment Commissioner 366w

Townend, Mr John
Debates etc.
Common fisheries policy (11:12:91) 930, 947-9

Townsend, Mr Cyril D
Questions
Global environmental facility 608
Integrated schools, Northern Ireland 978
Oxleas Wood, East London river crossing 249

Trade & Industry Select Committee
8w, 605

Trading standards departments
499-500w

Trafalgar Medical Services
NHS complaints 379w

Traffic Calming Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (04:12:91) 279

Training
Dwyfor 100w
Equal opportunities 18
Expenditure 409-10w
Judges 73w
Magistrates 73w
Merchant seamen 58-9w
National Association for the Care & Resettlement of Offender 442w
Offshore Safety Division 467w
School governors 239w
Sex education 92w
Speech therapists 116-7w

Training & enterprise councils
25-6w, 104w, 283w
Civil servants' secondment 25-6w
Employment action 240w
Expenditure 25w
Finance 26w
Government grants 442w
Rural areas 103w

Training & enterprise councils—continued
Special training needs 240w, 340w
Wakefield 240-1w
Wales 1-3, 442w

Training Enterprise & Education Directorate
Expenditure 131w, 325-6w

Tranquillisers
Prescriptions 135w
Wales 135w

Transfer of questions
Speaker's rulings & statements (11:12:91) 880

Transient people
Caravan sites 327-8w

Transplant surgery
Kidneys 65w, 199w
Northern General Hospital Sheffield 199w

Transport
Parliamentary procedure (02:12:91) 39-77

Transport & Works Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
2R & Money res* (02:12:91) 39-77
Questions
307w
Inland waterways 145w

Transport of hazardous materials
Scotland 193w, 232w, 281w

Transport of radioactive materials
Motorways 57w
Packaging 361w
Scotland 422w
Shipping accidents 361w

Transport policy
Railway transport 422w

Transport subsidies
Sea transport 501-2w

Travelling expenses
Civil service recruitment 435-6w
Tax allowances 36-7w

Trawsfynydd power station
13, 595

Treasury
Civil service agencies 435w
Disabled workers 81-2w
House of Commons broadcasting 83w

Treaty of Rome
Light dues 145w

Tredinnick, Mr David
Questions
Child abuse, Leicestershire 25-6

Tree felling
Water supply industry 69w

Tree planting
Government grants 457-8w
Scotland 457-8w

Trees
Wales 137w
Wide load vehicles 137w

Trespass
Police powers 243-4w

Trident
Clyde submarine base 472w

Trident submarines
141

Trimble, Mr David
Debates etc.
Fair Employment Commission for Northern Ireland, Press releases (12:12:91) 1027-9
Prison Security Bill, 2R (03:12:91) 179, 187-9
Regional government (06:12:91) 527, 552, 573-7

Trimble, Mr David*—*continued
Questions
Administration of justice, Northern Ireland 976
Business statements 1000
Church schools, Educational finance 345w
Polytechnics 413w
Royal family, Portraits 514w
Schools, Northern Ireland 322-3w
Sunday trading, Northern Ireland 984
Taking & driving away, Northern Ireland 383

Trippier, Mr David, Minister for the Environment and Countryside
Questions
British Waterways Board, Privatisation 363w
Cryptosporidia, Humberside 487w
Ecolabelling 259-60
Environment, Conferences 313w
Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council 311w
National parks 256-7
National Rivers Authority, River pollution 431-2w
River Darent 247
River pollution 173w, 246-7
Standard spending assessments 260

Trotter, Mr Neville
Debates etc.
Common fisheries policy (11:12:91) 941-4
Questions
Channel tunnel, Railway travel 106-7w

Trust ports
359-60w
Buy outs 360w
Privatisation 359-60w

Tuition fees
Higher education 17w

Turkey
Politics & government 421w

Turks & Caicos Islands
31w

Turner, Mr Dennis
Questions
Community care, Finance 331-2w
Consumers' Committee for Great Britain 164w
Educational finance, Pay settlements 297w
Educational finance, Wolverhampton 298w
Educational policy, Educational finance 297-8w
Local government borrowing 316w
Local government revenue, Capital investment 315-7w
Local government revenue, Interest rates 316-7w
Revenue support grant 315w
Revenue support grant, Road works 316-7w
Standard spending assessments 260, 317w

Tweeddale
Lead pipes 501w

Twinn, Dr Ian
Questions
Burglary 215w
EC Development Council 278w

Tyne & Wear
Incinerators 173w

UEFA
416w

UK Central Council for Nursing Midwifery & Health Visiting
117-8w

UK companies abroad
Oil industry 332w

UK contributions to EC budget
39w

Ukraine
988
Foreign policy 320w

Ukraine*—*continued
Recognition of states 320w

UN
see United Nations

UN Conference on Environment & Development
490w

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
31w

UN Economic Commission for Europe
22w

UN finances
275w, 319w

UN High Commissioner for Refugees
390-1w

UN resolutions
East Timor 479w
Zionism 274-5w, 319-20w

Underwater Test & Evaluation Centre
588w

Unemployed
Bail hostels 502w

Unemployment
225w, 392-3
London docklands 486-7w
Northern Ireland 515w
Statistics 131w
Wales 8, 20w

Unemployment benefits
Early retirement 566w
Social security appeals 25w
Social security benefits disqualification 25w
Social security benefits rules 241w
Working hours 241w

Unfair competition
Small businesses 94w

Unfair trading practices
Consumer credit 499-500w

UNHCR
see UN High Commissioner for Refugees

Uniform business rate
175w, 255-6
Private rented housing 492w

United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority
541w
External financing limits 141w

United Kingdom NIREX
493w

United Kingdom Passport Agency
381-2

United Nations
275w, 319w, 497w, 605-6, (12:12:91) 1168-75
Arms trade 498w
Disaster relief 275-6w
South Africa 279-80w

United Scientific Instruments
Ex gratia payments 269w

Universities
Civil service recruitment 18-9
Cost per student 89-90w

Unpaid taxes
37-8w

Unparliamentary expressions
Speaker's rulings & statements (02:12:91) 38, (03:12:91) 152, 166, (12:12:91) 1082, (13:12:91) 1272, 1277-8, 1296

Upholder class submarines
Repairs & maintenance 587-8w

Uranium
Calder Hall power station 541w
Imports 381w

Uranium*—*continued
South Africa 541w

Urban areas
Local authority powers 173w

Urban development grants
World Trade Centre Cardiff 285w

Urban programme
City Challenge 236w
Wales 407-8w

Urology
Stobhill Hospital 345w

Uruguay round
499w
Textiles 502w

USA
Curriculum 16w
Guided weapons 87-8w
Nuclear weapons tests 322w

USSR
732
CFE Treaty 496-7w
EC aid 989
Nuclear disarmament 228w
Nuclear non proliferation 87w
Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty 479-80w
Nuclear weapons policy 496w

Vacancies
Crown Prosecution Service 604
School governors 238-9w

Vaccination
Children 62-3w
Prison medical services 287w

Valleys initiative
248w
Expenditure 194w

Valuation
Council tax 477-8w
Powers of entry 370w

Value Added Tax (Building & Land) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(09:12:91) 706

Vanguard submarines
Rosyth Dockyard 588w

VAT
300-1w, 371w, 436w
Construction (09:12:91) 706
Environment protection 436w
Horses 162-3w, 191w
Small businesses 38w
Tax yields 371w

VAT registration
242w

VAT zero rated goods
370-1w

Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Questions
Reading, Educational standards 298w
Reading Borough Council, Local government revenue 488w
UN finances 275w, 319w
United Nations, South Africa 279-80w

Vaz, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
Aggravated Taking Bill, 2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 659-62, 665
Contempt of court (03:12:91) 227-8
Deportation, Judgments (02:12:91) 34-5
Impact of Disasters Bill, 1R (04:12:91) 282
Prison Security Bill, 2R (03:12:91) 197, 199, 202, 204-10, 219
Questions
Bank of Credit & Commerce International 142
Bank of Credit & Commerce International, Redundancy pay 104w

Vaz, Mr Keith—continued
Botswana, Nature conservation 551w
Child abuse, Leicestershire 26
Children Act 1989, Expenditure 199w
Combined heat & power 598
Cost of living, Young people 54w
Council tax 235w
Crown Prosecution Service, Vacancies 604
Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 121w
Director of Public Prosecutions, Public appointments 159w
European Court of Human Rights, Gibraltar 155w
Feltham Young Offenders Institution, Solitary confinement 510w
Footwear, Import duties 374w
Footwear, Labelling 374-5w
Footwear industry, National vocational qualification 410w
Homelessness, Leicester 365w
Hospital waiting lists, Leicestershire 112w
Income support, Young people 53-4w
Multifibre arrangement 374w
Neighbourhood watch schemes 386
Nurses Midwives & Health Visitors Act 1979 117-8w
Rents, Social Fund 54w
Resettlement units 128w
Textile industry, France 464w
Young offenders 123w
Young offenders, Custodial treatment 6-7w, 217w
Young offenders, Prison education services 6w

Verification
Atomic Weapons Establishment 347w
Nuclear test ban 543w

Veterinary Medicines Directorate
591-2w

Victim Support
see National Council of Victim Support

Victim support schemes
Lancashire 244w

Video recordings
Police interrogation 391

Vietnamese refugees
Repatriation 390-1w

Viggers, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 747
Exservicemen (09:12:91) 708-10
Questions
Armed forces housing, Empty housing 56w
Armed forces pensions 227w
Civil service recruitment, Universities 18-9
Family doctors, Computer applications 379-80w

Vocational Guidance
Speech therapists 116w

Vocational training
Discretionary student grants 603

Voluntary contributions
477w

Voluntary organisations
Manpower 501w
Scotland 501w

Voluntary work
Car allowances 475-7w

Volvo
Standing Order No 20 applications (09:12:91) 615

Voting methods
Council of Ministers 95w
Northern Ireland 515w

Voting rights
EC nationals 215w

Wages councils
Prosecutions 526-32w

Wakefield
Special training needs 240w
Training & enterprise councils 240-1w
Youth training scheme 104w

Wakeham, Rt Hon John, Secretary of State for Energy
Questions
British Coal Corporation, Privatisation 333w
British Coal Corporation, Productivity 334w
Carbon dioxide, Air pollution control 258-9w
Coal mining 591
Coal mining, Productivity 591
Dept of Energy, Council of Ministers 43-4w
Dept of Energy, Disabled workers 141w
Dept of Energy, European Communities 43w
Dept of Energy, House of Commons broadcasting 75w
Dept of Energy, Technology transfer 384w
Electricity generation 423w
Energy conservation 334w
Energy conservation, Companies 589w
Energy policy 335-6w
Energy prices, Privatisation 335w
Energy research, Expenditure 141-4w, 383w
Nuclear power 383w, 595-6
Oil industry, UK companies abroad 332w
Trawsfynydd power station 595
United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, External financing limits 141w

Waldegrave, Rt Hon William, Secretary of State for Health
Questions
Child abuse, Leicestershire 23-9
Dental services, Children 204w
Dentists, Pay 201w
Family doctors 132-3
Family doctors, Budgeting 132
Hospital waiting lists 128-9
Hospital waiting lists, Merseyside 134
Hospital waiting lists, West Midlands 128
NHS, Expenditure 133, 138-9
NHS finance 139
NHS finance, Regional health authorities 200-2w
NHS trusts 111w, 133-4
Tomography 128

Walden, Mr George
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 304
Teachers' Pay & Conditions Act 1987 (Continuation) Order 1991 (09:12:91) 704-5

Wales
AIDS 441w
Ambulance services 3-4
Areas of outstanding natural beauty 20w
Art education 440w
Arts finance 16
Bus services 11-2, 405w
Citizen's Charter 283w
Civil servants' secondment 20
Community care 195w
Community charge 194-5w
Community councils 21w
Cremation 440w
Crime prevention 407w
Defence industries 12
Deprivation indicators 407-8w
District health authorities 282-4w
EC regional policy 18w
Educational advisers 406w
Employment action 137w
Environmental policy 13
Family doctors 100-1w
Farm incomes 7-8
Foreign investment in UK 10-1, 20-1w, 102-3w
Geriatric patients 5
Health services 249w, 283-4w
HM Inspectorate of Schools 405-6w, 438w, 538w

Wales—continued
Homelessness 19w, 441w
Hormone treatments 4-5
Hospital consultants 136-7w
Hospital patients 198w
Hospital waiting lists 21w, 194w, 403-4w
House renovation grants 6
Housing 9-10
Housing construction 5-6
Industrial production 570w
Level crossings 405w
Local government finance 9
Local government reform 19w
Magistrates' courts 432-3w
Mental health community care 439-40w
Mentally handicapped 102w, 137-8w
Minor works grants 283w
Mortgage defaulters 6-8, 13-4
Motorways 101w
National Association for the Care & Resettlement of Offender 442w
NHS 248w
NHS administration 22w
NHS & private practice 101w
NHS finance 99-100w
NHS trusts 408w, 438w
Non-departmental public bodies 284w, 404w
Opera 15-6
Public appointments 102w
Rented housing 6, 19w
River pollution 19w
Road construction 198w, 439w
Road works 436-8w
Rural areas 285w
Schools 19w
Science & technology research 14-5w
Secure accommodation 102w, 137w, 195-8w
Set-aside schemes 404w, 571-2w
Sheep 7
Special education 248w
Sports facilities 538-9w
Standard spending assessments 285w
Tourism (04:12:91) 281
Training & enterprise councils 1-3, 442w
Tranquillisers 135w
Trees 137w
Unemployment 8, 20w
Urban programme 407-8w
Youth training 283w, 405w

Wales Tourist Board
(04:12:91) 281

Walker, Mr Bill
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 739
Common fisheries policy (11:12:91) 931, 942, 958-9
NHS trusts, Scotland (03:12:91) 151-2
Questions
Craigtoun Hospital St Andrews, Hospital closures 119w
Devolution, Scotland 849-50
Sea transport, Transport subsidies 501-2w
Sentencing, Scotland 843
Sunday trading, Northern Ireland 984

Walker, Mr A Cecil
Questions
Police interrogation, Castlereagh 985

Wallace, Mr James
Debates etc.
Common fisheries policy (11:12:91) 925, 944-7
Industrial Training Levy (Construction Board) Order 1992 (02:12:91) 87, 91-2, 95
NHS trusts, Scotland (03:12:91) 159
Questions
Business statements 402-3
Civil service recruitment, Travelling expenses 435-6w
Home energy efficiency scheme, Government grants 43w
Tibet 141-2
Western Isles, Freight transport 845-6

Waller, Mr Gary
Debates etc.
Aggravated Taking Bill, 2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 622
Questions
Railway electrification, West Yorkshire 57w

Walley, Ms Joan
Questions
Car allowances, Voluntary work 475-6w
Merchant seamen, Training 58-9w
Merchant ships, Pollution control 306w
Police, Government grants 121w
Schizophrenia, Mental health community care 482w
School governors, Teachers 299w
School governors, Training 239w
School governors, Vacancies 238-9w
School meals, Nutrition 238w
School meals, Water 238w
Waste disposal, Licensing 237w

Waltham Forest Housing Action Trust (Area & Constitution) Order 1991
Debates etc.
(04:12:91) 370

Wandsworth
Council house sales 235w
Government grants to local authorities 70w

Wandsworth Prison
Diplomatic bags 397-9
Prison staff 502w

War crimes
603-4

War Crimes Act 1991
Questions
603

War games
217w, 274w

Ward, Mr John
Debates etc.
Furniture, Fire prevention (12:12:91) 1020-2
Television (12:12:91) 1042
Questions
Taxation 728
Valuation, Powers of entry 370w

Wardell, Mr Gareth
Questions
Bus stations, Oystermouth 101w
Hospital waiting lists, Wales 21w
Hospital waiting lists, West Midlands 128
Tomography 128

Wardle, Mr Charles
Debates etc.
Pension funds (12:12:91) 1071
Questions
Business statements 995

Wareing, Mr Robert N
Debates etc.
Calling of Members, Points of order (11:12:91) 880
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 317
Questions
Housing estates, Outer estates 170w
North West Arts, Arts finance 48w
Offshore safety 531w
Offshore Safety Division, Training 467w
Offshore structures, Safety equipment 467w
Petroleum exploration, Irish Sea 600
Tax yields 40-1w

Warner Committee
see Children's Homes Staff Selection Inquiry

Warren, Gordon
Ex gratia payments 217w

Warren, Mr Kenneth
Questions
Child Support Agency, Offices 525w

Warrington
Housing estates 314-5w

Warships
Arms control negotiations 88w
Decommissioning 473w
Tactical nuclear weapons 543w

Waste disposal
EC law 491-2w
Foetal tissue 482-3w
Licensing 72w, 237w
Livestock 208w
Pets 207w
Prosecutions 491w
Sea pollution 281w

Waste management
237w

Water
School meals 238w

Water abstraction
164w
Associated British Ports 136w
River Taff 136w, 570-1w

Water Act 1989
Questions
69w

Water pollution
Ewelme 80w
Harmonisation of standards 431-2w

Water supply industry
171w
Tree felling 69w

Watson, Mr Mike
Debates etc.
Public expenditure, Scotland (04:12:91) 270

Watts, Mr John
Debates etc.
Deportation, Judgments (02:12:91) 35
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 436, 467-71

Wave power
Energy research 601-2

Waveney
Community charge 70w

Weights & Measures Inspectors
364-5w

Welsh, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 285, 291, 339-43, 368
Questions
A92 455w
Business statements 408
Hospital ancillary staff, Contracts for services 111-2w
Redundancy, Angus 852

Welsh Arts Council
15-6

Welsh Assembly
19w

Welsh Development Agency
438w
Australia 102-3w
Factories 248w
Foreign investment in UK 10-1

Welsh Grand Committee
(04:12:91) 282, 370

Welsh language
Adult education 19-20w
Data Protection Registrar 293w
Legislation 12-3

Welsh Language Board
12-3

Welsh National Opera
15-6

Welsh Office
Annual reports 570w
Civil servants' background 569w
Civil service manpower 569w
Day care of children 569-70w
Disabled workers 194w
Higher civil servants 568-9w
House of Commons broadcasting 101w
Pay incentives 568w
Performance indicators 569w
Public appointments 532-7w
Publicity 569w
Working hours 570w

West Midlands
Hospital waiting lists 128

West Midlands Police
(12:12:91) 1221-8

West Midlands Travel
393

West Yorkshire
Police 390
Railway electrification 57w, 233w
Railway travel 233w

West Yorkshire Police Authority
Police civilians 505w

Western European Union
(11:12:91) 859-78

Western Isles
845
Freight transport 845-6

Western Sahara
Consolidated Fund debates (12:12:91) 1168-75
Referenda 319w

Westminster underground station
30w

Westwood Hospital
Hospital closures 63w

Whale & Dolphin Conservation Society
144

Whales
Nature conservation 144

Wheeler, Sir John
Debates etc.
Crime (12:12:91) 1051-5, 1059
Deportation, Judgments (02:12:91) 32
Questions
Drug prevention schemes 509-10w
Earnings rules, Fire services 471w
Feldberg, Wilhelm, Animal experiments 397-8w
Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 396w
Prisoner escorts, Contracts for services 219-20w

Whisky
Production 456w

Whitbread
Isle of Wight 498w
Tenancy agreements 498w

Widdecombe, Miss Ann, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Social Security
Debates etc.
Pension funds (12:12:91) 1087-9
Residential care (10:12:91) 781-6
Questions
Capital rules, Interest rates 243w
Carers' premium, Computer applications 351w
Christmas bonus, Departmental correspondence 51w
Community care, Departmental coordination 352w
Community care grants, Prisoners' release 50w
Cost of living, Young people 54w

Widdecombe, Miss Ann—continued
Dept of Social Security, Disabled workers 221w
Dept of Social Security, Overtime 52-3w
Dept of Social Security local offices, Civil service manpower 52w
Dept of Social Security local offices, Market Harborough 224w
Dept of Social Security local offices, Opening hours 521w
Earnings rules 524w
Free school meals 470-1w
Housing benefits, Family credit 470w
Housing benefits, Landlord & tenant 351w
Housing benefits, Young people 354w
Income support, Pensioners 126w, 221-2w
Income support, Personal income 353w
Income support, Social security benefits uprating 376-7w
Income support, Women 525w
Pensioners, Personal income 51w
Rents, Social Fund 54w
Resettlement units 128w
Residential care, Local government finance 51w
Retirement age 50w
Retirement pensions 51-2w, 350-1w, 470w, 472w
Severe disability premium 125-6w
Social security benefits, Departmental forms 221w
Social security benefits reductions, Community charge 153w
Social security claims, Citizen's Charter 53w
Social security reform, Legislation 376w
Supplementary benefits, Social security benefits uprating 124-5w

Wide load vehicles
Trees 137w

Widowers' benefits
16w

Wiggin, Mr Jerry
Debates etc.
Transport & Works Bill, 2R (02:12:91) 39
Questions
Royal Naval Reserve, Defence expenditure 349w

Wigley, Mr Dafydd
Questions
Cancer, Medical treatments 134w
Childbirth, Medical records 62w
Data Protection Registrar, Welsh language 293w
Developing countries, Debts 147-8w
Development aid 151w
District health authorities, Expenditure 282-4w
Eye disorders, Young people 156w
Housing, Wales 9-10
Local government social services 137-8
NHS & private practice 113w
Non-departmental public bodies, Contracts for services 284w
Part-time employment, Publicity 472w
Railway accidents, Severn tunnel 642
Road works, Wales 436-8w
Sex education, Training 92w
Telephone charges, Billing 9-10w
Training, Dwyfor 100w
Trawsfynydd power station 595
Unemployment benefits, Early retirement 566w
Uniform business rate, Private rented housing 492w
Welsh language, Legislation 12-3
Welsh National Opera 15-6
Wind power 335w

Wild Mammals (Protection) Bill 1991/92
Debates etc.
1R (04:12:91) 279

Wilkinson, Mr John
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 745
Brand, Frank, Dismissal (13:12:91) 1299-303

Wilkinson, Mr John—continued
Questions
Business statements 410-1
Ukraine 988

Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Debates etc.
Armed forces reserves (10:12:91) 740
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 443, 450-3
Questions
Former Prime Ministers 15w
Rented housing, Wales 6

Williams, Mr Alan W
Debates etc.
Common agricultural policy (04:12:91) 345-7
Questions
Coal mining 591
Energy conservation 42w, 334w
River pollution 246-7
River pollution, Wales 19w
Student grants 415w

Williams Holdings
375w

Wilson, Mr Brian
Debates etc.
Aggravated Taking Bill, 2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 625
Common fisheries policy (11:12:91) 925-6, 935, 941, 943, 960-2
NHS trusts, Scotland (03:12:91) 152, 154-5
Tobacco advertising, Children (02:12:91) 110-7
Questions
Betting & gaming duties 566w
Business statements 1003
Crimes of violence, Scotland 842-3
Gambling, EC internal trade 507w
Lotteries 507w
Lotteries, EC internal trade 507w, 568w
Lotteries, Employment opportunities 509w
Petroleum Engineering Directorate 593
Petroleum exploration, Firth of Clyde 43w
Scottish Bus Group, Privatisation 44-5w
Tree planting, Government grants 457-8w

Wilton Park Executive Agency
227w

Wind power
335w
Conferences 281-2w
International conferences 335w

Winnick, Mr David
Debates etc.
Maxwell, Robert, Points of order (05:12:91) 415
Mirror Group Newspapers, Points of order (09:12:91) 617
Social security orders (11:12:91) 889-90, 910-2, 917
Questions
Business statements 993
Crown Prosecution Service 605
Incontinence aids, NHS charges 202w
Le Pen, Jean-Marie 385
Racal Electronics, Takeovers 375w

Winter warmth line
200w

Winterton, Mrs Ann
Questions
Indictable offences, Confiscation orders 502w
NHS trusts, Departmental circulars 62w

Winterton, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Maastricht Summit (11:12:91) 876
Residential care (10:12:91) 755-7, 765
Questions
Alcoholic drinks duties, Beer 82-3w
Alcoholic drinks duties, Tax harmonisation 83w
Hospital waiting lists, Merseyside 134

Winterton, Mr Nicholas—continued
Turkey, Politics & government 421w

Wolds Remand Prison
Contracts for services 392-3w
Prison staff 392w

Wolfson, Mr Mark
Questions
Family doctors 132

Wolverhampton
Educational assessment 719
Educational finance 298w

Women
Equal opportunities 20-2
Family doctors 112w
Higher civil servants 28w
Income support 525w
Industrial training 323w
Medical treatments 4-5
Pay 103w

Wood
Fuels 333w

Work permits
Iraq 340w
Nuclear physics 340w

Working hours
241w
Bailiffs 274w
Civil service agencies 570w, 587w
Courts 475w
EC action 144
Ministry of Defence 587w
Unemployment benefits 241w
Welsh Office 570w

Workington
(09:12:91) 615

World Bank
147-8w, 151w
Guyana 96w

World in Action
364w

World Trade Centre Cardiff
Urban development grants 285w

Worthington, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Public expenditure, Scotland (04:12:91) 273-4
Questions
Central institutions, Capital investment 346-7w
Further education, Local government expenditure 167w
Housing benefits, Young people 354w
Income support, Personal income 353w
Justice Charter, Legal aid 168w
Legal aid, Scotland 168w
Local government reform, Scotland 850
School buildings, Capital investment 256-7w

Wray, Mr Jimmy
Debates etc.
Economic situation, Opposition days (05:12:91) 460
Questions
Business statements 407-8

X rays
Health hazards 484w
Radiation hazards 485w

Yeo, Mr Tim, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of the Environment
Debates etc.
Homelessness (12:12:91) 1094-5, 1101, 1103-10
Questions
Building regulations 365-6w
Construction materials, Harmonisation of standards 364-5w
Council house sales, Debts 79w

Yeo, Mr Tim—continued
Council house sales, Northamptonshire 488-90w
Council house sales, Wandsworth 235w
Council house waiting lists 425w
Council housing, Carlisle 170-1w
Council housing, Construction costs 362-3w
County Hall 171w
Disabled facilities grants 313w
Empty property, Liverpool 244
Environmental impact assessment 182w
Environmental impact assessment, Conferences 175w
Estate Action, Broadmead Estate Redbridge 182w
Fairgrounds, Planning permission 237w
Government buildings, Repairs & maintenance 181w
Hanover Square Bradford, House purchase 236w
Hanover Square Bradford, Property development 183-5w
Homelessness 318w, 425w
Homelessness, Christmas 173w
Homelessness, Council housing 310-2w
Homelessness, Coventry 80w
Homelessness, Leicester 365w
Homelessness, Liverpool 243-4
Homelessness, Local authorities 362w
Housing, Local government expenditure 552w
Housing associations, Rural areas 185w
Housing estates, Outer estates 170w
Housing estates, Warrington 314-5w
Housing investment programmes, Durham 488w
Incinerators, South East region 430w
Listed buildings, Burley 431w
Listed buildings, Construction materials 181-2w
Oxleas Wood 249-50
Oxleas Wood, East London river crossing 249
Planning permission, Alternative energy 69w
Probate Registry Cardiff, Furniture 9w, 77w
Property Services Agency, Privatisation 176-7w
PSA Services, Empty property 361-2w
Public sector housing 258
Public sector housing, Capital investment 423-4w
Public sector housing, Empty property 311-2w
Public sector housing, Housing construction 257, 424-5w

Yeo, Mr Tim—continued
Public sector housing, Housing standards 312-3w
Public sector housing, Norwich City Council 257-8
Rent arrears, Chelmsford Borough Council 430w
Rents to mortgages scheme, Television advertising 363w
Shops, Empty housing 79w
Sleeping rough 552w
Temporary accommodation 425-6w
Town & country planning, Alternative energy 552-3w

Yorkshire & Humberside
Revenue support grant 184w

Yorkshire Regional Health Authority
Expenditure 113w
Speech therapists 117w

Young, Mr David
Debates etc.
Aggravated Taking Bill, 2R & rem stages (09:12:91) 638-9
Questions
Motor insurance, Driving offences 583w
Motor insurance, Enforcement 583w

Young, Sir George, Minister for Housing and Planning
Debates etc.
Homelessness (12:12:91) 1102
Questions
Council house sales, Cumbria 77-8w
Council housing 245-6
Council housing, Cumbria 486w
Council housing, Housing construction 245
Crown lands & estates, Land acquisition 494w
Development plans 367w
Environmental impact assessment, EC law 67w
Estate Action, Northfield House Peckham 68w
Greenbelt, Greater London 171w
Housing improvement, Broadwater Farm Estate 169w
Housing improvement, Stockton on Tees 169w
Local government revenue, Cumbria 78w
Planning & Compensation Act 1991 171-2w, 254-5
Planning authorities, Alternative energy 185w
Planning permission 255
Planning permission, Fish farming 494-5w
Reading Borough Council, Local government revenue 488w

Young, Sir George—continued
Rents to mortgages scheme, Basildon 313-4w

Young offenders
123w, 219w
Custodial treatment 6-7w, 217w
North Tyneside 219w
Parental responsibility 4w
Police cautions 4w
Prison education services 6w
Secure accommodation 157-8w

Young people
142
Cost of living 54w
Eye disorders 156w
Housing benefits 354w
Income support 53-4w, 352-3w
Mental health services 114-5w
Smoking 158-9w
Social security benefits 353-4w
Taking & driving away 382

Younger, Rt Hon George
Debates etc.
NHS trusts, Scotland (03:12:91) 148-9

Youth employment
225w

Youth services
413w, 726

Youth training
26w, 352-4w
Administrative delays 232w
Industrial accidents 339w
North West region 338w
South Glamorgan 539w
Strathclyde 232w
Wales 283w, 405w

Youth training scheme
Wakefield 104w

Youth unemployment
104w
Dwyfor 100w
North Down 520w

Yugoslavia
731-2, (12:12:91) 1016-20
Armed conflict 155w, (12:12:91) 1160-7
Iron & steel (09:12:91) 706
Mercenaries 33w
Overseas aid 277w
Recognition of states 593-4w

Zidovudine
Clinical trials 449w

Zionism
UN resolutions 274-5w, 319-20w